

A Metia Report

Six essential B2B marketing trends for 2017



metia



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Introduction



The holidays are over, you're back in the office, and you're energized for the year ahead. Well, something like that.

Two things that we know are certain as we start 2017: you're already looking forward to your next holiday, and you've already been bombarded with countless predictions and trends for the year ahead.

But this list is different!

Firstly, we've aimed our trends squarely at you – the intrepid B2B marketer. These trends are born from our recent experiences, working in partnership with our B2B clients to generate measurable returns for businesses like yours.

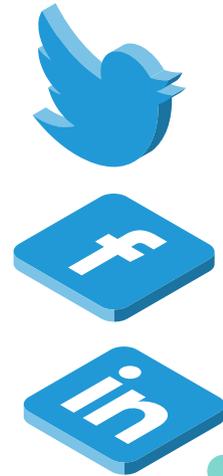
Secondly, these trends aren't wild predictions, and they aren't for the future: they're for the here and now. With that in mind, we've included practical guidance on how you can act upon these ideas and adapt your marketing strategy immediately, to drive measurable returns for your business.

If you decide to test these ideas, make sure to get in touch. We have a host of case studies that illustrate these points, and would love to talk you through them.

Peter Morgan

Director, Demand Generation
Metia Group

1 We're not anti-social, but...



The last 18 months have seen social media reach maturity as a marketing channel. In reality social media is now just ‘media’ – another channel through which marketers can reach their audiences online. But social media is far more valuable than old media to the B2B marketer.



Global spending in 2017 forecast to reach

\$36bn



growth predicted
in 2017¹

Due to the monetization of social networks, organic social content has become business hygiene – akin to publishing press releases to your website – while earlier social media KPIs such as ‘building a community’ and ‘fostering conversation’ have become minimal to the point of irrelevance, particularly for B2B marketers. And though you need to be ready to respond and deal with incoming queries, most often the conversation is quickly moved into more traditional customer service channels.

In short, the business impact of organic B2B social media outreach is limited, and generating valuable outcomes on a

consistent basis now requires paid social media. This is evidenced by increasing demand for social media advertising, with global spending set to reach \$36bn in 2017, a 20% increase year-on-year¹.

There’s a big upside to this shift. Social networks can be likened to a huge rentable CRM, the largest and most detailed customer database the world has seen – and one which customers themselves keep up-to-date. Marketers can target both known and net new audiences with modest investment, optimize campaigns in real-time, and understand the impact their activity is having on the bottom line. It has never been easier to drive measurable value through media.

¹Source: eMarketer <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Social-Network-Ad-Spending-Hit-2368-Billion-Worldwide-2015/1012357>

Practical next step for 2017:

Run a pilot project to find your audience through social media marketing.



- 1** Identify how you can target your audience through social media: what channels do they use, and how can you segment them through their interests and behavior?
- 2** Find content assets in your organization that will provide a fair value exchange to your audience when hosted on a landing page behind lead capture.
- 3** Assign a modest budget to test your approach via at least two channels.
- 4** Apply and test. Implement end-to-end tracking (linking your social media marketing through to your lead capture form) so you can understand the precise value your activity drives.

2 The resurrection of direct mail



It's no surprise that direct mail has been in decline over the last decade: in fact, the quantity of direct mail sent in the US has dropped 17.5% since 2005². But direct mail is far from dead.



drop in US direct
mail since
2005²

Indeed, direct mail is seeing a revival among marketers targeting senior B2B audiences for whom a timely, relevant, and high value piece of direct mail will open doors that advertising cannot.

Personalized, highly targeted direct mail can be the cornerstone of your B2B lead generation programs – the way to cut-through traditional barriers and get the attention of your audience. So when a timely follow-up call is made by your sales team, they are more likely to have a conversation that provides value to both parties.

Be warned, however, that direct mail rarely works as a standalone tactic – it's essential you have a multi-channel plan in place.

Telemarketing, email marketing, and targeted social media marketing can all play their part – and provide you with the connections through which to measure your campaign.

