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TEN DIGITAL TRENDS FOR 2017

The Richards Group is pleased to present Ten Digital Trends for 2017.

2017 will be the year of...Well, when you are looking at the many different and powerful digital trends that will shape the coming year, you know it isn't as simple as that. There are, of course, a great range of topics and developments that will impact us as advertisers, marketers, and brands. We need to scan widely and gaze deeply to understand the next wave of innovations and ideas that present new opportunities.

This year’s trends focus on the customer and brand experience that is dominated by digital interactions. We see the complexities of trying to connect with people in more advanced and helpful ways while at the same time understanding that frustrations with digital experiences make many distrustful of brands.

We also see how digital communications and experiences will continue to foster inclusivity and reveal the power of diversity. And we see that digital platforms and tactics which celebrate transparency and authenticity continue to be some of the most powerful tools we have.

Take some time to review each of these trends from our brand planners, brand managers, digital strategists, creatives, media planners, user experience architects, and public relations experts. We hope these trends are informative and help you shape your marketing strategies for the coming year.
BRANDING IN THE AGE OF DELIVERY

We want it now. No, not five minutes from now – now. We want our groceries at our doorstep in less than two hours, we want to see how far away our UberEATS lunch delivery is from our stomachs, and we expect the instantaneous delivery of our products to be free and frictionless.

THE GROWING CULTURE OF IMPATIENCE

Today’s consumers expect instant gratification. Modern devices and information exchanges have fueled this craving for instantaneous fulfillment. The Internet opens the door to information, entertainment, and connectedness, and our phones make it so we can access it all immediately and from anywhere. We expect things so quickly that we’ll wait a mere two seconds for a video to load before we abandon it at an exponential rate. And our expectations for how fast “instant” should be are only getting faster. This attitude is shifting to the goods and services that brands offer. In 2017, brands will become instant to satisfy this new expectation.

THE OLD WAY

Before delivery, buying something meant getting in your car, driving to the store, and finding what you want. While the process was not instant, the gratification of taking what you bought home was. Enter the online shopping revolution. Suddenly, we were able to access all types of products from all over the world, but we had to wait days, weeks, even months to get the products we purchased online. This made us impatient. And the pleasure principle in psychology tells us that when we don’t get immediate fulfillment, our psychological response is anxiety and tension.

Since people have been purchasing goods online, brands have been doing everything in their power to eliminate this impatience between when we purchase a product and when we receive it. In lieu of truly instant goods and services, they provided instant information – updates and information on how long it would take to arrive. It is as if our goods became just another part of the Internet, buffering and loading as we waited.
This type of instant information will continue to be important. But it is still just a substitute for what people really want: instant, on-demand goods and services. In 2017, we are set to achieve instant in an unprecedented way. Delivery times have gone from weeks to days to mere hours. This will change the way we treat brands and product experiences for good.

To make its world-class instant services possible, Amazon runs robotic warehouses, has bought an airline, and is testing delivery drones. But not every brand needs to take such drastic steps to make impatient consumers happy. A variety of growing and emerging technologies has made it easy for nearly any brand to become instant.

**WHAT YOUR BRAND CAN DO TO BE INSTANT IN 2017**

**Invest in Becoming More Instant**

Not every brand needs to provide an on-demand good or service, but consumers still have instant expectations. Becoming more instant can take significant time and investment, but starting can be simple. The easiest way to begin is to audit your brand’s instant capabilities at each touchpoint. Consider each step in your user journey to understand where you can provide more instantaneous interaction. From our marketing messages to our products and services themselves, there are many ways to optimize how and when we talk to our consumers to fuel all of our insatiable appetites for the “now.” Consider the different things consumers want from you. Is there a way that you can provide them without the need for a trip, a queue, or an appointment? This sort of transformation takes time. But there are other ways to supplement the capability your brand has to be instant.

**Partner and White-Label Instant Services**

Even if you sell through other retailers, you can still drive direct-delivery sales and get your goods to people in record time, without adding an errand to their list (Google Express partners with most major retailers to provide next-day delivery). There’s a whole landscape of companies trying to solve on-demand goods, and many of them make great partners. Walmart, for instance, is piloting partnerships with Uber and Lyft to provide same-day grocery delivery at $7-$10.

Additionally, there are many emerging apps creating on-demand delivery services for specific products and goods. Localized delivery partners (such as Swapbox or Postmates) help enable brands to deliver faster in urban areas. Services such as UberEATS and a host of other food delivery services (DoorDash, GrubHub, etc.) connect restaurants to consumers by making it easy to get your favorite meals delivered. There are even food delivery services such as Caviar that are redefining what “delivery food” means by bringing upscale, fine-dining meals to consumers at home.

The “instant services” market has proliferated enough to support single-purpose services such as Minibar that focus on key occasions and contexts in the lives of consumers (like delivering specific types of goods such as alcohol and mixers when a person is short on time).

For many small to medium-sized businesses, being instant sometimes isn’t feasible given company size. In 2017, we’ll see more brands that will use the power of crowdsourcing to deliver products and goods to consumers instantly. Apps such as Friendshippr, UberRUSH, PiggyBee, Roadie, and Zipments provide crowdshipping services to help brands of all sizes provide instant goods to their customers.
Rethink the Store Experience

Brands such as Tesla, Warby Parker, and Tuft & Needle represent a massive trend toward disintermediation in industries where in-person sales are the norm. All three have seen success taking goods traditionally sold on the lot and have freed consumers to have these goods delivered directly to their homes.

With all this delivering, it may seem that stores are going the way of the dodo. But this is not necessarily true. People still enjoy browsing and trying out products, and they continue to seek out the help of associates and concierges. But the store must evolve beyond its role as a storehouse.

In place of dealerships and outlets, Tesla, Warby Parker, and Tuft & Needle have provided smaller, experience-focused brick-and-mortar showrooms that give consumers the ability to see and try products without hassle. If your brand has a brick-and-mortar experience, consider how it can become more of an exciting, personal experience – and how points of friction such as lines and obtrusive salespeople can be replaced with more enjoyable alternatives.

Consider Your Instant Product Experience

Even in our instant world, people no longer just want goods; they want experiences. More and more often, that will mean creative, well-branded uses of delivery. Services such as Birchbox, Blue Apron, and Loot Crate provide curated products through subscription retail. These goods-driven experiences span many different verticals and offer experiences people look forward to having over and over again.

But how does the strength of a brand, so often conveyed through giant signs, shelving, displays, and people, come to where a person is – especially in a box on their doorstep?

The experience of learning about and ordering a product should be just as simple, instant, and frictionless as getting it. Packaging itself may be an increasingly important touchpoint. Whether on Christmas morning or Tuesday afternoon, people love unboxing (one in five consumers report that they’ve watched an unboxing video on YouTube, according to Google Consumer Surveys). For instance, Trunk Club delivers its curated clothing selections in premium packaging that resembles an actual trunk with a personalized note from a stylist.

In fact, over half of consumers in a recent survey indicated that they would make repeat purchases from an online merchant that delivers premium packaging. Four in 10 consumers would share an image of a delivery on social media if it came in a unique package.
It is also important to consider who is delivering your product or coming to provide your service. The fact that a person may be “on the go” doesn’t mean they can’t act as an ambassador of the brand. Much like providing training, collateral, and recognition for your brand’s associates or salespeople, it is helpful to give on-demand partners and couriers tools to help them represent your brand to its fullest.

Focus on the Gap

Even with goods and services that are nearly instant, there is a chasm of expectations that opens up between when a person orders an experience and when they receive it. As marketers, we can either let that chasm be filled with anxiety or supply our own experience. It is important to give people information about their order’s status and – even better – reasons to be excited for its arrival.

Messaging is a great way to bridge this gap between desire and fulfillment. For example, last year, Everlane began providing status updates for orders via Facebook Messenger. Now Facebook Messenger notifications are available for any brand that uses Shopify. Providing access to this type of information via a messenger helps a brand feel reachable and responsive before issues and questions even arise.

Consider Using “Instant” as a Marketing Tool

Instant tech, including delivery, is a new medium through which nearly anything can be advertised. Here are just a few examples:

- Demonstrate product capabilities. Thermos shipped coffee overnight to 25 top social fans to prove that it would still be hot when it arrived.
- Enable custom products and experiences. Instead of waiting for people to go buy another Coke (#ShareACoke) or pack of Oreos (#OreoMiniDelivery), both brands provided limited-time-only custom packages for customers to buy directly on their sites. Traditional retail channels are not ready to offer personalization on this level.
• Replace a tweet with a small gift. Instant is a great tool for reaching fans, brand advocates, and influencers. Gifts are one of the oldest forms of communications, and they have a long history of use in advertising. But only recently have marketers begun using mailed gifts as a tool for building their brands on social media. For example, Taco Bell sent rings to its most loyal influential fans and saw a massive social impact. The gifts were not costly, but the creative gesture was meaningful enough to get people talking.

• Make trial easy. DRY Sparkling Water recently promoted trial of its new beverage by including a bottle with every UberEATS order for a day.

These examples take a hands-on, often trial-driven, show-don’t-tell approach to bringing people compelling brand experiences. The creative possibilities for using emerging, instant tech to share your brand are endless.

CONCLUSION: BRANDING IN THE ON-DEMAND LANDSCAPE

Overall, brands have a unique opportunity to provide exciting, new instant experiences through smart uses of delivery and other instant tech.

And at the heart of this all: As your goods start to become more of an on-demand or subscription experience for people, as shopping trips become less frequent, and as the role of your stores changes, you must be able to trust and rely upon the strength of your brand. This strength must come through at every touchpoint, especially at your customer’s doorstep.

Corey Austin
Digital Strategy
A digital strategist who’s at home in the real, solid, nonvirtual world, Corey loves envisioning where emerging technology can fit in everyday life. He helps turn bits and bytes into campaigns for clients such as 7UP, Dr Pepper, Canada Dry, Schweppes, Jeep, Ram Trucks, and FIAT.

Mallorie Rodak
Brand Planning
Her talent as a voiceover artist for TV, radio, anime, and video games is surpassed only by her skills as a brand planner at The Richards Group. For Mallorie, seeing things – especially brands – from a variety of angles is all in a day’s work. At The Richards Group, Mallorie guides the work for several restaurant, food, and beverage brands, including Firehouse Subs, Dr Pepper, and Ruth’s Chris, among others.
Today there are “cord-shavers,” “cord-cutters,” and the ever-elusive “cord-nevers.” Cord-nevers are the individuals who have never subscribed to a traditional pay TV service. In October 2015, Forrester reported that cord-nevers made up 18 percent of the U.S. population. Forrester also estimated that by 2025, half of all TV viewers under age 32 will not pay for TV in the current model. Pretty scary, right? Especially when most big-name brands rely so heavily on linear TV for advertising. To progress and thrive among a growing population of cord-nevers, brands must extend their campaigns to new media now to learn how to better communicate with cord-nevers in the future.

CORD-NEVERS are typically Millennials who are either in school, living with their parents, or employed at their first job right out of college. The biggest difference between cord-nevers and cord-cutters is that the cord-nevers have skipped an entire stage of viewer development. Unlike cord-cutters who have come to terms with dropping their cable subscriptions, most cord-nevers have grown up with the belief that they can watch anything they want without paying a traditional TV distributor. The question is, if cord-nevers currently make up 18 percent of the U.S. population and growing, how and where are they consuming content on a daily basis?

According to Forrester, cord-nevers typically watch nearly 8 hours of streaming video per week. They tend to view streaming video on their PCs at a significantly higher rate, but are open to watching video on their smartphones as well. Cord-nevers are not only changing which content distributors they rely on, but they are expanding what it means to “watch TV.” In 2016, YouTube commissioned a study by comScore to deep dive into Millennial viewing habits. The study concluded that the fragmentation of the current viewing environment would continue and that digital will become increasingly significant in the distribution of viewing content for Millennials. ComScore’s findings may rattle some advertisers who have historically relied on TV as a media plan driver, but this shift in viewership is the perfect opportunity for brands to target the right audience with relevant messaging.
For most advertisers, the obvious answer to this conundrum may be to increase pre-roll, full episode player, and video companion banner units – done and done, right? Not so fast – keep in mind that the average Millennial cord-never is platform-agnostic and consumes content in numerous fragmented ways throughout the day. Another way to reach cord-nevers is to capitalize on big tentpole moments such as live sports, season finales, or award shows throughout the year. Many brands are testing and finding success in reaching the cord-never audience during tentpole moments with the following media.

