

Digital marketing trends for 2017 (part 1)

 By [Stephen Sandmann](#)

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I'm more or less a self-taught digital marketer (formally only studied marketing). It's my curiosity, risk-taking nature and creativity that got me to where I am today. It is this curiosity that led me to ask the question, 'What should we look out for in 2017 when it comes to digital marketing?' I share my thoughts on trends and I caught up with many digital marketing experts, like SA's digital marketing pioneer Rob Stokes, founder and non-executive chair at [Quirk/Mirum Africa](#) and [Red & Yellow School](#) to get his thoughts on the year ahead.

What does it take to be a digital marketer in 2017?

To stay ahead in 2017, digital marketers need to be tenacious, risk-takers and hungry for knowledge. Speaking of knowledge, education, training and mentorship will accelerate this year. Simply put, demand will continue to outstrip supply – there is a substantial digital marketing skills shortage in SA now.

Digital marketing in 2017 carries tremendous opportunity for students looking for a career path, as well as marketers of all types. Digital agencies will continue to seek out top talent which blue chip clients demand. Companies are also on the lookout for digital marketing talent to collaborate effectively with their agency counterparts.



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According to Stokes, a digital marketer needs to possess a few personal qualities to achieve success, and but above all, genuine curiosity. "Everyone loves to talk this game, but precious few people are actually able to live it. It's a rare character trait which more humans should strive for if they want to compete in the 21st century. Once you are curious, then you need the ability to apply what you've learnt through this hunger for knowledge into value-adding creative thinking, innovation and problem solving.

"The role of the marketer is to know their customer, develop products and services that meet their needs and then build a programme of communications to express the organisation's purposes.

"I feel that currently the innovation part of this mandate has been pushed aside in favour of extra communication. In my opinion, this is not an effective strategy in the long term."

Where are we heading in 2017?

Remarkable digital marketing must combine data-driven creative ideas with the relevant, innovative application of technology. Let's give consumers 'intuitive brand experiences' to communicate effectively with them.

Online consumer behaviour can guide the ideation process. Internationally, advertising agencies are taking advantage of crowdsourcing and AI for creative ideas and executions. A new digital creative model has emerged and SA will follow suit. Personalised online content can now be scaled like never before.

We must step up our understanding and ability to harness Google's and Facebook's algorithms (the mechanics of how they work) to effectively get our messages across to consumers this year. There is a good chance that Snapchat will become a viable marketing platform, especially with its promising, just-launched ad tech platform in mind.

Stokes shares interesting insights: "Mobile phone sales are now predominately smartphones. This means that on the digital side of the marketing mix, industry professionals now have a market that is – for most of our current planning intents and purposes – using smartphones. This is significant because a smartphone is not just a phone; it's a connected computer in your pocket that knows who you are, where you are and can communicate with you directly and in an incredibly rich way.

"The opportunities are endless, but they are also different. Porting a tactic from another channel to mobile is unlikely to be a super effective strategy. It's an incredibly exciting time, but we have to be whip smart to make the most of it."

What will digital marketing budgets look like in 2017?

Brands' 2017 marketing budget allocations will compensate more for the year-on-year increase in consumer smartphone usage, as well as an increase in their usage of other digital technologies. I see digital marketing budgets increasing in 2017.

Stokes is optimistic about the likelihood of digital marketing budgets increasing in 2017: "I say yes, purely on the basis that for sound economic reasons, they should. The time consumers are spending on digital channels as a proportion of the time they spend on other channels is far greater than the corresponding marketing budget apportionment. This makes no sense because marketing spend should at least roughly follow consumers' attention. The gap is still large because most marketers are risk-averse (ironically, given their definitional mandate to innovate) so logically it needs to close even if budget still lags reality for a while."

I'll end with one caveat. When it comes to the world of digital marketing, always expect the unexpected coupled with lots of curveballs. I believe it's best to keep an eye out for shifts in trends and be ready to adapt your craft.

Source: [Adage.com](#)

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Read more: [Digital marketing trends for 2017 \(part 3\)](#)

ABOUT STEPHEN SANDMANN

I have a keen interest in innovative, digital marketing-lead advertising and search marketing (SEO and paid search), which I've developed through my award-winning agency and corporate career at Ogilvy, Quirk (now Mrum), Vodacom and now a specialist digital marketing consultant at Sandmann Digital.

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