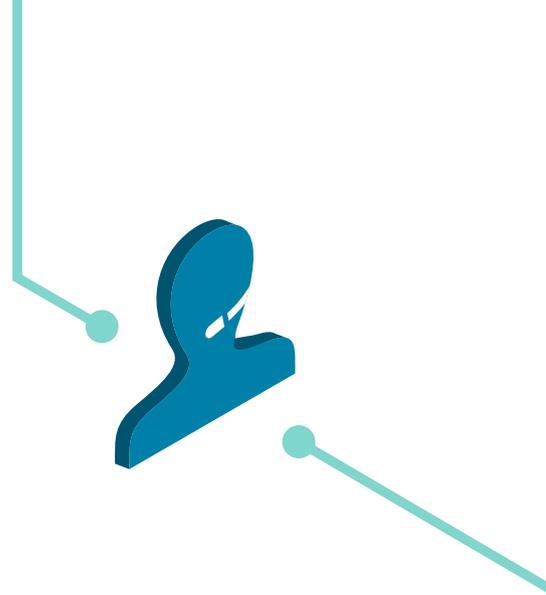
When it comes to tracking the success of your direct mail, make use of digital technologies. Use personalized QR codes or shortened links to track who visits your website after receiving the package, and what they do once they're on it. This can also provide insight for your sales team when following up.

Personalized, highly targeted direct mail can be the cornerstone of your B2B lead generation programs

²Source: eMarketer <http://www.emarketer.com/Article/Social-Network-Ad-Spending-Hit-2368-Billion-Worldwide-2015/1012357>

Practical next step for 2017:

Run a pilot project to target high value audience through a direct mail campaign.



- 1 Identify a small segment of high priority audience that you wish to target – for example, an audience group you have struggled to engage through existing sales and marketing outreach.
- 2 Define a marketing plan that will capture the attention of your audience. You need to offer a fair exchange of value to get past the gatekeeper, and provide content that demonstrates how you can help the recipient overcome their challenges.
- 3 Agree a schedule for following-up that will help convert your good first impression into a measurable outcome, such as a face-to-face meeting.
- 4 Build a framework to help you demonstrate the impact of your campaign. Remember: if you can't demonstrate the success of your activity then its impact will be wasted.

3 Get personal to get ahead



Organizing or attending face-to-face events can be expensive. The financial and environmental cost of large scale events led many to speculate that – with the arrival of the Internet – the future of events lay online, rather than face-to-face.

Of course, that was a miscalculation. Face-to-face events still thrive, and any event attendee will tell you how the real-world experience can't be matched online. But the cost of hosting events or exhibiting at conferences can be prohibitive, and generating measurable return on investment (ROI) from events is a real challenge.

The answer, from our experience, is a structured plan that combines the best aspects of physical, face-to-face interactions with the reach and scale that only online media can offer. A plan that balances the essential, unavoidable investment (for example the cost to sponsor an event, or build a stand) with an investment in content creation and demand generation to ensure real value is delivered for the business.

This means generating 1-to-1 meetings with hand-selected targets in advance of a conference, to ensure that senior managers have a calendar full of qualified meetings that reward your investment.

You can also generate content from the event, delivering set-pieces such as roundtables or dinner discussions where conversation is captured and weaved into a valuable asset to drive engagement, hosted behind lead capture and marketed to your audience online.

These approaches require forward planning, strong creative ideas, and relentless execution – but the rewards can be large, and can be measured.

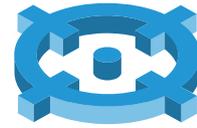
Practical next step for 2017:

Run a pilot project to capture content from an event.