**KOHL’S OSCARS SPONSORSHIP**

During Kohl’s first year as the exclusive Oscars® sponsor in 2016, it launched an integrated campaign that included four TV spots and all major social channels. Kohl’s goal for the sponsorship was to reach new Millennial customers, and it offered exclusive content in between TV spots on social.

Kohl’s Oscars campaign used the hashtag #allthegoodstuff and asked viewers to tweet their own acceptance-speech style of gratitude during the weeks leading up to the award show. Kohl’s also partnered with “Saturday Night Live” comedian Vanessa Bayer and celebrity party planner Mindy Weiss to create a content series for viewing-party inspiration on their Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest pages. During the award show, Kohl’s live-streamed Vanessa Bayer’s viewing party, outfitted by Kohl’s, where she read selected #allthegoodstuff submissions from Twitter. Kohl’s Oscars’ campaign was successful in lifting its Twitter engagements over 600 percent.
TROLLI SNAPCHAT ADS TAKEOVER CAMPAIGN DURING THE NBA ALL-STAR GAME

During the NBA All-Star Game, Trolli, makers of the infamous Gummy Worms candy, partnered with James Harden of the Houston Rockets and created a multichannel integrated campaign that consisted of a TV spot, Twitter, Snapchat, and Instagram behind-the-scenes content.
“Weirdly awesome” things happened when Trolli encouraged Snapchatters to “be a baller and eat crawlers.” Trolli ran a Snap Ads Takeover Campaign in Snapchat’s NBA All-Star Game Live Story and NBA Playoffs Opening Night Live Story. Millward Brown measured that the Snapchat campaign reached over 4 million users ages 13-34, resulted in a 33 percent lift in purchase intent that was over 2.5 times higher than mobile consumer packaged goods norms, and 90 percent of Snapchatters who remembered the campaign enjoyed it.

MTV VIDEO MUSIC AWARDS 2016

For TV properties such as Viacom’s MTV (whose audience skews on the younger Millennial side), a huge indicator of the cord-never shift came from viewership results of the 2016 Video Music Awards (VMAs). The VMAs are MTV’s flagship event of the year, and as an extension of the televised awards, MTV posted to its Live Story feed on Snapchat throughout the event. VMA-related content (which was live for 24 hours August 28-29) on MTV’s Snapchat account delivered 30.5 million total video views vs. 25 million the previous year. However, linear TV viewership was down 34 percent compared to the previous year and garnered a total of 6.5 million viewers across the 11-network live simulcast (MTV, MTV2, MTV Classic, VH1, Comedy Central, Spike, TV Land, BET, CMT, Centric, and Logo). These results suggest that over three times as many Snapchat users saw VMA content as people who watched the award show on linear TV, which left MTV and advertisers scratching their heads.
MTV president Sean Atkins commented on the show’s viewership stats: “If you didn’t do all the digital stuff, would they come back to linear? I don’t think so.” Atkins continued, “In a world of infinite options, you don’t solve that by pretending those options don’t exist.” Sean Atkins makes a very good point and reinforces that digital content works well when there is a major tentpole event, whether it be for a network or a retailer.

Today’s Millennials are already difficult to reach, and the next generation will be tougher. As the cord-never demographic grows, the optimal thing brands can do now during big moments is to integrate broadcast efforts with new digital channels. This will give brands the potential to reach the right audience, at the right time, and communicate the best message possible.

Emily Edwards  
Digital Strategy  
At The Richards Group, Emily works to create digital and integrated campaign strategies for Dr Pepper, Diet Dr Pepper, and Andersen Windows. She brings a perspective to projects that’s driven both by culture and her experience in the world of digital marketing. Emily enjoys naps, cheeseburgers, and people-watching. Her goal in life is to win The New Yorker’s Cartoon Caption Contest.
“Keep it simple,” “make it intuitive,” “don’t make them think” have been mantras of usability for many, many years. However, there is a recent trend, enabled by a confluence of innovations and technologies, that brings the simplify mantra to its logical conclusion: The single-button, or single-interaction, interface. Brands such as Amazon, Apple, and Uber have led the way with this trend, and 2017 is shaping up to have many others follow. If it is possible for you to reduce your brand’s user experience down to this type of simple interaction, the impact on adoption and brand affinity can be significant.

Although technology enables this trend, technology is also responsible for its need. According to Joseph McCormack, author of “BRIEF: Making a Bigger Impact by Saying Less,” the average professional receives 304 emails every week, checks their smartphone 150 times per day, and spends 28 hours each week reading and responding to emails. McCormack says, “People’s brains are taxed” because “too many things are competing for our attention.” He goes on to make the point that if you can’t get to the point quickly, you risk being dismissed or ignored.

Furthermore, a survey of Canadian media consumption by Microsoft concluded that average attention span had fallen to eight seconds, down from 12 seconds in the year 2000. In the same report, Satya Nadella, the chief executive officer of Microsoft, said, “The true scarce commodity is increasingly human attention.”

In this economy of attention and our increasingly fast-paced lifestyles, the difference between success or failure often comes down to seconds. The Internet is rife with stories of people too busy to pause and take two minutes to order paper towels via the Amazon app. Ask those people if they could say “I need some more paper towels” or click a button to have them delivered, and it’s a different story. Hence, the Amazon Echo and Amazon Dash Button.

The single-interaction experience can be any single interaction to accomplish a task. Those interactions can include moving an object, scanning a fingerprint, speaking a command, making a single selection, entering a single term, or pressing a single button.

Let’s list a few real-world examples for reference:

- Amazon Dash Button
- Amazon Echo
- Apple Pay (at the register and online)
- Many Apple Watch features
- Social login
- Raise to wake
- Uber
All of these have one key thing in common: They rely on predetermined user preferences and/or data to reduce the actual user interaction required per task. At its core, this is not new. On sign-up, ask the user to fill out a bunch of information, including their personal preferences. Then, when they use the app, bingo, you only have to ask for the one or two things needed to get the job done. However, in that scenario, the sign-up process can be long and cumbersome. There are a number of smarter approaches to collecting or discovering the information needed to simplify the required user interaction, and the best solutions tend to use a combination of these. Here are a few techniques that can be used.

**COLLECT ADDITIONAL USER-PROVIDED DATA UP FRONT OR ON SUBSEQUENT USES**

An example of this would be how Amazon collects payment information from customers on first use, then, on subsequent orders, if different information is provided, that information is also saved. Customers can then select a different credit card with a single click.

**COLLECT ENVIRONMENTAL DATA AT TIME OF TRANSACTION**

(e.g., location, time, device)

Waze is a good example of this. It uses GPS data for your current location and time of day to set the display to day or night mode.

**CONSIDER HISTORICAL DATA**

(e.g., What did the user do in the past? What is their typical behavior?)

Personalization in general is almost entirely based on this. But the same data can be used to intelligently default options for a given interaction. For example, Amazon stores each delivery address you use. Then, at checkout time, it shows you an intelligent list made up of a combination of the most used and recently used.

**DERIVE INTELLIGENCE THROUGH CORRELATION OF ALL AVAILABLE DATA**

(e.g., Tom is 300 miles away from home and located at a hotel. It is 5:00 p.m., and Tom has nothing on his calendar for this evening.)

Google and Apple have both recently introduced features where travel time is considered when reminding you of an appointment. This requires correlating appointment time, location of the appointment, and current location. Further correlation of data, such as traffic, mode of transportation, available parking, etc., could also be used.

Let’s look at two examples that take advantage of many of these techniques.

**APPLE PAY**

Not only is Apple Pay a “single-button” experience in use, but Apple also makes good use of many of the techniques above to streamline its setup. Given that your iPhone is already secure, entering your credit card information is all that is required. To assist with that, Apple lets you use the iPhone’s camera to “scan” your card. That’s all the setup there is. When you are ready to pay at the register, you just hold your phone over the card reader and use your fingerprint to authenticate the transaction.
UBER

Let’s start by considering what data is needed to schedule and pay for a ride.

- Payment details
- Pickup location
- Pickup time or ETA of pickup
- Number in party/type of vehicle
- How the driver can contact you
- How you can contact the driver
- Destination

When you sign up for Uber, you provide your email, mobile number, and credit card information. When arranging for a pickup, the app assumes you wish to be picked up where you are currently. Pickup time defaults to ASAP, and, before you even make your request, the app tells you how long you will have to wait. Vehicle type is simply the nearest one, unless you specify otherwise. (Unless you have a large party, you won’t even consider this option, so the app doesn’t make a big deal out of it.) Your contact information is provided to the driver automatically, and the information you need to contact the driver is provided by the app. All that remains is for you to indicate your destination.

Just about any interaction that is required between your brand and your customers is a candidate for the kind of simplicity we are talking about. Even if the end result isn’t a true “single-button experience,” the techniques listed, and others like them, can be used to simplify customer interaction, even if the end result isn’t that “single-interaction experience.” According to the 2015 Global Brand Simplicity Index by Siegel + Gale, 69 percent of consumers are more likely to recommend a brand because it provides simpler experiences and communications. Additionally, 63 percent of consumers were willing to pay more for simpler experiences.

As you see in the list of examples above, more and more companies are striving to reduce the required interaction per transaction down to the minimum. They know that reducing the complexity of those interactions will result in more transactions as well as higher brand affinity. Furthermore, if the user finds the amount of simplicity surprising, you also increase the likelihood that your customers will talk to others about their experience.

Suggestions to help simplify customer interaction:

- Identify all the ways customers interact with your brand. This could be purchase, setup, use, getting support, making a donation, sharing on social media, visiting a location, etc.
- Examine the step-by-step user interaction for those interactions.
- Look at each piece of information the customer provides, and ask yourself if that information has ever been provided before.
- Look at each choice made, and consider if it could be predetermined with a high success rate based on prior user behavior and/or environmental data.
- Build a mockup of a revised process, and test it with your customers.
- Put the refined changes out there for real-world use, with the ability to measure and revise ongoing.
Brian Edgin
User Experience Architect

At Click Here Labs, Brian acts as the voice of the user for clients including Biltmore, Dr Pepper, 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. Brian also helps run the agency maker lab. In his spare time, Brian enjoys teaching his kids the joys of Arduino prototyping and 3D printing.
Influencer marketing as a practice isn’t new, but its delivery certainly has changed. Traditionally, an influencer’s paid or sponsored endorsement was obvious – a celebrity crediting a designer for their award show look, an athlete drinking a soda in a commercial, or a game show host thanking a laundry detergent at the top of the program. The consumer saw these sponsored messages, knew they had been paid for, and let the endorsement affect or not affect their purchase decision.

But as social media has grown in popularity, consumers have found a way to connect with influencers on a deeper, more personal level, beyond just what they were paid to endorse. Through social media, influencers give us a curated glimpse into their own lives, including the snacks they keep in their fridge, the books on their nightstands, and all the little odds and ends they can’t live without. It was only a matter of time before we found a way to monetize it.

In 2017, with a new reality of more prominent disclosures on the horizon, the success of influencer marketing will rely on partnerships that are more authentic and feel more like brand advocacy.

**BIG BUSINESS**

Influencer marketing is set to be a $5-$10 billion industry within the next five years. This makes it serious business for brands looking to get their products and services in front of the right audiences, especially when ad blocking software is supposed to cost brands more than $40 billion of potential revenue in 2016. For many brands, leveraging influencers in social media has helped level the playing field. Influencers can be engaged with something as simple as a product offer or a payment that can vary from hundreds to hundreds of thousands of dollars depending on the influencer’s following.

**GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION**

Unfortunately, it has also become an ever-growing frontier with new channels constantly introduced, and some brands, influencers, and agencies have engaged in practices that make it hard to discern when a post has been paid for.

While brands including Cole Haan, Warner Bros., and Lord & Taylor all made news running afoul of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for their less-than-transparent influencer programs, it got even more serious when the organization issued an enforcement policy on deceptively formatted advertising in December 2015. The policy alerted the public that the FTC was prepared to start proactively going after those who did not play by the rules. It was the latest in years of policy updates from the organization in regard to how brands and influencers should represent themselves in the space, but it was one of the most impactful to date. The statement sent a very loud warning to the influencer marketing community that can’t be ignored – “we’ve been watching, now we’re acting.”
While the FTC is working to protect the best interests of the consumer, the organization is set to directly and indirectly impact influencer marketing in 2017 in several key ways: directly, with how relationships are disclosed in sponsored content; and indirectly, with how consumers perceive sponsored content and how it’s delivered to maintain value.

