

17 trends for 2017



By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Last year we predicted that 2016 would be a 'year of disruption' and how. It was all that and more. To make sense of 2017, we trawled trends and asked resident futurists and trend spotters to weigh in on trends in consumer insight, business and the media and marketing industry. These are our 17 trends for 2017 for what we are calling the 'year of visual communication' as video and VR start integrating with all forms of marketing communication.



Image by 123RF

1. Are you a digital predator or digital prey?

Forrester has predicted that, by 2020, every business will become a digital predator or digital prey. Disruption is inevitable. Just ask the taxi industry after Uber came along and the hotel industry with Airbnb. Have a look at how car brands are transforming to meet the challenge of the sharing economy as the prediction of declining car ownership is becoming a reality in some parts. Brands need to act now to become 'the next big thing' to avoid being disrupted by 'the next big thing'.

2. The rise of brand activism

In this age of 'alternative facts' and where our leaders and institutions are often exposed as corrupt and liars, it is time for brands to stand up for the values and authenticity that their consumers are telling them they want. The recent [Superbowl](#) in the US was a case in point, with brands taking a stand publically before an audience of millions. It was unprecedented. But uncertain times call for leadership and a reflection of the values that make us human. Trend forecaster, [Dave Nemeth](#), agrees, saying that corporates will have to address issues relevant to their communities, including broader issues such as education and migrants to build loyalty, instead of sitting on the fence. [Lebo Madiba](#), MD, PR Powerhouse, predicts that the 'anti-establishment sentiment' trend is likely to be entrenched in 2017: "As communicators, we need to find innovative ways of tapping into this sentiment. We need to help our clients find their unique voices in a cacophony of other voices; to engage their audiences in an authentic way and to build loyalty that will ride out the winds of change."

3. Artificial intelligence is a reality

It's being reported that Artificial Intelligence will eliminate 6% of jobs in five years' time and intelligent robots and algorithms will take over CRM functions in many companies. These are the positions at risk, according to trend guru, [Dion Chang](#): customer service, web designers, online marketers, accountants, HR professionals, trucking and taxi services, journalists, lawyers and psychologists. Not only that, AI experiments in culture could bring us movies, art and music in the future. [Lani Carstens](#), MD, John Brown Media, believes it will bring more personalisation and plug into existing technology to help brands reach the right consumers.

4. Crafting authentic products and experiences

There is always a counterpoint to everything and as our world becomes more automated and integrated with artificial intelligence and everything becomes connected to the Internet of Things, people will also demand tangible experiences, contact with real people and a yearning for the craft of bygone days. This is where craftsmen, handmade unique products and organically farm-to-table, homegrown, homemade produce and products still have a place at local markets. Dave Nemeth calls it "handmade luxury", where companies will produce limited editions and tap into craftsmen in developing countries to enhance the authenticity and put money back into impoverished communities. According to a [Forrester/PwC study](#), 94% of executives believe that delivering personalisation is critical to reaching customers. Data will be critical here, says [Bradley Elliot](#) MD of Platinum Seed. [Giles Shepherd](#), group chief executive of Brand Alive, says the demand for authentic brands is growing, proven by the meteoric rise of craft industries globally as it "proves that brands that have interest value, with stories to tell, are receiving interest – and customers".

5. After hours retailing experiences

As [Dion Chang](#) reports, turning your unused spaces after hours into bespoke experiences for your customers, is becoming a trend, with sleepovers inside museums like the London Science Museum with its torchlight tours; and a vintage listening room in Brooklyn's Rough Trade record store that can be booked via Airbnb. Locally, families can overnight inside the V&A Waterfront Aquarium, giving kids and their parents an undersea experience at night. This is coupled to people wanting real, authentic experiences with their brands, reiterates Giles Shepherd. Amazon's new bricks and mortar store 'Go' is a great example.

6. Micro-casting adventures

The future of media planning lies with the shift in how consumers experience moments, and how they use social media and messaging apps to extend and segment experiences. As [Graham Deneys](#), strategy director, Carat, explains: "Consumer journeys have morphed into rather unpredictable mini adventures and this is the future of media planning. Serving the right message at the right time has become increasingly difficult and planning tools are going to need to catch up quickly or risk becoming significantly dated." The massive growth of video online means video plans need to be included in all media schedules, Deneys advises. "We need to know which touchpoints are most relevant to our audience at which micro-moment and then adjust creative thinking to facilitate conversation and relevance. Perhaps our creative won't resemble an

ad at all, but more a step to move the consumer from one point to another with a specific goal in mind.” Internet video is expected to account for 79% of global internet traffic by 2020 and 52% of marketing professionals have named video as the type of content with the best return on investment, reports [Johanna McDowell](#), chief executive, IAS.

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7. Alternative facts vs truth vigilance

When the leader of the free world and his administration popularise “alternative facts” in opposition to the truth; and fake news is used to manipulate elections and voter sentiment, it is even more important for people and brands with integrity to stand up for the truth. This is not an opportunity to jump on the bandwagon and use spin to subvert brand communications. Politicians and brands are being called out more and more on social media by consumers for being less than honest – and turned into memes for the amusement of all. This is an opportunity for authenticity, honesty and truth. Keep telling the real stories. Advertising, after all, can influence culture and societal narratives.