- 1** Identify an event or conference which your organization is already planning to attend, along with senior members of your target audience.
- 2** Organize a 'set-piece' activity that allows a focused segment of your audience to experience something they normally wouldn't: think of a first-class restaurant, and a speaker who has genuine topicality or relevance.
- 3** Build a plan to get your audience to the event. You need to do three things: attract their attention, get them to register, and ensure they attend. Don't rest on your laurels once people are signed-up. In our experience, 50-60% of decision makers who accept an event invite will fail to attend unless a structured program of reminders is in place.
- 4** Develop a content strategy to capture discussion from the event in a valuable content asset, and build a plan to market this asset to a wider audience for lead generation.
- 5** Tracking is essential: you can demonstrate the success of your pilot via the audience you attract to your event, and the leads you generate from your content asset. Make sure you have a plan in place to measure both.

4 Track outcomes, and no excuses!



The last few years have seen big advances in how marketing activity is tracked online. As connectivity and computing power have increased, so have the quantity and quality of data provided by the marketing channels we use.



49%
of US content marketers are unable to measure content performance across channels in aggregate

Despite this increase in data, many marketers are still struggling to demonstrate ROI, particularly when their campaigns span multiple channels. Indeed, a 2016 Rapt Media report found that 49% of US content marketers were unable to measure content performance across channels in aggregate³ - a truly staggering admission of collective failure, and potentially a huge waste of budget.

So what's holding marketers back? It certainly isn't the technology. Thanks to campaign and conversion tracking it is now straightforward to link demand generation activity to a desired outcome – for example, from first impression on social media through to a sale or renewal.

Further integration with customer relationship management (CRM) data allows marketers to understand both the short-term success of their tactics (such as driving website visitors) and the longer-term strategic impact (such as converting customers to advocates).

What marketing departments are lacking are the skills needed to implement such tracking and analysis. Reporting across multiple channels requires a sound understanding of digital analytics and the technologies on which marketing activity runs. Analyzing and interpreting the resulting data often requires specialized statistical expertise.

³Source: Rapt Media <http://info.raptmedia.com/future-of-content/measuring-content-performance>

A 2015 report by The Economist Intelligence Unit concluded that while “marketers are confident in their ability to shape strategy, [they are less confident] about their capability to deliver in data and technology. [What marketers need now is] the ability to combine the technical orientation of a project manager and data scientist with the big-picture view of a business strategist.”

In accompanying research, 32% of senior marketers surveyed by The Economist declared that improving data analysis skills in their marketing operation was a top priority, while 29% ranked measurement of marketing ROI their biggest challenge for the year ahead⁴.

Senior marketers must acknowledge this skills gap, and act. It is no longer acceptable to ignore outcomes. Marketers must have the resources and technology in place to demonstrate the ROI of their activity.

“Marketers are confident in their ability to shape strategy, [they are less confident] about their capability to deliver in data and technology.”

The Economist Intelligence Unit

What marketing departments are lacking are the skills needed to implement such tracking and analysis

Senior marketers surveyed by The Economist

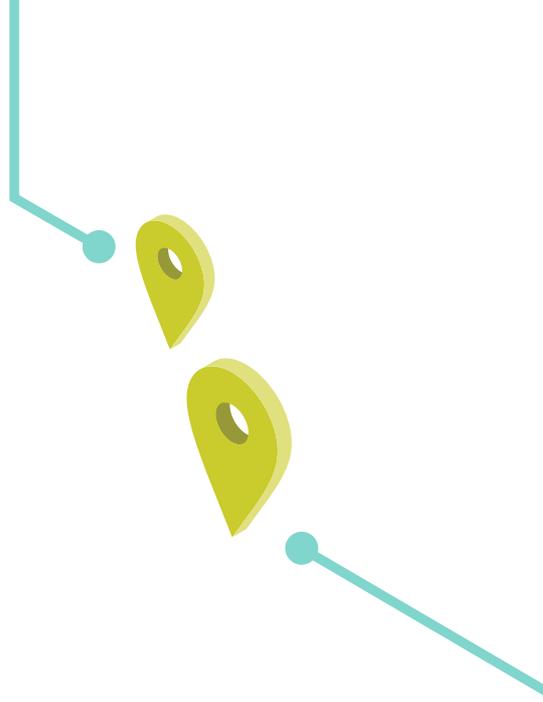


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ranked measurement of marketing ROI their biggest challenge for the year ahead

⁴Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit http://futureofmarketing.eiu.com/briefing/EIU_MARKETO_Marketer_WEB.pdf



Practical next step for 2017:

Run a pilot project to demonstrate the value of end-to-end tracking.