**UP-FRONT DISCLOSURES**

The FTC is looking to brands and agencies to play by the rules, and it has made it clear not doing so could mean legal action and financial penalties. However, how to properly disclose may cause some confusion depending on how long you’ve been running influencer programs. Initially, the FTC mandated that posts where an influencer had received compensation or product needed to disclose just that. Then, posts needed to include the hashtags #advertisement or #sponsored or any of several variations; #ad, #spon, and #sp were also acceptable. Now, the abbreviations may not be as clear a disclosure, so #advertisement and #sponsored are the preferred method, but a hard rule on this has yet to be set.

Some influencers bury their disclosure in a sea of other hashtags, but not for much longer. According to Michael Ostheimer, deputy in the FTC’s Division of Advertising Practices, where they go in a post is important as well: “If consumers don’t read the words, then there is no effective disclosure. If you have seven other hashtags at the end of a tweet and it’s mixed up with all these other things, it’s easy for consumers to skip over that. The real test is, did consumers read it and comprehend it?”

The FTC has help in its pursuits. Consumer advocacy groups such as Truth in Advertising are also actively monitoring and reporting violations they encounter. In August 2016, these groups made national headlines when they found more than 100 posts across the Kardashian family’s accounts that failed to provide proper disclosures.

**IMPACT ON VALUE**

Ideally, the FTC would like a paid influencer’s post to have a disclaimer at the beginning of the copy to immediately let anyone know the post has been influenced in some way. While this is a relatively simple ask, it has the potential to make a huge impact on how influencer content is perceived.

More than 300,000 posts on Instagram included the hashtag #sponsored or some other relevant abbreviation in July 2016, more than double the number for the same time period in 2015. As that number continues to grow, it’s not hard to imagine an
Instagram user being exposed to several sponsored posts from influencers on any given visit. When all those posts are preempted with a hashtag disclaimer, will they hold the same value they do now or will they feel more like the commercials we skip, the magazine ads we blindly thumb past, and the display ads we block?

**THE SILVER LINING**

If anything, stricter disclosure regulations will help – if everyone has to play by the same rules, it pushes us all to create better work. Content is still king, which means influencers still hold a lot of value no matter how the partnership needs to be disclosed. In a recent blog, Sprinklr AVP of Marketing Solutions Lynn Murray pointed out the best influencer marketing examples should feel like brand advocacy, not an ad. Looking ahead to 2017, there are a few things brands can do to continue to capitalize on their influencer marketing strategies:

- **Partner with the person first, not the followers.** An influencer with 10 million followers may sound like a great idea for getting maximum impressions, but a recent study found more followers often means less engagement. Find a partner that naturally fits with your brand ideals. Odds are their audience will also be a fit.

- **Influence with a message, not a product.** When developing an influencer strategy, develop it with a “message-first” approach, not a product-centric one. Consider an influencer as an extension of how you envision your brand, not as a salesperson trying to push a product. Dove is a consistently good example, and its #MyBeautyMySay campaign is stunning.

- **Make a connection, not a promotion.** Work with your influencers to create a connection that goes beyond the product. It may be hard to connect with a product on an emotional level, but it’s not impossible. Consider the foundation of your organization and find the right influencer to bring that to life. Anthony Bourdain partnered with Balvenie to create a video series that seamlessly connects the brand to local craftspeople in an authentic way.

**Disclaimer:** If this had been a post sponsored by The Richards Group and not a voluntary opportunity, this would be considered a buried disclaimer and a violation of FTC guidelines.

**Joe Flowers**

**Digital Strategy**

Joe has spent time since graduation managing digital and communications strategies in a variety of industries, including nonprofit, healthcare, consumer packaged goods, and sports and entertainment. He applies his experience to clients including Sewell Automotive Companies, World Pancreatic Cancer Day, AAA, and Go RVing. When he isn’t going the extra mile for his clients, Joe can typically be found at a concert, hunting for the best taco joint in Dallas, or going the literal extra mile outside as an accomplished runner.
Before you read this article, I want you to do one thing: Spend two minutes on your phone using your Facebook app.

Done? Good.

In the time you spent on Facebook, chances are you read a news story or watched a video. These are common activities on social media, yet there is something about them that I find particularly puzzling: How little time we spend on each of these activities.

Here is my point. As on any major social media platform, the news feed experience is one that is highly personalized and yet inherently ephemeral. According to a recent Pew study, Facebook users spend an average of only 107 seconds reading long-form articles. Add in a video, and you’ve just spent a little over two minutes on Facebook consuming two different pieces of content.

So why then, when we spend almost a third of our online time on social media – where we go to not only connect with friends, but also to consume news and entertaining content – does each piece of content fail to consume more of our attention?

The answer, as it turns out, can be found in the science of our mind.

Each time we share, like, or comment on a post online, our brains release a nice little shot of dopamine, otherwise known as the “reward molecule.” This positive feedback loop is pretty powerful and, as it turns out, plays a large role in explaining why we’re constantly scrolling, looking for what’s new, what we can share, what we can find to feed our need. So, despite taking up a third of our online time in social media activities, news content in our feed doesn’t always captivate us or engage us in longer time spent or deeper consumption.

So what does? If we’re looking in digital, we need to look outside the social feed – away from the digital distractions associated with its dopamine-laden feedback loop – and to a medium that captures attention like few other types of digital media.

That medium is on-demand audio, where incredible stories abound in the form of podcasts, segments, and stand-alone stories or clips. In 2017, this emerging medium – which has grown dramatically in the past year driven by consumer trends and developments within the on-demand audio industry – will become a mainstream media channel and a more common part of the content diet for audiences.

But why now? What is overcoming on-demand audio’s long-standing inability to gain traction among consumers, as both on-demand video and music have themselves seen meteoric adoption rates over the same time period?
To start, let’s look back at one of my early podcast experiences…

As I recall, the episode was “American Football” by WNYC’s Radiolab. Unlike a story that I would have skimmed on social media, this episode had me spellbound for over an hour as hosts Jad Abumrad and Robert Krulwich recounted the history of football and how it came to be the most popular sport in America.

Since then, my affinity for these rich, well-told stories has only grown, and the podcasting industry has grown right along with it. As I (like my podcasting heroes at Radiolab) dug into the history podcasts, I began to discover dots that, when connected, began to paint a picture that looked a little bit like this:

Over the past few years, these dots have grown increasingly bright.

In 2014, podcasting began to reach mainstream consumers, as quality podcasts from stations such as NPR, WNYC, and WBEZ proliferated, with “Serial” becoming the first podcast in iTunes history to reach 5 million streams or downloads.

In 2015, podcast hosting provider Libsyn hosted a record 28,000 shows and received over 3 billion download requests.

And in 2016, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) released its much-anticipated guidelines on podcast advertising, which will help standardize metrics for this medium.

The bottom line? Podcast content is better than ever, consumers (by way of increased downloads) are responding, and the IAB has finally given its nod of approval to this emerging medium.

But that’s just the tip of the iceberg.

With the podcast advertising market expected to top $200 million in 2017, there are several powerful trends that will make podcasts a prime destination for brand storytelling in 2017 and beyond. As you will see, these developments represent the biggest dots that podcasting has long been missing and that are now finally coming into focus.

So let’s dive in.
DEMAND FOR ON-DEMAND ENTERTAINMENT ACCELERATES

Over the past few years, mobile device penetration and increasing Internet connection speeds have led to a surge in demand for on-demand entertainment. In 2016 alone, nearly 79 percent of U.S. users will access the Internet regularly via a mobile phone, with 61 percent subscribing to video on-demand (SVOD) services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime Video. When it comes to on-demand audio, these figures are consistent, as 71 percent of listeners access podcasts via mobile devices.

And this demand for mobile entertainment doesn’t just apply to smartphones and tablets – it applies to connected cars too. By 2020 there will be an estimated 220 million connected cars on the road, and in the meantime, consumer preference is already becoming significantly impacted by connectivity.

Take, for instance, China. As a country that is arguably poised to lead the world in connected car and autonomous vehicle innovation, we can already see that more than 85 percent of Chinese customers in the low-cost/high-volume car segment are “willing to switch to a different brand of car if it offers more connected features at a reasonable price.” For perspective, that’s even more than they care about the car’s design or performance. Seriously.

With entertainment among the most-desired features of Internet-connected cars, on-demand audio has the opportunity to finally disrupt the radio industry by stealing away listenership in the car (where an estimated 44 percent of all radio listening takes place), much in the same way subscription video on-demand finally surpassed DVR penetration in 2016.

NEW ENTRANTS DISRUPT PODCAST DISCOVERABILITY

Since the introduction of podcasts in the early 2000s, Apple has commanded an outsized share of the app market, with 60 percent of podcasts downloaded via iTunes and the iOS Podcasts app. While it’s viewed as a supportive member of the podcasting industry, it’s done admittedly little to improve the discoverability of the over 300,000 podcasts found on its store.

Other players within the space, however, are actively working to address the issue. Panoply, NPR, and WNYC are all working hard to develop app functionality that makes podcasts more discoverable through curated playlists and personalized recommendations. While these companies work to solve the discoverability problem, Spotify is also beginning to enter the space, as it began to feature podcasts more prominently in the summer of 2016, and has the opportunity to leverage features of its Discover Weekly technology to provide tailored podcast recommendations.

PODCASTERS EXPLORE NEW MEDIA TO FIT THE SOCIAL FEED

In addition to improving discoverability, podcasters are also beginning to explore new methods of distributing their podcasts across social networks such as Instagram and Twitter. Recent examples include WNYC’s audiograms and This American Life’s “Shortcut,” both of which take snippets of podcasts and turn them into animated videos that can be shared on social media. As new entrants continue to improve podcasts’ discoverability, these emerging media formats could help expose podcasts to a wider audience of listeners.
MEASUREMENT AND DYNAMIC AD INSERTION BECOME A REALITY

Over the years, publishers and advertisers’ biggest frustration with on-demand audio has been the lack of data and ad serving capabilities within the major podcast marketplaces. Podcast networks such as Panoply and Acast, however, are hoping to change this, as both are introducing products that will capture richer data to help brands understand consumers’ listening habits, including session duration, geographic location, and software and device usage.

In addition, these firms are working to deliver dynamic ad insertion capabilities, which will allow advertisers to insert ads into shows (both new and old) on the fly, serve different ads to different audience segments, and report on ad listening metrics that can improve both programming and ad targeting.
BIG BRANDS BEGIN TO JOIN IN

In addition to improved advertising metrics and dynamic insertion capabilities, recent data from Podtrac shows that podcast advertising has resulted in ad effectiveness unequaled in other digital advertising channels, generating “62 percent average unaided ad recall, an 81 percent average increase in product or service awareness, a 187 average increase in usage intent, and a 69 percent average brand favorability rating.”

Given this kind of performance, it’s no surprise that big brands such as Dell, Target, and American Express are entering the space with sponsored messaging. In addition, some brands are even going so far as to create podcasts of their own.

GE, for instance, has created a podcast called “The Message,” in which a fictional character is charged with decoding a message received from outer space. Throughout the series, mock interviews and reports give the fictional series a journalistic feel, while GE technology is incorporated into the narrative to help the protagonist decode the extraterrestrial message.

WHAT THIS MEANS MOVING FORWARD

Given consumers’ shift to mobile, increased desire for on-demand entertainment, and improvements within the industry, podcasting has finally reached a place where it should demand consideration within brands’ digital media consideration set.

Although it has been a long time coming, the medium has always contained one of the most powerful storytelling devices that brands can employ: the human voice. Unlike other digital media, which induces viewers to skim or skip content in favor of the new and the next, on-demand audio is a format that focuses viewers’ attention and consequently helps foster their unbound imagination.

Brands that can fuel their audiences’ imaginations with timely and relevant storytelling will be well prepared to endear themselves to consumers in 2017 and beyond.

John Stallé
Digital Strategy
Since joining The Richards Group, John has executed comprehensive social media, content marketing, and digital media strategies for clients such as Charles Schwab, KeyBank, and Orkin.
I’LL HAVE ONE OF MY PEOPLE GOOGLE IT SOON

For all the good the Internet does, it has also become a major source of frustration for everyone. The clutter, negativity, lack of trust, overload of misinformation, and general creepiness because of all the people using your data to track your life make the Web a pain as much as it is a powerful tool.