8. Authentic storytelling for marketing

[Forrester](#) predicts that for 2017, marketing will shift from “volume-based advertising strategies toward quality experiences across the entire customer life cycle”. This is influenced by ad blockers and the formulation of new standards for digital advertising in particular. Forrester believes publishers will reduce advertising volume, improve ads and introduce more sophisticated targeting. This will also be reflected in social media sites and Forrester predicts that even TV-led campaigns will be “superseded by integrated campaigns where mobile, social, and search will build on the reach and awareness of the TV narratives”. Geo targeting and technology will also enhance mall media, out of home and shopper media. Data applications need to drive accessibility to easy consumer insights. “Tell more beautiful stories,” advises [Carl Willoughby](#), executive creative director, Openco Advertising.

9. Virtual reality disrupts advertising

While slow to roll out, virtual reality will disrupt the advertising industry in the near future. It will be used to create unique brand experiences; as well as highlight problems in society that need solutions. Johanna McDowell believes VR technology will be used to “help minds see things differently”. It is predicted that VR will be used in entertainment, education, retail, real estate, as well as marketing. The technology is now available to bring augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), into the mainstream to deliver compelling user experiences, says [Werner Lindemann](#), Mediamark. The VR ad from Lockheed Martin won big at Cannes in 2016.

10. The explosion of video

There has been a massive shift in media in recent times – it is now “convergent, interconnected and fully transparent to technology and therefore measureable”, explains [Dawn Rowlands](#), CEO Aegis Media Sub-Saharan Africa. “This shift in media has caused everyone to re-evaluate and think beyond initiated transactions, emails, push notifications and traditional advertising. Rather, businesses need to be thinking about live connections, coherent ecosystem, emotions translated into data, people and dynamics.” How content is consumed and how attention shifts throughout the day is influenced by the proliferation of smart devices. This explosion of screens means the consumer is always on, 24/7. This has been a paradigm shift for consumers and brands have no choice, but to follow suit, as “the new consumer is converged, fully-integrated through multi-media and multi-screen”, says Rowlands. [Pilira Mwambala](#), ad operations director, Mark1, says with video, brands have a platform “to inspire audiences with captivating experiences and measure user’s feelings and emotions almost instantaneously”.

11. Collaborative storytelling

With storytelling, advice has been, “write for your audience”. In 2017, [Tom Manners](#), Clockwork Media, says, this has become “write with your audience”. Brands will need to turn over much of the ownership of content creation to their audiences, encouraging their consumers to share content that feeds into overall brand strategy. “Every year, users are creating and sharing more and more content, thanks to apps such as Snapchat and Instagram. Some of the best brand stories will inevitably come from these amateur content creators.”

12. The digital economy is the economy

The integration of digital into every facet of our lives and the industry, means there is no distinction for ‘the digital economy’ or ‘digital media’. Digital is everything and the pace of change is relentless and customers don’t buy brands anymore, “they join brands”, says [Dawn Rowlands](#). She warns: “Digital transformation means that we can change the way that people experience our brands like never before. The next five years are going to be a constant state of change, data is becoming a new currency and if a company cannot adopt to test and learn to quickly launch products to the market, those companies will be left behind.”

13. Big data intelligence

Big data continues to be a mega trend and the challenges continue to be how to make sense of all the data collected and implement the insights gathered. “Digitalisation is now embedded into all businesses and through the Internet of Things, all apps and devices present opportunities to bring true engagement to life in real-time, and with more insights than ever before. Insights are derived from big data; a term that some push aside as a buzzword, while others know how to glean valuable intelligence from it,” says [Joshin Raghubar](#), executive chairman, iKineo.

14. The new marketing

Both marketers and agencies have to be more agile when building content narratives. A different approach is needed to reach consumers living in the “here and now” and create meaningful consumer ecosystems. “Now the art of persuasion is about involving consumers in the decision-making journey. It’s about providing audiences with what they want to hear - at the right time and in the right way. So old-style segmentation tools are effectively out of the window; it’s all about securing audience traction through emotion-generating engines,” says [Shireen Jaftha](#), integrated media specialist at Kagiso Media.

15. Mobile-first

All experiences should be designed mobile-first with a device-agnostic user approach and appropriate content levels based on data-cost sensitivity, says [Tom Fels](#), Publicis Machine. “We will see more simple, effective and ground-breaking marketing through mobile as time marches on.” Content needs to be carefully crafted, however, to yield returns and compete against all content out there.

16. The year of living simply

Be more human, have honest conversations, create rewarding brand experiences, create a simple way of life, advises [Rudy Hassiem](#), MD, BrandNew Creative Agency. He urges a return to simplicity and less marketing smoke and mirrors to understand consumers better and, “truly understanding their needs and adjusting our products to suit their world, as opposed to the other way around”.

17. Drones take to the skies

From deliveries to remote wars to espionage to entertainment, drones are becoming a part of our lives and will eventually result in human-carrying drones, giving us instant flight, says futurist [Graeme Godrington](#).

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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