- 1 As a first step, we'd recommend linking a social media marketing campaign to your website in order to quickly demonstrate the value of end-to-end tracking to senior management.
- 2 One of the best ways for a B2B marketer to demonstrate value is through lead generation. Identify a content asset you have hosted (or can host) behind lead capture. Remember it needs to provide a fair value exchange for your audience, otherwise they won't be willing to part with their contact details.
- 3 Generate campaign tracking links that will help identify your traffic within your website analytics. If using Google Analytics, use Google's [URL builder](#). Create goals to track conversions against your objective, for example submissions of the lead capture form. If you aren't familiar with Google Analytics, get help from someone who is.
- 4 Run your test, then review your data to see how much traffic you drove to your website, and how many leads you generated. If your tracking is set up correctly, then your data should be easy to analyze, and your story easy to tell.

5 Switch off the fire hose



There will always be pressure for email marketers to grow databases. After all, adding prospects to the database has to be good news, right? And senior managers love to see numbers increase.

An excessive focus on quantity, however, diminishes the performance of your email marketing. You need to focus on quality: ensuring your database is made up of customers and prospects who want to receive your messages and want to engage with you.

This sounds like utopia, but how can it be achieved? The answers may seem counter-intuitive.

Firstly, you should provide your audience with routes through which to update their contact preferences, including the ability to define the topics that interest them (and those that do not)

and – importantly – to unsubscribe. Regular pruning in this way will help you remove dead wood in the form of people who genuinely aren't interested in what you have to say.

This is a good thing. These people will never become customers or advocates, and if you continue to email them you risk permanently damaging your reputation, so it's better to remove them as soon as possible. You'll also gain a better understanding of the users who remain on your list and interact with you: allowing you to provide more personalized, relevant communications moving forward.

Such an approach should deliver incremental increases in engagement from your audience, and these increases can translate to measurable ROI. We can articulate this point using publicly available data.

For this example, we'll consider a Financial Services vendor emailing a database of 20,000 contacts once per week. If we use Experian's benchmark unsubscribe rate (0.12% per send⁵) and – for sake of simplicity – assume no new subscribers during the time period, our example company will lose 1,214 subscribers per year. That's an annual churn rate of 6.1%.

To help quantify this loss, let's map these figures to recent Hubspot research that identified the average cost to acquire new leads in the Financial Services industry as \$51-100⁶. If we take the mid-point of that range (\$75.50), replacing the 1,214 lost subscribers will cost our example company \$91,657 – each and every year.

Thus, an incremental increase in effectiveness can drive significant returns. By reducing the average unsubscribe rate from 0.12% to 0.10% our example company would retain an additional 200 subscribers per year – an efficiency saving of \$15,100.



Reducing unsubscribing rate by 0.02% generates efficiency saving of

\$15,100

This example demonstrates why B2B marketers must approach email marketing with discipline and rigor. Each and every email should be assessed before it is sent. Marketers should only press send if the expected benefits outweigh the likely costs.