The Internet has become work – ugly, dirty, hard work. It is unwieldy and impossible to navigate. Digital distractions taunt us at an alarming rate, and it is a fact: You can’t trust anything you find or read on the Web. The anonymity afforded us by the digital veil allows all sorts of creeps, liars, tricksters, and trolls to lurk in every post, article, and promise made by a brand. We now live in what is commonly referred to as a “post-trust society,” and given the exponential rate at which mistrust is spread via the Internet, we’re not going to see things improve anytime in the future. The worse it gets, the more we’ll see a behavioral change in those who can afford to do something about it. The wealthy will demand help to do the work they don’t want to do, and someone will figure out how to serve the wealthy what they want.

Until artificial assistants such as Siri, Alexa, and Google Assistant get their acts together, the only thing a wealthy person living in our modern, digitally deceptive world can do with technology, once an amazing and wonderful frontier, that kicks their ass is to hire a human digital assistant. A person. An Internet caddy, a Web valet.
I’ll overwhelm you for a moment with some stats:

• Every single minute, YouTube users upload 400 hours of video.
• The average person sees over 5,000 brand and ad messages a day.
• There are over 4.5 billion Likes thumbed-up every day on Facebook.
• Just in America, we check our phones 8 billion times a day.
• Video pre-roll makes you want to tear your hair out.
• Native? Deceptive wormholes programmed by evil geniuses.
• Pop-ups, even when blocked, pop up.
• Every 60 seconds, 293,000 statuses are updated and 136,000 photos are uploaded (most of them mediocre pictures of puppies, kids, and food).

As if having real puppies, raising kids, and making food weren’t enough work, we need to photograph them and share them so other people have more to distract them on the Web every day.

Every time you go online, you risk losing an hour of your life that you can’t get back. And what’s worse is that hour is filled with lies, deception, and trickery. And that does not sit well with busy, wealthy people who want a faster, more accurate, more trustworthy web experience.

Take a look at this article that presents 40 sites to make travel easier. Forty! Forty sites to sift through – all promising to make travel easier. What a conundrum, what a contradiction, what a conflict of interest. I look at these 40 sites, and I laugh at how each does one of two things: Cut and paste what the other site says. Contradict everything the other sites say.

Now, on top of planning your trip, which is a stressful decision to begin with, you have these “helpful” travel sites peppered you with doubt and fear that you’re making terrible decisions about where to go and where to stay when you get there. You also get a healthy dose of guilt tossed in if you don’t take the time to wade through all of them. Wait…did you see all of them? Are you really sure there is not one more really helpful site or app out there that would really make your trip planning easy? Then you read this article, telling you that not many travel apps are worth downloading.

Crap. Yeah, guilt, stress, fear, doubt, and a huge time suck, just to plan a vacation. Welcome to the Internet in 2017. The Web has made vacationing miserable. It can also ruin cooking, fashion, wedding planning, gardening, and kite making with equal aplomb.

Now imagine having a human assistant to help you on the Web. Someone to Google things for you, handle your social media, filter out things you don’t like, look up the things you do like – someone to make the Web easier to deal with. If you think this is far-fetched, have one of your people do a little research on the subject. And, no, don’t just ask Siri. She’s incompetent.
History tells us that people are generally lazy, and therefore humans invent technologies to make life easier. But when the technology we've created becomes a lot of work, we farm it out, especially the wealthy. The wealthy drive change because: They have the money to invest in change. We all want to sell new technologies and create new industries to get some of that wealth in our pockets.

**PROOF**

Everyone can cook. Wealthy people have people cook for them. Now we have cooked food delivered to our homes.

Everyone can drive. Wealthy people have people drive for them. Now we have on-demand car services for everyone.

Everyone can shop for clothes. Wealthy people have people shop for them. Now we can all get in-home style consultants online.


It is a human truth that the more money you have, the more likely it is that you’ll have other people do stuff you don’t like to do. Now, I must note, the definition of wealth is relative. Look at how artificial intelligence and speech recognition have made it possible for someone making minimum wage to still delegate simple tasks to Siri, Alexa, or Cortana.

Think about it. Twelve years ago nobody had a smartphone, but now we’re all so exhausted by the idea of typing in our search for the best falafel near us that we relish the opportunity to speak our commands into our phones.

Now, if you had lots of money and a human assistant who really knew what you liked and didn’t like in a vacation, you could just say, “Find me a magical place for Christmas, something very Whoville, and book a few weeks in a chalet, preferably near a gondola and within walking distance of a town with amazing fondue.” Your assistant would wade through all the junk and deliver your dream vacation itinerary, and you would trust it implicitly. Do that same search yourself on the Internet, and you’ll never get it planned. The Web is just too unwieldy.

If the average person spends eight hours on the Internet every day, I think the average wealthy person would rather seven of those hours are spent by someone else who has the patience and intelligence to cipher through the maelstrom of confusion. The trend took root when apps were introduced. Apps were the first indicators that people would pay money to have someone else make the Internet easier to use. All apps attempt to alleviate some of the online stress we endure, aggregating data, providing shortcuts, promising to minimize effort and maximize success. But now there are so many apps, we spend time online looking at app reviews to determine which app is the best app. There are over 2 million apps in the Apple App Store alone. There are now articles published to review which apps are the most helpful. So, instead of making our life easier, the proliferation of apps has added a few hours of reading app reviews to your list of things you need to do before you buy the app that is going to make your web life easier.

I know, I know – you’re thinking with all the apps and sites that aggregate prices, compare product features, and even calculate retirement needs, no one will actually hire an Internet Caddy™. But remember, these sites and apps are self-serving businesses that are trying to profit from your overwhelmed digital life. They want you confused. Confused people make irrational decisions that may just go their way.
“Wealthy people” are one of the most difficult targets for a brand to reach. Brands that sell luxury goods, travel, and other nice things want a digital relationship with these people because they have money and generally like to spend it on a good life. But as the Internet grows increasingly untrustworthy and time-consuming, this fickle audience will grow increasingly wary and exhausted by their digital life – thus making them even harder to reach. What is a brand to do if it wants to be loved by people of means?

First, stop stalking your target. Everyone knows when a brand is tracking their data trail, showing up in every article, social media site, and web search. The brand is being sold “effectiveness” by the digital strategy and media specialists, but forgets that consumers don’t necessarily appreciate being stalked by a brand. There are negative emotional consequences for brands that stalk their customers.

Second, don’t be a different brand online than you are in real life. It’s funny: That veil of anonymity that allows us to post negative comments on a restaurant review site, after we’ve had a few martinis and which we would never have the gumption to say to the manager’s face, also applies to brands trying to connect with consumers. Bait and switch is so shamelessly bad in a store but perfectly acceptable online. Deceptive headlines used to entice a person to an “article” that turns out to be an ad are not cool. Don’t do it.

A brand would never incessantly tap people on the shoulder as they browse the showroom floor saying, “Hey, I know you like Hugo Boss because you’re wearing Hugo Boss so that means I know something about you, which means you can trust me and talk to me about this Lexus IS. Hey. Hey, I like Hugo Boss too. Hey, we’re alike.” But they are more than willing to do this online. Following, badgering, prodding, stalking, pestering, interrupting: If you wouldn’t do these things in your store, don’t do it online.

Think like the person you want to reach. They don’t want hard sell, fast talk, constant interruptions, or brands as “friends.” Badgering them to like you, follow you, or invite you into their inboxes is just plain rude. Brands need to have manners online if they want respect and admiration from consumers. Don’t let promises of infinitely trackable data, profoundly improved returns on investment and media efficacy, or magic-bullet digital marketing solutions turn your brand into a rude online jerk.

Everyone wants things to be easier. The wealthy will hire subordinates to manage and simplify their digital lives. It’s how humans roll. Brands want to make it easier too. But they can’t take the easy way out to drive sales and site traffic. The hard work of showing restraint in the quest for instant transactional satisfaction, being consistent in fulfilling the brand’s promise, being digitally kind to the busy, overwhelmed people you hope to turn into loyal customers is necessary if you want to be seen as a trusted brand in the untrustworthy Internet landscape.

Chuck Schiller  
Brand Creative/Writer

Chuck started out as an art director in Milwaukee in 1984. In 1999, he joined The Richards Group and pursued writing along the way. His national and international brand experience is pretty diverse: Jeep, Dodge, Alfa Romeo, Harley-Davidson, Patrón Tequila, Zephyr Gin, Pyrat Rum, Ultimat Vodka, The Home Depot, TGI Fridays, Red Lobster, MetroPCS, Casio, Prestone, Grupo Vidanta resorts, Aria Resort & Casino, Atlantis resorts, countless banks, hospitals, etc.
EMPOWERING THE NEW INFLUENCERS

The smart money is on inclusion. New freedoms mean exciting realities for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer (LGBTQ) community, and its buying power, digital connectivity, and cultural sway offer brands opportunities to endear themselves in meaningful ways with this influential consumer.

For decades, brands have understood the importance of focused campaigns and content that is targeted to specific demographics, but these strategies have mostly appealed along gender, ethnic, and geographic lines. Recently, a host of high-profile and emotionally charged topics such as legislative bathroom bills (#WeJustNeedToPee), marriage equality (#NoH8 #LoveIsLove), bullying (#ItGetsBetter), and the Orlando shootings (#WeAreOrlando) have put gays, a demographic around since the dawn of man, squarely front and center in the public discourse, and brands have begun to take notice.

The gay revolution accelerated exponentially in recent years, and it wasn’t just televised. It was hashtagged and shared on social media, where everyone has a voice. Nowhere was this phenomenon more evident than when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that marriage for same-sex couples is constitutional, and Google, YouTube, Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter all supported the advocacy. That day, #LoveWins became the top trending topic on Twitter, with more than 3.12 million tweets, many of which included images of the White House and other important buildings lit up in rainbow colors. On Facebook, users were given the choice to put a rainbow-striped filter over their profile picture to show their support, and Mark Zuckerberg himself shared a map that detailed the enormous growth in the number of LGBTQ groups on the social media site.

LGBTQ citizens have become more accepted by the general population, and some brands have begun to message directly to them as a way of increasing overall favorability.

The combination of purchasing power and the halo effect of LGBTQ-friendly strategies makes the business case for inclusion clear:

- The combined buying power of U.S. lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults rose about 3.7 percent to $917 billion last year.
- Seventy percent of LGBTQ consumers will pay a premium for a product that supports the LGBTQ community.
- Seventy-eight percent of LGBTQ adults and their friends, family, and relatives will switch to brands that are known to be LGBTQ-friendly.
- Forty-seven percent of consumers under 24 years old are more likely to support a brand after seeing an equality-themed ad, compared to 30 percent of all age groups combined.
LGBTQs are also twice as likely as the general population to agree “they need to be connected to the Internet from the moment they wake up until they go to bed.”

LGBTQs are connected vocalists with usually more than one device within reach — and they actually want to receive ads on those devices.

“Standing for something as a brand is much more important today,” said Georgetown marketing lecturer Rohit Bhargava. LGBTQ rights “was something that was sort of on the fringes and it became totally mainstream,” he adds.

THE INCLUSION POT OF GOLD

For smart brands, it’s no longer good enough to slap a rainbow on a once-a-year tweet. And today’s digital engagement strategies go way beyond parades and parties. Brands have enjoyed a “halo” effect by normalizing and “mainstreaming” the LGBTQ outreach through messaging that validates, celebrates, and takes a stand.

- Honey Maid’s “This Is Wholesome” campaign celebrates the diversity of all families in America, including gay dads. After receiving some negative feedback, the brand found a shareable way through art and video to literally transform the printed messages of hate into love. Their fan community shared the video and in only three days the Love film was viewed 2,593,111 times. Google searches for “Honey Maid” increased by over 400 percent.
- Lexus hosts the “It Got Better” series on its L/Studio digital channel. Through the firsthand success stories of LGBTQ celebrities, the series gives hope to LGBTQ youth that life can improve.
- Target has a long history of inclusion and recently came under fire for its policies that protect LGBTQ people. To offer support, the powerful Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) organization began a digital campaign called #StandWithTarget. It shared Target’s statement supporting LGBTQ customers on its website and encouraged visitors to take a digital pledge and share it on their social media channels. In addition, GLAAD asked the community to #StandWithTarget by visiting a Target store to shop and taking a selfie for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat.

