

The five digital trends that will shape your year



By [Tom Fels](#)

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It is widely acknowledged in our circle that the world of advertising and marketing is shifting faster than ever, as political, economic, technological and social change assault South Africa's favourite brands.



Tom Fels

Two or three years ago, these same brands walked a well trodden path, growing safely and stably. The question confronting them today, is what move to make, not whether to make a move at all – as failure to chart a new course will soon see them facing an unappealing Mexican standoff with consumers asking for more.

With so much at stake, and so much change to consider, here are some of the trends that are re-writing the rule books for 2017:

Brands as the voice of social change

Many successful brands have shifted from marketing to the people, to marketing with the people. Continued compassion and empathy toward causes that consumers hold dear will provide greater sources of resonance as clearly articulated brands create strong tribes of advocates rather than broad swathes of middle-of-the-roaders. More so than ever, purpose-led communications will be the linchpin of standout brands venturing into this uncertain future. As an international yet relatable example, watch how this recent Chipotle piece does an amazing counter-culture job of making a statement for its belief in 'cultivating a better world', following its 2016 viral hit "The Scarecrow".

Standing out in a digital democracy

More and more the voice of the people, digital communications continue to change the game in four key areas that affect brand owners:

1. The growing ubiquity of mobile internet is cementing the view that online experiences should be designed mobile-first, with a device-agnostic user approach and appropriate content levels based on data-cost sensitivity. We will see more simple, effective and ground-breaking marketing through mobile as time marches on.
2. Internet fame has been democratised and an increasing number of online influencers are becoming credible conduits to targeted audiences rather than traditional media buys. But buyer beware, authenticity will remain key here, as consumers are happy to call out obvious 'paid for' endorsement.
3. Technology has lowered creative production barriers, from editing an iMovie, to starting a blog, designing a logo or editing your own photographs, the net is choc-full of ideas. Expect brands to adopt new forms of innovation first, elevating themselves out of mass mediocrity.
4. Building on this, content has been crowned king, but only good content. The concepts, craft and care put into the work will yield comparative returns. Anyone churning out creative to meet a monthly planned commitment is missing the point - we're competing against ALL online content for attention and the returns will be ever-diminishing.

Media guided by measurables

As economic prospects waver, emphasis is shifting into sure-bet media channels where targets can be identified, spend can be manipulated and sales can be tracked on a granular level. Continuing the deepening trend toward online media consumption, mass-customisation of communication will be further enabled through clever programmatic buying and personalised content creation.

Metrics will more than ever guide creative strategy, audience segmentation, content planning and an always-on approach to campaigning, rather than the calendar-based view that we've become accustomed to. We can expect TV and high value traditional production mediums to come under fire as hefty media costs and associated 'wastage' come under the spotlight.

The specialist agency gains momentum

Arguments for the separation and consolidation of specialist talents within ad groups has long raged, yet two trends are becoming clear:

1. As integrated agency margins compress under continued transparency and procurement pressures, the specialist and consulting capabilities within ad groups enable non-traditional services to grow the scope and stickiness of the whole entity. More emphasis will be placed on this source of organic growth in the year to come.
2. Clients are increasingly wanting single-point accountability at scale for the delivery of an integrated marketing service. Even more so, they are expecting agencies to lean-in to their organisations, adopting a coordination role and acting as an accountable extension of their marketing teams. This may see independent specialists brought in under a lead-agency's coordination efforts to fulfill on holistic integrated requirements.

Performance based remuneration

Over the past decade, the prospect of part performance-based remuneration has lingered, but certain intangibles have left marketers and agencies unable to come to widely accepted terms on how such agreements should be structured. Still, in 2017 you can expect continued pressure for agencies to adopt a portion of risk related to their delivery, the golden question being what the corresponding upside might look like for agencies that deliver exceptional results to their clients (and how 'exceptional' will be measured).

Never a dull moment

With all this in mind, we are strapped in for another exciting year, full of change, full of challenges. As an industry in flux, there will be opportunities aplenty and (you can bet your bottom dollar), risks to navigate.

ABOUT TOM FELS

Tom launched Nurun into South Africa in 2016 and is most interested in leveraging technology to drive business results. Intent on creating real value for his clients through innovation, Tom holds relationships with a number of local and international blue chip clients. Prior to this, Tom was instrumental in the growth of Publicis Machine as group managing director...

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