Lost each year through unsubscribing

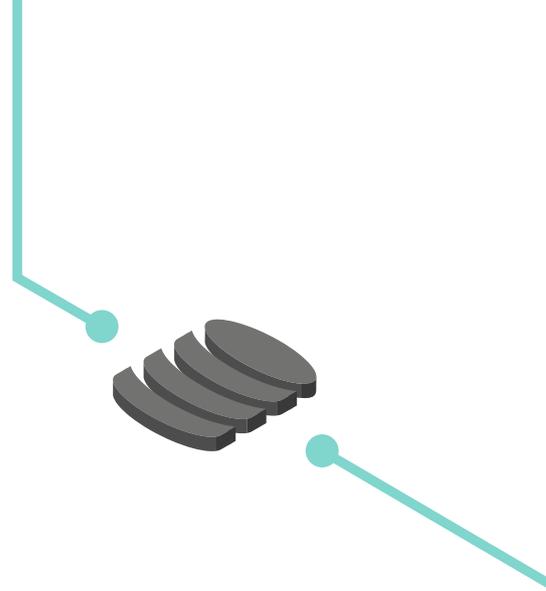
\$91,657

⁵Source: Experian <https://www.experian.com/assets/marketing-services/white-papers/email-marketing-quarterly-benchmark-study-q1-2014.pdf>

⁶Source: Hubspot <https://research.hubspot.com/charts/cost-per-lead-benchmarks-by-industry>

Practical next step for 2017:

Run a pilot project to show how pruning your database can increase its value.



- 1** Ring-fence a sample of your audience, and develop a plan to increase the quality of information you hold on these users.
- 2** Send an email prompting users to update their contact and content preferences, and to provide more information around their role and priorities. Be clear that you're doing this to improve the quality of communications you provide.
- 3** Ensure that all email communications sent to this group focus on appropriate content as defined in their content preferences.
- 4** Offer a clear route through which people can opt-out of future communications to avoid subscribers choosing the SPAM button over unsubscribing and damaging your deliverability.
- 5** Measure the impact of this activity: how many users updated their details, and how many unsubscribed? You will also need to measure the ongoing behavior of the sample against a baseline: how does the activity impact engagement? Demonstrate the ROI of your activity by mapping changes in engagement and unsubscribes against your average cost-per-acquisition.

6 Listen more, talk less



As B2B marketers, we face many temptations when planning campaigns. The temptation to make use of the latest technology for no particular reason; the temptation to promote multiple calls-to-action simply because we can; the temptation to focus the narrative on our own products and solutions.

It's important to disregard these temptations and focus on one thing: **your audience.**

To your audience, you are – more than likely – just another vendor. Your story is no more unique or interesting than any other. So in order to capture your audience's attention, and generate the outcomes you desire, you need to provide something of real value that demonstrates how you can help them.

You must also make it easy for your audience to access that value. Business decision makers are short of time, they often use mobile devices

to browse, and they are often doing this on patchy mobile connections. Placing hurdles in their way is not a good idea.

So how can we maximize returns? By listening to our audience, and placing simplicity at the heart of our campaigns.

Your campaign's offer should be clear, it should be easy to understand, and it should offer real value to your audience. Focus first on their challenges and motivations, and align your solution to their needs.



1-second

delay in page load time
can significantly decrease
conversions

Your delivery mechanism needs to be direct, and easy to use. It must be optimized for mobile, and you should resist the temptation to add unnecessary complexity: include a single call-to-action and no more. Make the transaction as easy as possible for your audience.

Issues that may appear trivial can have major consequences. For example, research conducted by Kissmetrics found that a 1-second delay in landing page load time can decrease conversions by 7%⁷.

We can better understand this impact by considering a B2B marketer who needs to generate 50 new leads per month for their sales team. In this example, the average conversion rate of the marketer's landing page is 5%, which means they need to generate 1,000 landing page visits per month to reach their target.

The reduction in conversions caused by a 1-second delay in load time would increase the number of visits required to 1,075. This translates to a 7.5% increase in the marketer's demand generation cost, assuming they are paying on a cost-per-click basis. A significant increase.

Finally, reporting should be streamlined, measuring each user's journey through your desired sequence of actions. And it should be delivered in real-time – letting you optimize activity as it runs. Resist glossy vanity metrics that pander to bragging in favor of those that show real business benefits. Focus on the metrics that matter, and optimize your campaign around them.