NEW FREEDOMS = NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO ALIGN AND PROBLEM-SOLVE

LGBTQs have more opportunities to join the mainstream population than ever, resulting in new touchpoints for brands and opportunities to engage with and solve problems for consumers.
COURTSHIP

Fashion, entertainment, and spirits brands have traditionally been the first to reach out to the LGBTQ community, and gay hookup and dating apps are no different. Scruff and Grindr, to name a few, feature ads for underwear, vodka, and concert tickets, but in 2017 mainstream brands will find creative ways to reach this captive audience. These apps present very natural partnership and advertising opportunities for for-hire transportation companies, hotels, coffee shops, restaurants, and even local attractions.

MARRIAGE

There is no such thing as a “traditional” same-sex wedding, and this opens the door for smart brands to establish themselves as the go-to gay wedding sources. Facebook and other social media platforms offer very specific targeting opportunities for products and services that are both traditional and nontraditional. Early out of the gay wedding gate was the City of New Orleans. It used Facebook’s advanced targeting options to serve ads that highlight the city’s vibrant LGBTQ culture and wealth of LGBTQ-related events to just the right targets.

Google searches related to same-sex weddings (“LGBTQ-friendly wedding venues”) and traffic to online resources such as GayWeddings.com will increase exponentially in 2017. Smart vendors, planners, venues, and even churches will take advantage.

And wedding registries are not just for fine china and crystal anymore. In 2017, new categories such as outdoor equipment, gay travel, and other experience-related products and services will enter the consideration set, and brands that would never have considered a wedding registry will introduce them this year.

PARENTING AND FAMILY

Perhaps the biggest opportunities for brands to leverage the new realities of the LGBTQ consumers center around family life. Same-sex parenting naturally follows same-sex marriage, and these new families will want to find each other and gay-friendly resources in larger and larger numbers.
FOUNDING EACH OTHER

Throughout time, the biggest challenge for the LGBTQ population has involved finding and connecting with each other. The local gay bar has traditionally been a safe gathering spot, but as the population has grown more digital, so have introductions. Now the vast majority of gays generally meet each other through social media and dating apps such as Scruff and Grindr.

In 2017, this trend will make its natural evolution into the next phase of the LGBTQ life cycle – parenting. New apps will be introduced that will use geotargeting to connect same-sex couples with others like them for kids’ playdates and even to develop small groups to share challenges and victories with each other. These apps will offer more opportunities for smart brands to engage and help empower these young families.

FINDING FRIENDLY BRANDS

As more and more children in same-sex parented families become school-aged, and as gender identity expression becomes a more accepted exploration for kids, neighborhoods and school districts will become as important as they are to traditional parents. Nontraditional families moving to new cities will place a high value on environments that have progressive anti-bullying and restroom policies. Online searches and consumer resources will direct these folks to the gay-friendly real estate and mortgage agents who will help navigate them to the most progressive neighborhoods, developments, and school districts in the area.

And once settled, our nontraditional families will be looking online to find decorators, furniture stores, and, yes, home improvement warehouses that welcome them with open arms and open doors. Social media campaigns featuring these types of families will begin to populate the right news feeds.

Hallmark has already jumped on this idea with a clever Christmas campaign that features a young gay couple unpacking in their first home. The spot was introduced on the company’s Facebook page to wide acclaim.
FINDING ONLINE RESOURCES

Meanwhile, digital resources addressing the special needs of new LGBTQ parents have struggled to keep up with the demand. In 2017 we will begin to see this rectified, as digital content and blogs dedicated to these new audiences will grow, offering brands new digital opportunities to connect with them. Diapers, over-the-counter medications, grocery store staples, children’s clothing, and school supply brands will begin to follow the leads of Tylenol and Campbell’s Soup and create gay-friendly content to share on these sites.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND RETIREMENT

Financial companies have recently recognized the need for life-planning products for the LGBTQ community. Prudential is one of the leaders in this area and has already established itself as the online financial thought-leader for the LGBTQ consumer, but any brand that wants to be involved in the financial decisions of the LGBTQ investor will pay attention to its research and follow its digital lead.

Prudential introduced its 2016/2017 LGBT Financial Experience report on its dedicated microsite and featured a video interview with none other than Jim Obergefell, the named plaintiff in the U.S. Supreme Court case that brought marriage equality to America. In it, he discusses progress for the LGBTQ community, while acknowledging barriers to true financial security remain.

The report also featured real data indicating that financial needs – including saving for retirement – for the LGBTQ community are the same as for the general population for 46 percent of those surveyed. In addition, 45 percent said they need to follow a different path to meet those same needs and urged financial advisors to consider the unique needs of LGBTQ clients.

Answering the call is Wells Fargo. Along with the College for Financial Planning, it has created the Accredited Domestic Partnership AdvisorSM (ADPA®) program to address the financial needs and considerations of domestic partners. Financial advisors from Wells Fargo Advisors with the ADPA designation have been trained on key issues affecting domestic partners and are dedicated to providing consumers with tailored investment-planning solutions. The banking company not only offers an online “ADPA Advisor locator” on its LGBTQ-focused microsite, but it also sponsors the “Money Minute” video series as well as a wealth of other relevant resource material on Advocate.com, a major source of news for the LGBTQ community.

IT’S NOT TOO LATE

The breathtaking speed and extent of the cultural shift – from open and sometimes physical hostility toward LGBTQ people to widespread acceptance and support – is unprecedented. A clear understanding of the context behind this complete reversal is essential for brands seeking authentic digital connections with LGBTQs, and the vast swaths of the population who stand in solidarity with them.

There’s a reason PayPal, the NBA, the NCAA, and many other companies have pulled business from North Carolina following the state’s recent passage of a sweeping anti-LGBTQ bill. Brands have begun to recognize that LGBTQ-friendly business is good business. The evolution of that mindset means more proactive engagement with this community, and this will happen online.

We’re here, we’re queer, and we’re digital. And it’s not too late for brands to earn loyal fans with a digital approach to inclusion that solves our problems and celebrates our humanity across all of our new life events.
David Nesmith
Public Relations

An agency veteran in his 21st year in the industry (nine years with Richards Partners), David is known for his messaging skills and creative strategic thinking. He is equally at home in the boardroom and the newsroom, and has polished the reputations for a varied list of clients that includes Behringer, Hyatt Regency Dallas, JLL, JPI, Klyde Warren Park, Reunion Tower, and Wolfgang Puck Catering. David spent 12 years in the entertainment and fashion industries, and helped launch the House of Deréon collection for Beyoncé, the William Rast collection for Justin Timberlake, and the Sean by Sean Combs collection for Sean “Diddy” Combs.
DETERMINE THE BEST PATH TO LIVE VIDEO SUCCESS

Live video in social media will become part of successful brands’ media plans, but not all brands will be successful at live video.

Social media live video had a big year in 2016. We saw millions of viewers tune in to the NFL on Twitter, millions watch breaking news on Facebook Live, and tens of millions watch the 2016 presidential debates – “Chewbecca Mom” even received over 161 million views. In 2017, we can expect live video on social channels to become a staple in our news feed as more content becomes available – more sports, original programming, and exclusive social TV deals are in the not-too-distant future.

So what does this mean for brands? In 2016, we saw brands jump on the live video bandwagon. As Facebook served up more reach for live video than normal content in users’ feeds, brands took advantage with Q&As, behind-the-scenes footage, even a talking pancake made the cut. Social live video has become so prominent that in June 2016 over 80 percent of U.S. agencies and marketing decision-makers said they might or definitely will invest in live-stream video advertising.

It’s difficult to tell if social live video is just a “trending” content type, but it certainly seems like it’s not going away anytime soon. Facebook made it a priority to put live video in your main navigation, replacing the Messenger icon in its mobile app. And now, social networks are primed for new advertising opportunities.

This is where I see a fork in the road, or perhaps just two different and promising approaches for exploring social live video in 2017 and beyond. The first path: A publisher approach can be taken with social live video. Brands can use live video as another content tool to express new ways of connecting with an audience. This path gives you a raw and authentic way to tell a brand story that could resonate well with the right target market.

Social live video is a big opportunity for brands to create authenticity and build credibility. What better way is there to allow viewers to join in and experience an interaction with your brand than through a live video? It gives brands the opportunity to not just talk and script a communication, but to actually produce a real, authentic moment with the brand directly. This treasured “authenticity of content” is critical as 80 percent of consumers say it is the most influential factor in their decision to become a follower of a brand.
Brands who want to make a connection and engage with users in a social environment will need to look closely at social live video and be ready to take new and different approaches. Just as brands have learned to create rich photo and video content to connect with users in the news feed, live video is another opportunity to take advantage of what could become a new and powerful tool in a brand’s content toolbox. It will give brands that are ready the chance to tell the raw story and make a transparent moment with the viewer without the need for video editing.

The second path: Use live video as a broadcast media tool, more similar to traditional TV. Is it really out of the question that social live video begins to reflect television? Facebook has already found publishers to create regularly scheduled programming. The logical next step is advertisements.

Facebook has already begun testing mid-roll ad formats in its live video, and Twitter has plans in place for live video ad opportunities that it suggests will be similar to mid-roll as well. This is an exciting opportunity for advertisers with a new and intriguing format to reach a rapidly growing audience.

Expect the usual big players (Walmart, Target, McDonald’s, etc.) to be the first mid-roll advertisers in social live video. But as these mid-roll units become available to a wider set of advertisers, it will be an excellent opportunity for brands to garner impressions in a new environment. While it will be important for live mid-roll units to be part of a brand’s media plan, it must be understood – social live video is not TV.

As marketers, we need to be wary of treating live video like traditional broadcast television. The news feed is a drastically different place than cable networks. It is where content competes for users’ attention in a matter of seconds, where the skip and scroll can easily divert the viewer. Mid-roll units might be advertising traps for brands that are more focused on trying to connect in more meaningful and deeper ways. Mid-roll ads in social live video that are treated like TV commercials will still achieve impressions and reach, but they will not substitute for the engagement potential of live video on the most powerful communication platforms.

Viewers will be flocking to live video across social media in 2017, and brands must get prepared to reach them and communicate with them in the most effective ways. And now is the time to ask, “Can your brand go live?” It all depends on the story you’re trying to tell.

If your brand is focusing on reaching new audiences in a rapidly growing space, social live video looks promising for you. And the opportunities that mid-roll ad units will present will only grow in 2017. Combine this with already sophisticated targeting capabilities, and you have a powerful new tactic to reach and connect with your audiences.

Sam Nicholson
Digital Strategy
As a digital strategist, Sam helps brands such as Snapple, Mott’s, Ruth’s Chris Steak House, MD Anderson Cancer Center, and the American Diabetes Association navigate the complex world of digital and social media. He is a big sports fan, especially the Texas Rangers, Dallas Cowboys, Dallas Mavericks, and anything Texas A&M. Sam graduated from Texas A&M University in 2011 with a B.S. in Agricultural Communications and Journalism. His hobbies include writing, music, camping, hiking, and traveling.
THE NEW ERA OF SOCIAL CONTENT

We’ve been living in a world where social media managers don’t sleep. We are constantly looking for the next real-time trend, pumping out monthly content calendars, and thinking that social media revolves around our brands.

Because of this, a lot of brands have lowered the bar on social content and have not been very strategic. Let’s be honest with ourselves; just because it’s National Puppy Day doesn’t mean that your brand, which has nothing to do with puppies, needs to create a social post with your product and a puppy next to it. The bright side is that 2017 is going to be a much better world where we are going to do more with less, make a bigger impact, put the strategy back into social content, and finally see social media grow up.

With the updated algorithms and the shift to paid posts, we need to change how we approach social content in 2017. How brands and agencies have historically thought of organic content in a monthly calendar will no longer be true. We will start to redefine what it means to create high-quality content with a proper balance of media spend and production budgets. Additionally, community management shouldn’t be overlooked in the content creation process.

THE ALGORITHM ERA

Let’s start with the landscape and the facts. Social networks are fundamentally going to protect the user experience first and foremost. It is impossible for them to serve all content to their entire user bases. That business model will not work. Therefore, Facebook and other channels have figured out how to monetize their platforms and protect the user experience by decreasing reach and developing algorithms to serve only the most relevant content to its user bases. In fact, brands are pouring more dollars into paid social to ensure their posts are reaching their desired target audiences. In 2017, social network ad spending will represent 24.4 percent of marketers’ total digital ad spending, up from 19.8 percent in 2016.

