

The rise of the digital planet tells a new story

 By Yaw Dwomoh

7 Oct 2020

Staring down the barrel of what is certainly going to be an economic recession, businesses are now preparing to navigate a period of prolonged uncertainty for their brand, the global economy, and the consumers they serve.



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At no point in human history has the populace been so aware of the economic consequences of a pandemic. Initially, the reaction to the Covid-19 outbreak ranged from sheer panic to brands scurrying around to make happen what they could before the apparent and inevitable shutdown.

While the Covid-19 situation has turned out to be an unmitigated disaster for many businesses, hundreds of others have taken the consequences in their stride. Industries were already establishing their presence online before the pandemic hit. Now, with an unprecedented increase in online sales around the world, businesses and entrepreneurs realise that the shift might be more formidable and long-term than they ever thought.

The rise of a digital planet

The future is now, and it is digital. More and more people are shopping for everyday needs and luxury items online. From groceries to sanitisers and clothes to washing machines, the need to physically visit a store to shop continues to fade. As the behaviour of the consumer changes, with it, changes the traditional marketing trends.

1. Digital marketing cannot work in isolation. We need a more integrated approach

Integrated marketing demonstrates to the consumer that your brand is aware of their changing needs and behaviour. Marketers would need to understand the customer at every step while making use of custom tools, data, and tech to stay ahead of the game. Traditional brand models offer customers a generalised experience. But the keywords in the new models would be “personalised” and “relevant” instead of a wholesome experience designed to cater to everyone.



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Marketers in the post-Covid-19 era will have to rethink what technologies they really need, which ones can help them save money, and which ones can help them transform their businesses that may have been transformed by this crisis. Marketing technology that helps with the above business needs will, therefore, be considered essential and the rest may end up in the trash heap of tech-driven promises that never delivered true marketing return on investment (ROI).

Consider the traditional brand conduit structure that has been used to monitor the behaviour of a client. The structure begins tracking from the moment the consumer realises their need for a product and begins the search for it, to the moment when he takes the action to make the purchase. Unfortunately, this trend has become outdated when it comes to the digital market.

The consumer in this case might not even be aware of a product while surfing the internet. Carefully placed ads on social media or related brand stories on e-commerce sites are then used to catch their attention. Online reviews and specifications are other vital aspects that drive customer interest and ultimate purchase.

Hence, following a traditional brand funnel that assumes unchanging behaviour in consumers, would prove to be a bad idea and, as a result, the need for new tools and trends in digital marketing is rising, calling for a more integrated approach.

2. Storytelling and brand communication transformation is a reality

Massive changes in tech and consumers' use of channels were already beckoning a new approach to storytelling, creativity, and brand communication. The pandemic has only accelerated this revolution.

We are arguably going through one of the most radical transformational periods in terms of what technology looks like in all the environments in which we operate. Strangely enough, very few brands are exploring how to push these new channels as far as they can go or come up with ways to tell stories and communicate differently.

Navigating ways to market, sell and create brand experiences in this new era has never been more important — especially as the pandemic might mean that in-person interactions become more and more infrequent.

Now, as the internet essentially becomes our “real world”, brands are starting to think about how they can reinvent digital experiences in more creative and immersive ways, making brand storytelling an essential tool on the digital platform.

3. Focusing on the return on investment (ROI)

This large shift in the market caused by the influx of online shoppers would obviously mean that brands would have to increase their investments in building their presence and marketing their products online. All the high return on investment (ROI) generating tools and digital channels, including SEO, story-telling and conversational marketing, are going to witness an incredible increase in investments during and post-Covid-19.

4. Digital marketing as a profession

Economists and market researchers have overtly stated that the current demand on the process of shopping itself, may shift completely into the virtual arena, while physical stores and restaurants turn into experiential and recreational sites. By this time next year, the need for skilled digital marketers will have at least tripled. This will undoubtedly lead to the creation of a newer, more specialised teams of digital marketing experts.

Many entrepreneurs will see an opportunity in the changing needs of the digital market and move to take it up as a profession.

5. Job creation

This quickly transforming market is likely to create new positions in the near future. With the youthful South African entrepreneurs displaying proficiency in digital optimisation and the country brimming with untapped talent, the display of cost-effective digital skills here cannot go unnoticed.

What now?...

With digital transformation becoming the buzzword, marketers and brands alike will have to take into account the latest trajectory. Data analytics would see a huge improvement when tracking the changing and somewhat, the erratic behaviour of the “new” consumer in the transition from traditional brand funnels, to trends and terrains that many brands are unfamiliar with.

The risk of physically going to the market during current times has made even the technologically unaware familiar with online shopping and only now, are they realising the sheer advantages of being able to order everything from a book to a double door fridge from the safety of their homes. This brings us to a situation which no amount of marketing research could have predicted.

As many brands seek to scale-up in e-commerce, customer experience will be hugely important as brands compete on logistics and customer experience, as much as product or service specs. A March 2020 Kantar survey indicated that 32% of respondents expected to shop more online post-Covid-19. Brands will need to prepare for knock-on effects in customer experience, logistics and fulfilment, mobile-first designs as consumers adapt to the ‘new normal.’



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For so long marketing has promised to be the voice of the consumer, but in reality, marketers champion inspiration and purposeful messaging overwork that means the most to their audiences. It's these moral differences that are creating a substantial barrier within the marketing industry and highlights the need for brands to tell their stories in a realistic, sincere manner.

Consumers, with their ever-growing demands, are shifting at a rate we could never have anticipated. More and more brands are now ready for the shift. The moment to deliver is now. Marketing trends currently are not just calling for a transformation, but a digital revolution.

ABOUT YAW DWOMOH

Born in Ghana, Yaw Dwomoh is the Managing Director of Idea Hive, a specialist Brand Storytelling company based in Johannesburg that enables medium-to-large brands to craft their brand stories in a way that is authentic, connecting with customers in a way that captures their hearts and their purchasing power.

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