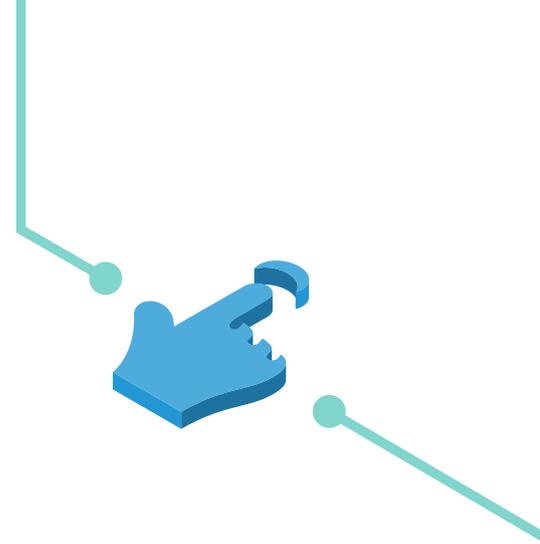
Marketing need not be complicated to be successful: **simplicity is king.**



⁷Source: Kissmetrics <https://blog.kissmetrics.com/loading-time/?wide=1>

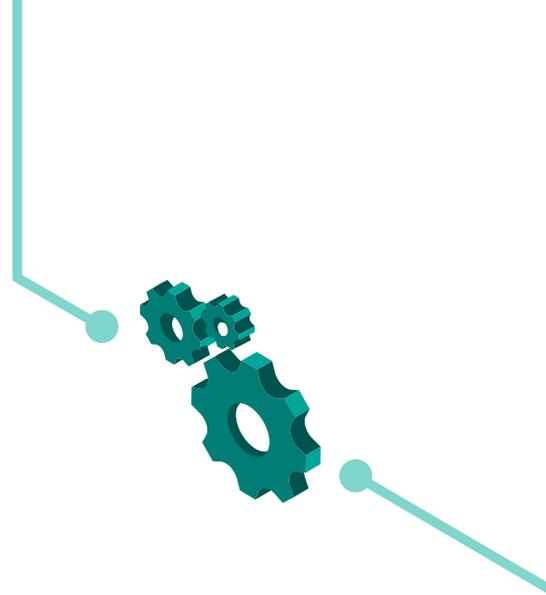
Practical next step for 2017:

Run an A/B test to see how simplicity can affect an existing lead generation campaign.



- 1** Identify an existing lead generation campaign for which you have conversion data.
- 2** Build a plan to replicate this campaign, but simplifying at each step of the journey: from demand generation (more direct content and simpler imagery), through to the landing page (less content, optimized for mobile), and the lead capture process (with the bare minimum of form fields). Ensure you can track your audience as they move through your desired journey.
- 3** Repeat your campaign using the new simplified process, as an A/B test.
- 4** Compare the two data sets – which simplifications have worked, and which have not? Identify learnings you should apply to future projects. Test and repeat.

Closing thoughts



We hope these trends have proven informative, and we hope we've provided practical ways in which you can implement these techniques to your marketing in 2017.

As with all marketing, it's essential you understand what you want to achieve, and how you plan to achieve it, before you execute any activity. Ensure you have support from within your business before you start, and set expectations around what your activity is aiming to achieve.

Successful tests like those described in this guide require an understanding of the mechanics involved, and a commitment to analyze the data and tune your activity as it runs. Make sure you have the appetite and resource to execute your activity successfully, and to report on how it impacts your business.

If you're planning to take the next step, then get in touch. We have a host of case studies that illustrate each of these points, and we'd love to talk you through them.

If you need further guidance, take a look at our blog and other downloadable content at www.metia.com.

About Metia

Metia Group is a global digital marketing agency with offices in London, Seattle, Austin and Singapore. We employ over 130 digital marketing professionals; each is expert in a particular area of specialization.

Our clients include big corporations and ambitious businesses. We provide them with creative campaigns that reach across geographies, scale massively, can be deployed systematically and measured relentlessly.

If you'd like to learn more about our capabilities, and discuss how we could help you reach and engage your target audiences with focused, measurable campaigns, please get in touch.

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