We couldn’t live in the golden era forever, could we? So, marketers, let’s take a deep breath and accept it; we live in an algorithm world where paid rules. The average person is eligible to see up to 1,500 pieces of content every single day with the attention span of less than 8 seconds. This means that as brands, we have to break through the clutter, and it’s not going to happen every day. Throw out your monthly content calendars and start planning for breakthrough creative with proper paid support. Be strategic about the “right-time” topics you go after, and make sure you are truly adding value to the social space rather than just adding clutter. We must be responsible marketers and ensure that there is always a balance between the media budget and the production budget. What a shame it would be to produce an awesome piece of content that nobody sees.
RESPONSIBLE MARKETERS CREATING ORGANIC CONTENT, WHY?

Although the landscape has changed and it’s a paid world, some of the best-in-class brands are still churning out their monthly content calendars. We took a look at some of the best-in-class brands in social media and analyzed their monthly cadence. The chart shows that these brands are posting on average 76 times a month on social media, most of which is organic content.

Additionally, a recent study found that 80 percent of the public content on top branded pages on Facebook is posted without paid support.

Sounds like we haven’t really accepted that paid social is the new norm.

IS ORGANIC CONTENT REALLY DEAD?

Yes and no.

First, let’s start with the yes. Organic content cannot help your brand to gain free mass reach, nor will it create a viral real-time moment. The days of the “Oreo Blackout” are long gone. You need to plan for content to take off, not just bet on it to take off. Facebook was the first channel to adopt a pay-to-play approach, and the average brand is reaching just 1-3 percent of its Facebook audience. As other platforms shift to a paid approach, we will continue to see the Facebook model be implemented across the board. Facebook took a winding road to get to where it is today, while frustrating a lot of marketers in the process. Newer and upcoming channels, such as Snapchat, are looking to monetize from the get-go and aren’t playing the organic game.

Now let’s talk about the no: Why organic content might still have a role for your brand. As marketers, we need to ask ourselves some really hard questions about our brands to determine if your time and resources are worth doing organic content:

- Do people talk about your brand without you first starting the conversation?
- Do you have an engaged audience on social media?
- When you look at your monthly content calendars, are people getting value out of everything that you are posting? Or is it just to check a box?
- If your brand were to go dark on social, would you be missed?
If you answered yes to those questions, you are probably a passion brand and you should be approaching social differently. Passion brands’ organic content can be reaching a small group of people that matter. These are likely the loyal consumers who have a connection with your brand and want to hear from you. Does this mean you need to churn out monthly content calendars? No. It means that you need to have a strategic approach on how to engage your loyal fans.

Social media is a living, breathing technology platform that changes daily. Organic content also allows for brands to test new opportunities in technology with minimal investment. There’s never been a better platform for taking risks and trying new things. We should encourage the right kind of failures from brands and learn from each other. Over the past year, we have seen updates such as Facebook Live and Instagram Stories that could not have been taken advantage of with paid content. Organically, taking advantage of these moments allows for you to understand what really works for your brand and what doesn’t, before you make a bigger investment.

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT IS NOT ORGANIC, IT’S A MUST-HAVE

The role of social is fundamentally changing to be a media outlet, but we must remember the foundation it was built upon and what it can help brands achieve in their marketing strategies. Social media was the first time in advertising history where consumers could talk back to brands in real time. As we shift to more of a paid approach on social media, we can’t forget that people are in its roots. It’s about being social.

As we shift to this paid-only approach, we have to be careful not to start using social as a microphone similar to the TV model. We must protect that two-way conversation that is such an integral part of social media. Community management is often put in a silo that is separate from content efforts, when in fact it is a key part of creating relevant and impactful content. A community manager is a strategic position, and it is someone who is gaining daily insights from consumers and understanding what they care about. This insight should not be overlooked, and it can help to impact larger strategies and business decisions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR CREATING SOCIAL CONTENT IN 2017

In 2017, social media buys are going to look a lot like TV. On the bright side, social media is growing up and deserving of a mass audience and media spend. But let’s keep what we love about social and why it took off. Let’s be honest, we’re all better than national “whatever” day. This year, the quality of content, the strategy behind it, and the media spend are going to make brands better than ever on social media.

When creating social content in 2017, here are three things to keep in mind:

- Do more with less to make a big splash in social media.
  - What are your big moments this year?
  - Do you have the proper budget for production and media?
  - Is the budget between production and media balanced?
  - Are you adding value or clutter to the social space?
• Reevaluate the role of organic content in your social media strategy.
  – Are you a passion brand?
  – Are there opportunities for you to test new platform updates?
  – Is there a reason for you to be talking or are you just checking a box?
• Treat community management as a strategic position to influence content.
  – Are you staying true to the nature of social and engaging in two-way conversations?
  – Is your community manager a strategic thinker who is gathering consumer insights to influence your strategies and content?

**Caitlin Mitchell**
*Digital Strategy/Social Media Strategist*

Caitlin loves making connections. Person A to Person B, Company Y to Audience Z – if two parties need to meet, Caitlin’s ready with introductions. It’s no wonder, then, that she’s excited by social media. Caitlin’s energy serves her well in an online world that never seems to slow. She has put her mark on hashtags for an ever-growing number of brands, but currently focuses most of her time within the Dr Pepper Snapple Group portfolio.

**Elizabeth Weinstein**
*Digital Strategy/Social Media Strategist*

Elizabeth came into social media and advertising through her deep love of sports (she’s partial to the Stars and the Rangers). Perhaps that is why she loves using her strategic skill set to create superfans for her brands in the social space. Elizabeth spends most of her time on brands within the Dr Pepper Snapple Group portfolio.
MOBILE DEVICES AS DATA CONNECTORS THROUGH THE CUSTOMER JOURNEY

“Ultimately, measuring ROI means having the right mix of analytics to capture insights along the entire consumer journey,” states a report from Millward Brown. Many advertisers have powerful analytics tools in their toolbox (including site analytics systems or data management platforms). But there’s one small tool, as noted by Google, generating robust data that 87 percent of people always have “at their side, day and night.” The mobile device.

As mobile device technology makes evaluating the power of media spend throughout a consumer’s journey more attainable, clients will lean on evolved metrics that can show and connect the value of ads across campaign touchpoints and allow for learnings and optimizations throughout the customer journey.

BIG DATA IN YOUR POCKET

After years of “mobile-first” monikers, mobile has now firmly solidified its position as “the leading digital platform, with total activity on smartphones and tablets accounting for two-thirds of digital media time spent.” On top of that, adoption has not slowed, with eMarketer projecting that 81 percent of the population will use a mobile device in 2017.

With vast improvements and expansions of cross-device measurement, the mobile device now serves not only as a means of reaching an audience, but also as a data connector of a person’s digital persona, connecting the user across home or work desktop usage, wearables, and, increasingly, television. This connector generates insightful data and metrics that can apply to the full customer journey. Let’s take a look at how mobile may be used to provide these deeper, connected insights.

HOW DO WE KNOW A CONSUMER EXPOSED TO OUR CAMPAIGN ENTERED THE STORE?

Through the mobile device, advertisers are able to connect their campaigns with in-store traffic, identifying insights between what a consumer was exposed to prior to entering a store and what they do while shopping.

Store traffic technology itself is not new. Many measurement solutions saw their beginning about five years ago. Since inception, the technologies have evolved from panel-based and limited-scale solutions to advanced movement tracking across iOS and Android location services through partners such as PlaceIQ and NinthDecimal.

Additionally, measurement advances have been made through the rise of beacon technology, which has seen quick adoption and is expected to continue growing with new technology advancements in the coming years. In fact, beacon adoption is on track to hit 400 million by 2020, according to Unacast, which is the world’s largest network of beacon and proximity data.
And while the buzz around beacons and location-services technology is heavily focused on in-store brand interaction, ad serving, and coupon distribution, these advancements reach much further to accelerate measurement opportunities in the race for attributing awareness messaging to a tangible key performance indicator (KPI).

What does this mean for advertisers? Together, these systems can more accurately link ad exposures across digital ads in the journey to a single mobile device to determine if the audience was driven in-store.

At this level, the most important metric to consider is the in-store visit rate. While methodologies differ between partners, generally this metric is calculated by determining the rate of unique mobile devices that visited a store to the volume of ad exposures generated.

So, given the in-store visit rate importance, although the desktop display generated the highest click volume, the mobile video and mobile paid social are considered stronger performers given that there was a higher volume of store visits following ad exposure for those placements.

These mobile insights can be applied to higher funnel tactics, throughout the customer journey. Let’s take a look at how these metrics may be applied to brand interest.

**HOW DO WE KNOW IF A USER HAS INTEREST IN OUR BRAND?**

The space between awareness and in-store/sales has always been fuzzy, as advertisers cobble together engagement-type metrics to attempt to find the customer and draw them into a brand experience.

Identifying how mobile shifted consumer behaviors, Google introduced the concept of “micro-moments,” which raises focus on the “in-between” stages consumers execute throughout their journey prior to making a purchase.
These micro-moments are made more powerful when connected with the insights drawn from the in-store metrics. Google states in its report: “Thinking about these intent/context combinations will not only help you identify more specific micro-moments to go after, but it will also encourage ideas for how to be most useful with your content, ad messages, and app functionality when you are there.”

Determining the metric for micro-moments depends upon your objectives as there are an almost infinite number of micro-moments to consider. Ultimately, it’s important to evaluate what data from your customer’s mobile usage may be relevant to determine the information they are seeking.

Continuing with the in-store data reviewed in the example above, given that mobile video was a strong performer in driving store visits, that data may be reviewed at a deeper level to determine what video content the customer is viewing, how that content may inform search behaviors, and how soon after viewing they visit a store.

**HOW MUCH EXPOSURE IS NEEDED TO DRIVE BRAND INTEREST AND ULTIMATELY A STORE VISIT?**

Traditionally, marketers rely on reach and frequency metrics to determine the optimum exposure needed. While valuable, these metrics are limited in that touchpoints are largely considered equal, yet we know an impression for a long-form piece of content may not be the same value as an impression for a display unit.

Great news: Our mobile insights can apply to this stage too, as we look at increasing exposure time with a brand. With this metric, we aren’t merely aiming to increase the reach of media channels, but the time our consumers are exposed to ads across the highest-performing channels, knowing that typically consumers move seamlessly across many devices en route to conversion.

So, how do we calculate an exposure time metric? Continuing with our previous example, let’s assume this advertiser served three mobile videos during its flight, each 30 seconds in length. We could then determine the exposure time by calculating the total number of minutes viewed for each video.

That metric could then be applied to the in-store visit rate and the micro-moments to determine which video was strongest in delivering brand engagement and store visits.
Tapad, a cross-device publisher, has recently released a viewable exposure time (VET) metric that identifies the optimum cross-device viewable exposures needed for a consumer to complete a desired action (be it a conversion or on-site activity). With VET, advertisers may optimize their media to maximize the exposure time needed for a user to act across their desktop, mobile, and tablet.

As an added bonus for exposure-time metrics, mobile measurement for offline channels is continuing to expand and grow in sophistication. While not perfect yet and still relatively low in scale, companies (including Tapad) are implementing methodologies for connecting a user exposed to TV and out-of-home to in-store traffic using the mobile device.

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME TODAY?**

Using mobile data to inform measurement throughout the customer journey can be powerful, yet it does require some work. There isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach given that each brand has different goals and objectives.

Below are some guidelines to begin considering the application of mobile data throughout the customer journey for your brand:

- **Design a schema based on the business outcomes most important to your brand.** Start with your goals and objectives, and identify what mobile data you’d like to gather to both inform and measure against those outcomes. Additionally, identify the optimal method for data collection and analysis, be it using current systems and technology or outlining a road map for implementing the appropriate tools for success.
- **Set KPIs to measure results throughout the journey.** Ensure the KPIs are evaluated by channel and holistically across the campaign. While optimizations at a partner level are important, it’s equally important to understand how a channel is contributing to the campaign as a whole.
- **Organize and align teams to collect, evaluate, and create insights from the results.** While each team has an individual role, the results and insights impact all components of the customer journey; therefore, it is important to review and share results holistically.

The “holy grail” of measurement may still be out of grasp, but using mobile’s always-on nature to measure and inform tactics throughout the customer journey aids in inching us closer.
Kristen Pankratz
Brand Media/Planner
Kristen plans media for all channels across a variety of clients, including Biltmore, Charles Schwab, and Firehouse Subs. This involves addressing client objectives through a strategic analysis of the media landscape to create an approach that brings audiences full funnel to conversion. In her spare time, Kristen enjoys being active with family and friends and taking weekend trips to enjoy the outdoors through activities such as sailing, skiing, and snowboarding.

Sarah Franks
Brand Media/Planner
As an Air Force kid, Sarah literally grew up on all four sides of the country, which spurred a love of traveling. At The Richards Group, she has worked on a variety of national and local brands, including Red Lobster, Zales, Sewell Automotive Companies, and H-E-B grocery stores. Sarah currently splits her time between MD Anderson Cancer Center, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Great Gatherings, and Shamrock Farms.
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FOLLOW THE CONVERGENCE

It’s no news to read headlines about the death of the paid-TV model as we know it, quickly giving way to digital video. In Q2 2016, the top paid-TV provider lost 708,000 subscribers – a 25 percent increase from the same quarter in 2015. That’s the largest loss in the history of the 60-year model. But don’t look at those headlines alone. As other figures show, although the paid-TV business is undergoing more change than ever, it’s not going to die anytime soon. If at all. In fact, 2017 is the year we’ll see more convergence in paid TV and digital video than ever before, and that’s a good thing.

The paid-TV subscriber losses are less than 1.5 percent of the total subscriber universe, proving the bleeding is more a very slow trickle than a hemorrhage. All the while, Facebook viewers watch 100 million hours of video a day.

These are just two of the many statistics to illustrate that we no longer live in a marketing world of broadcast TV and digital pre-roll buys, but in a world of video convergence entirely driven by consumers’ behaviors and expectations. In a multiscreen world, consumers want a seamless experience. As advertisers, it’s no longer just about reach, but about delivering a targeted message to the right audience, at the right time…and both screen and context. Advertisers want a holistic video approach that puts an end to costly audience fragmentation and engages with audiences in deeper, more efficient ways. And publishers see this convergence as an opportunity to inject their content into untapped platforms and to reach new audiences. Thankfully, consumer viewing habits and technology are forcing conversion of the traditional TV model and digital video more quickly than ever. Now video is video, regardless of the context or screen.

Despite popular belief, the video ecosystem is not becoming lopsided, but is actually healthier than ever. Here are several ways the ecosystem as a whole is benefiting.

PEOPLE ARE VIEWING AND STREAMING VIDEO CONTENT AT IMPRESSIVE RATES

Even with the dramatic changes in the video ecosystem, time spent with TV and digital video is astonishing, still. The average person spends over four hours a day watching TV and an hour watching digital video. The amount of subscriber growth from Netflix is compounding at an annual rate of 27 percent since 2012, with users watching 42.5 billion hours’ worth of programming in 2015. Mobile users on YouTube spend on average more than 40 minutes per session viewing video content.

The irony? Content from standard content programmers (broadcast networks and cable) on streaming platforms such as Netflix account for 50 percent of total content.
The legacy paid-TV model continues to get eyeballs. Digital video impressions grow, regardless of where the content originated. Looks like a win for the ecosystem as a whole.

**LONG-FORM CONTENT IS NO LONGER JUST FOR THE TV SET**

It used to be that TV shows and movies were viewed on your TV in the living room, bedroom, or game room. Shorter-form content was produced for the laptop, mobile phone, or tablet – cat videos, sports highlights, and that video on Facebook of your nephew face-first in a cereal bowl (no worries, his nose was out of the milk).

But now, ubiquitous screens blur the lines of what should be watched when. In Q4 2015, nearly half of all video plays were on tablets and smartphones, growing 35 percent in the past year and 170 percent since 2013. At the same time, nearly one-third of smartphone videos watched were longer than 10 minutes.

More screens + more engagement + more content = more revenue for the ecosystem.
MONETIZATION IS HAPPENING ON LONGER CONTENT

Viewing of longer content (20+ minutes) on digital platforms means more eyeballs and more ways to monetize that content by publishers. For the first time, long-form ad views outpaced the growth of live ad views, growing at a rate of 37 percent year over year. Furthermore, in Q2 2016, video views grew 24 percent year over year while ad views rose by 28 percent. This is an indication that digital advertising content is outpacing video growth, a great sign for publishers, indicating users remain committed to ad-supported platforms while viewing longer content.

At the end of the day, the loser isn’t paid TV. And the winner isn’t digital video. The video ecosystem as a whole is benefiting. Seemingly, brand and consumers are benefiting as well.

With our improving video ecosystem, there are three things the industry should look forward to:

• Increased available impressions in paid TV and digital video means stories can be told in a screen-agnostic and data-enabled world.

• There’s a great opportunity for programmers and distributors to monetize every ad impression. While brands wish this was less of an opportunity, here’s the funny thing: More revenue means more (and maybe better) content to be consumed.

• Stories can be told in a wide-reaching landscape that is equally deep. Reach, consumer insights, and engaging interactions provide real value to brands and advertisers.

Jeremy Ekes
Brand Management

Jeremy’s competitive spirit has been obvious since the day he was born, when he beat his twin sister out of the womb by a full seven minutes. He once got ejected while coaching a 10-year-olds’ softball team. That ump was blind, man! These days, Jeremy channels all those competitive juices into helping his clients win their daily battles. In nearly seven years at the agency, he’s overseen the agency’s clients in the cable industry. He’s also helped build brands in higher education, travel, and retail. His days are now spent in the financial category with the U.S.’s 13th largest bank, KeyBank. Jeremy is a major foodie – just ask him about any restaurant in town.
LEVERAGING DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY AS A BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

In 2017, brands will no longer ignore the warnings to bring their mobile apps, digital documents, and websites into digital accessibility compliance. Increased awareness of the relatively untapped market of people with disabilities will spread. Brands will leverage the growing global population of disabled and aging users of technology, and explore opportunities to provide and market accessible products and services.

FEAR AND ANGER OVER INACCESSIBLE WEBSITE LAWSUITS

A growing number of lawsuits are being filed against businesses accusing them of having inaccessible websites that are not in compliance with accessibility guidelines, or, more specifically, failing to accommodate individuals who are blind or have low vision, who are deaf or hard of hearing, or who have physical disabilities affecting manual dexterity. These lawsuits can cost millions, which has been causing businesses to react, as one would expect, with fear and anger. The very word “compliance” has made them think it’s something they must do, so naturally they have a negative attitude. Today, we are seeing these same people happily getting on board with digital accessibility compliance. So what has changed and why are businesses finally adopting these standards?

A NEW FOCUS ON THE BENEFITS OF DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE

Major changes have taken place this year in the world of digital accessibility. Advocates for digital accessibility compliance have come to realize that negative motivation through lawsuits doesn’t really work in the long run and that hitting digital accessibility offenders in the pocketbook isn’t winning them over to their cause.

So accessibility advocates have taken a new and far more effective approach. By reframing the digital accessibility compliance conversation to explain the huge potential for enlarging their customer base, increasing their social status, and gaining an edge over their competitors, brands are now seeing the benefits of taking the necessary steps to bring their digital assets into accessibility compliance.

WHAT IS DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Digital accessibility is about making it possible for everyone, especially persons with disabilities, to use computer hardware and software, as well as to consult and create digital resources, on devices of all kinds (computers, mobile telephones, tablets, etc.).
DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE PAYS DIVIDENDS

DISABILITIES THAT AFFECT WEB BROWSING

An estimated nine out of ten websites are not accessible. For people with disabilities, this can be a substantial disadvantage because some actually rely on the Internet to be their eyes, ears, legs, arms, or a combination of these. It is essential that computer hardware and software be accessible to provide equal access and equal opportunity to people with disabilities. Digital accessibility can also help people with disabilities to more actively participate in society.

WHAT MAKES A WEBSITE ACCESSIBLE?

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) sets the main international standards for the World Wide Web and its accessibility. W3C created the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0), which are similar to Section 508 but on an international level. WCAG 2.0 requires specific techniques for compliance and is more current than Section 508.
Many countries and international organizations require compliance with WCAG 2.0. The guidelines are categorized into three levels of compliance: A (must support), AA (should support), and AAA (may support). Representatives from the accessibility community around the world participate in the evolution of these guidelines.

Section 508 is currently undergoing a refresh and will be requiring compliance with these guidelines for all federal agencies and those who are selling to federal agencies. The Department of Justice is also looking to these for the set of guidelines that organizations will need to comply with under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The new rules are not expected to be issued until 2018, but experts warn not to wait to become compliant.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES: INCREASED POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS

Proactively providing an accessible digital experience can result in increasing your potential customers. Fifty-seven million Americans are living with a disability. As the population ages, this number will continue to increase.

Around the world, people with disabilities are gaining recognition as a significant and growing market – more than $3 trillion – for products and services, and they are making their needs and expectations known.

Using information and communication technology that is accessible is the fastest way in which to reach people with disabilities and the elderly. By providing an accessible digital experience, a brand is choosing to market not only directly to this population, but also to friends and family who are conscious of a company’s approach to accessibility.
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES: DECREASED RISK OF LEGAL ACTION

While the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities identifies access to online information and communication technologies as a basic human right, the United States has various laws and regulations regarding specific federal, state, and local governments along with public accommodations.

A number of brands have already suffered from costly public legal actions where inaccessible sites were deemed discriminatory. Specifically, in National Federation of the Blind v. Target Corporation, 452 F.Supp.2d 946 (2006), the federal court ordered that a retailer may be sued if its website is inaccessible. The legal landscape for digital accessibility in the United States continues to grow rapidly through advocacy and litigation.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES: INCREASED EFFICIENCIES

By using common coding standards, accessibility pays dividends and makes good business sense. Because most assistive technology leverages coding best practices, accessible sites usually exhibit better quality characteristics, including better usability, better search engine optimization, and reduced maintenance costs. Recent trends demonstrate that people with and without disabilities benefit when businesses make it easier for people to access and purchase the services or products they have to offer.
BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES: UPHOLDING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Having an accessible website and mobile application is the right thing to do. Not only is it good business to create content that everyone can access, it’s also something your people can be proud of, improving their overall engagement and sense of purpose.

On average, people with disabilities spend:

45 Billion a year

Are you willing to lock out 20% of the potential visitors to your site?

Source: Deque

While it is best to consider accessibility during the initial planning and coding of a site, it is not too late to make an existing site accessible. From a tactical point of view, the best way to introduce accessibility is through education and a committed organizational focus. Ideally, accessibility will be incorporated from beginning to end of the software development life cycle.

With legacy sites, however, it is possible to retrofit content. In addition to planning and developing with accessibility in mind, it is also important to include accessibility testing. Accessibility testing includes automated testing, using a code-parser to flag possible violations, and manual testing, using assistive technology such as screen readers and magnifying tools.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES: RECOGNIZED AS A LEADER IN DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

Because the number of agencies that can deliver accessible digital experiences is small, hero websites that demonstrate innovation and creativity alongside accessibility best practices are widely publicized and applauded.

Apple is one example of a strong leader in digital accessibility. Every Apple device is built with powerful assistive technology, making them accessible to everyone. Apple also unveiled its new accessibility website that focuses more on how people with special needs are using Apple’s technology instead of highlighting just the features themselves. If you’re completely unfamiliar with the concept of accessibility, the front page gives you a quick snapshot. Watch the film “Sady”:  

![Apple Accessibility Sady]
Facebook is another strong leader in digital accessibility. It now uses artificial intelligence to help blind people see Facebook. With more than 39 million people who are blind and over 246 million who have a severe visual impairment, many people may feel excluded from the conversation around photos on Facebook. It wants to build technology that helps the blind community experience Facebook the same way others enjoy it. It has introduced automatic alternative text. Watch this demo:

One of the biggest criticisms of accessibility by digital agencies is that it stifles design and creativity. The reality is that design and creativity are only limited by your knowledge when it comes to accessibility. New technologies including HTML5, CSS3, and WAI-ARIA have features that enable accessible and dynamic content.

Designing and developing web content that is engaging and accessible is the ultimate challenge. The more you are recognized for your advances and thought leadership in this area, the more business you will get.

WHY DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY COMPLIANCE SHOULD MATTER TO YOUR BRAND

Brands have the opportunity to enhance the digital customer experience for the largest minority group (over a billion people) around the world. Research shows that 86 percent of buyers (including people with disabilities) will pay more for a better customer experience. By enhancing the customer experience and making the website easy to use for people with disabilities, brands can begin to build a disability-friendly brand presence, which results in brand loyalty and repeat business from the disability market segment.

Wanda Lipscomb
User Experience Architect

As a UX architect, Wanda designs the information architecture and user experience for clients including AAA, Charles Schwab, Go RVing, and Luke's Locker. She also conducts user research efforts, including interviews, card-sorting exercises, usability testing, and competitive landscape analyses. Additionally, Wanda creates site maps, interaction flows, user journeys, wireframes, and content audits, and performs expert heuristic evaluations of existing sites and creative work in progress.
Consuming content in the traditional sense is no longer enough for today’s tech-savvy audience. As technology continues to evolve in a predominantly mobile world, consumers long to be part of the experience to feel truly engaged. In this, the age of Snapchat filters and Pokémon masters, augmented reality has made a huge breakthrough and with that will usher in a new era of advertising in the coming year.

Before discussing the implications behind this new trend, let’s take a step back and define augmented reality (AR) as it relates to advertising today. When you hear “augmented reality,” you might envision a futuristic world from a science fiction series. But, of course, it is simpler than that in today’s world and not so difficult to understand. Augmented reality is in use now, and it is giving us a fascinating ability to transform our surrounding environment, enhance it, and make it more valuable and informative. When executed well, it is an elegant blend of virtual digital objects placed in our real world, in real time.

As we’ve seen with AR gaming sensation “Pokémon Go,” an effective marketing integration becomes a positive part of the experience instead of interrupting it. In 2017, we see AR becoming a more effective tool for marketers, helping them connect virtual experiences to trigger positive, real-world interactions with brands. Someday AR will provide a ubiquitous experience in which users may not realize they are consuming paid content. This could be the difference between trying to sell consumers on an experience vs. letting them experience it for themselves.

When Snapchat released augmented reality filters in 2015, advertisers quickly took an interest in making their brands part of the AR social experience. Earlier this year, Taco Bell released a branded filter that turned users’ heads into a giant taco shell for Cinco de Mayo. The sponsored filter broke Snapchat records, garnering 224 million views in just one day, making it the most viewed filter to date. These examples demonstrate how augmented reality is now mainstream, how it can be a natural and welcome part of a digital interaction, and how it can create a long-term impact with people still talking about these campaigns months later.
Success stories such as this have given us a sneak peek into the way augmented reality can transform advertising today. The adoption of the technology is set to grow exponentially over the next year. IDC predicts that in 2017, 30 percent of consumer-facing Global 2000 companies will experiment with AR/virtual reality (VR) as part of their marketing efforts.

What exactly is it about augmented reality that captures our attention as consumers? What makes AR so special is that it allows us to connect with brands on a more personal level. There is an emotional connection between what a buyer is looking for and what the product offers when we are able to picture it in our own world. This not only enhances the buyer’s experience by allowing them to be in control, but at the same time drives brand visibility.

Ramping up to the reunion season of “Gilmore Girls,” Netflix transformed 200 coffee shops nationwide to resemble the series’ famous Luke’s Diner. Leading up to the event, there was buildup to an exclusive surprise hidden under the coffee cup’s sleeve. Thousands of die-hard “Gilmore Girls” fanatics, myself included, lined up at the crack of dawn to be part of the experience. A Snapcode was revealed under the cup sleeve that unlocked an exclusive Snapchat filter available to share for a limited time and only to those at the event. This is a great example of how augmented reality can enhance experiential marketing, allowing marketers to entice fans with exclusive content and bring a fictional world to reality at a relatively low cost.
In its early stages, AR seemed to be limited to games, toy-like interactions, and social interactions. The benefits of augmented reality in advertising can be seen in executions beyond gaming and entertainment. Personalization and targeting is a big one. In the coming year, it will become a common occurrence for consumers to experience unique AR ads directed at their interests, eye gaze, even emotional state and name, given the right platform. With AR, the world around us has, in a way, become a new canvas to explore. Advertisers will begin to experiment with ads that can pop out right in front of you, even follow your eye movement, making content much less avoidable than it is now.

Although mobile phones are today’s AR hardware for accessing augmented realities, they are only just a preview. As adoption of the technology grows, we will see a shift in the tools consumers use to digest information. Devices such as the Microsoft HoloLens and Meta 2 glasses are tomorrow’s evolution for accessing AR experiences. Experiencing AR with tools like the HoloLens is different in that digital realities are anchored into the environment around us rather than layered on. Playing a game of pool on your dining room table might allow you to interact with the digital world in the same way we interact with physical objects. That is what sets it apart and allows for a closer connection vs. today’s mobile experience.

AR is a fundamental gateway to customer engagement and is evolving quicker than many ever thought possible. Soon augmented reality will become ubiquitous, part of our everyday lives. IDC expects that AR/VR technologies will reach mass adoption levels by 2021. This means that in just five short years, more than a billion people worldwide will regularly access apps, content, and data through an AR/VR platform.
Many think that AR ad space will inevitably be in competition with physical ad space. They believe that as AR continues to grow, AR ads that appear atop physical ones will create friction, resulting in a fight for consumer attention. I believe the opposite is true. As more and more companies begin experimenting with AR, there will be a harmonious bond between new and old technologies. The interactive experience that AR provides will give new life to more traditional forms of advertising. Porsche’s recent ad demonstrates this. Users could scan an ad in Outside magazine. Then, interaction with the ad revealed a digital display of the Swiss Alps along with a 360° view of a Porsche 718 Boxster. This is a great example of using augmented reality to not only bring traditional advertising to life, but also to engage the user in a fun, sophisticated way that aligns with the brand personality.

The combination of AR with traditional advertising will grow significantly in 2017, capturing our attention as consumers and allowing us to actively become part of the ad experience. The nimble nature of AR allows advertisers to customize conventional forms of advertising, giving users personalized experiences in ways they never thought possible. Magazines, posters, even billboards are already being transformed with the added capabilities of AR. As we see success in these areas, more companies will begin to adopt the idea, making this combination much more common in the near future.

KC Munoz
Digital Analytics
As a digital analyst at Quadratic, KC spends most of her time crunching numbers and analyzing data. From defining strategies for site tracking to developing insights geared toward business-focused objectives, she is part of the site optimization process from start to finish. She is the voice of the story that data tells for clients such as Dr Pepper Snapple Group and Schwab Advisor Services. When KC is not hard at work, you will likely find her in spin class on 18, at the nearest coffee shop, or in the middle of her favorite “Doctor Who” episode.
THE END OF MARKETING SILOS

BY
ASH PEMBROKE
DIGITAL ANALYST

THE RISE OF THE CUSTOMER SPECIALISTS

First there was radio, then broadcast TV, cable, personal computers, then mobile phones and social media. In response, we created a marketing department for radio, broadcast, and so on... Today, consumers have at least three devices where we interact with each other and with the brands we select. That number will likely double with the Internet of Things (IoT) across an ever-growing number of channels.

Today’s top marketers are addressing this changing platform landscape head-on by challenging the structure of the marketing organization, no longer trying to align itself by channel or by content. In 2017 and beyond, the trend dominating marketing organization realignment and agency selection will be the customer journey. Marketing strategies will no longer be developed by channel, device, or platform, but instead will focus on driving growth by curating the most valuable customer journeys across the marketing footprint. The focus on connecting the cross-device journey has stemmed from a convergence of technical capabilities and analytic knowledge – and is pushing teams toward mass reorganization out of their specialized silos.

This shift begins with critical questions such as: Which customers are most valuable? What makes those customers different? How do we drive more value from other customers? What user experiences should I prioritize? As teams begin to work together to answer these questions, new organizational strategies are defined, but roles begin to blur. Let’s look at some of the new analytics realities and capabilities that are helping realign our digital marketing efforts.

Every digitally connected human creates a trail of data that makes data scientists giddy. That data, though, can be overwhelming and rarely actionable without a substantial integration effort. But for those who can mine it, opportunities will appear like beacons to help move marketers out of the data morass and into a clear list of actions, experiences, and products that will drive customer growth.

*Global Web Index 2016*
We’ve known for a long time the path to purchase is nonlinear, but we continue to understand more about just how circuitous the path can be. We also now understand how data-intensive good, predictive marketing is – and just how connected the organization must be to capitalize on derived opportunities in real time. As you look more deeply into the natural customer journey, it is very clear that our current “linear” marketing team structures simply will not be the most effective approach in the coming years.

**Discover Nonlinear Customer Journeys**

THE RISE OF THE MANAGED JOURNEY

Have you ever been the victim of a bad handoff? Reserved online, but the in-store associate didn’t know how to find your order? Purchased a stove, but had the installers do a bad job? Maybe you browse on multiple devices, and your shopping cart isn’t retained across them. Perhaps you are a marketer and you ask for dynamic campaign landing pages, but the e-commerce team doesn’t have the bandwidth for your project.

Brands are taking matters into their own hands by breaking down the old approach and creating new initiatives to actively manage the customer’s journey from end to end. In some instances, brands are creating and offering new services. And in other cases, brands are actually creating the bandwidth they need or building new teams to focus exclusively on managing the customer journey. Enter: the experience team.

WHAT DOES AN EXPERIENCE (OR CX) TEAM LOOK LIKE VS. TRADITIONAL SILO TEAMS?

As discussed, many brands have been actively restructuring and breaking down the silos, but how have they done it? How have they refocused on the customer’s journey rather than on particular platform experiences or channels? We believe it starts with an analytics exercise.

The Chief Experience Officer (CXO) or Chief Customer Officer is here to stay. Harvard Business Review noted as early as 2011 the rise of the CXO. These executives don’t just focus on marketing or operations; they focus on organizational growth. They tend to lead cross-functional projects and break down walls. In this way, the teams transcend specialist silos (media, e-commerce, information services, store operations). This drive for cross-functional integration is starting to change agency-client relationships, creating a new status quo where marketing clients demand more thorough understanding of customer journeys, analytics, and platform functionality. **CXO teams are the clients of the future for agencies because they want to be involved in strategy and execution at every step.**
HOW TO BUILD THE EXPERIENCE TEAM

The first step is to define what metrics equate to organizational success – you have to define what digital data points predict larger growth. To find those key insights, you mine data. CXOs and decision scientists make great friends. They must. Because in the future, a company’s success will hinge more on successfully articulating the value of a customer than anything else. Customer value is the ultimate profitability of a customer, which you can then distribute back over the channels they use. In a sense, it is prioritizing efforts by what affects the bottom line. With a full, and valuated, look at the customer’s path from acquisition to purchase and retention – you can begin to understand the net value of each stage, device, and channel in the journey.

This playbook, containing the valuated journey, is how the marketing organization should align itself. This approach is snowballing, in part, because of the advancement of user experience tools that allow the management and optimization of those critical touchpoints at scale. These tools allow organizations to act on the insight and actively optimize in an ongoing way vs. treating growth as a one-time project.

In the past, a specialist team would measure to a shortsighted key performance indicator (KPI). Then, the media team might measure reach and efficiency but not incremental customer profitability. The outcome is that silo leaders might have argued about what success means while growth stagnates or, worse, the company grows in spite of itself and this flawed approach is reinforced.
Definition: A growth metric is a composite metric that defines the impact and contribution of each organizational silo. A growth metric should align customer value and operational efficiencies.

This growth metric is the new single view of organizational success to which specialist teams are held accountable. To support growth measurement, organizations are creating dedicated insights teams to allow ready access to data across the organization.

Example Growth Metric vs. a Traditional Loyalty Curve. See Any Similarities? Growth Metrics Are Akin to a Quantified Engagement Curve.

Ultimately, personalization and journey management are something in which the leading digital companies in the world are actively investing. The team structure looks different for each company, but the process to realignment is similar for each. As this trend continues to grow, experience management is becoming a point of differentiation in driving customer value. We’ve seen that brands such as Amazon, Progressive Insurance, and The Home Depot that were most successful focused on the core, high-value journeys and built teams to support and optimize them.

Maybe this seems easy enough to adopt, but where many can stumble is in the first step: Defining the customer and the value of each step that leads to the definition of organizational success. As some companies have shifted to focus on this true north, their success is driving major shake-ups in ad technology, agency models, and customer experience. We don’t know what the successful marketing team of the future looks like, exactly. But if this trend continues, we know that they will proactively define opportunities with their data that drive customer value and strategically align their organizations around driving growth through the customer experience.

Ash Pembroke
Digital Analytics/Marketing Technology Director
Constantly digging, incessantly asking, tirelessly churning on bits and bytes of information is how Ash approaches the world. She can’t help herself. The urge to understand and find meaning in data, systems, and pretty much anything drives her wonderfully restless brain. At The Richards Group, Ash discovers and activates digital experiences across the marketing ecosystem for her clients, such as Neiman Marcus, AAA, and Dr Pepper.
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