

Embrace these business-changing themes or suffer the consequences...

 By [Mark Tomlinson](#)

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This is a genuinely fascinating time to be alive, and yet it is even more fascinating to be in the business of communications, as we bear witness to and participate in some of the industry's most ground-breaking developments.



Mark Tomlinson, group managing director Hellocomputer.

We have already seen large-scale digital disruption. It wasn't that long ago that on a Friday night, my mom would run me down to the Blockbuster to grab a couple of videos. Now all that remains of Blockbuster is a couple of movie posters held onto by teenage fans, completely obliterated from modern business by the disrupter known as Netflix.

And what has become of mom's taxi? Also toast. Replaced by technology that is just way cooler, way more accessible right now, Uber. And so, the story continues and the casualties continue to stack up, with a clear narrative playing out that says goodbye to those businesses that could not change, adapt or evolve.

The challenge for businesses, in 2019 and beyond...

The challenge for businesses that need to change is, how do they keep their essence, the core of who they are, yet be comfortable evolving everything else? It is also crucial to identify the themes that play a role in your category's disruption.

Well, a couple of points ring true here:

Firstly, there is little point re-inventing who you are if there is no substance left, so try and evolve whilst staying true to the original founding principles. Obviously if that is under threat from disruption, then you have little choice but to change that story as well. The broad themes that will play a role in your disruption are: **Automation, Artificial intelligence, Data and Cloud.**

Automation: How can we use automation to give our businesses scale, to operate like we have large teams, yet work smart and light? Don't expect automation to solve your brainstorming or thinktanks, but what you can expect is that it takes care of more menial tasks that are repetitive and simplistic in execution.

Ask yourself the question, "*where in my business is my thought capital best deployed, and what are the tasks that a machine could help me execute?*" There are many software solutions emerging in various industries that can help you take this further.

AI: this is a very complex area for business, and will need much investment and time to effectively become a more human interface, however there are already simpler versions of AI playing a role in assisting businesses service or engage customers.

From automated voice prompts, to social media bots, these AI assistants are accessible 24/7, often responding in a fraction of the time that the traditional social media or service staff would respond. While they also remove inaccuracies, typos and the potential for a spat to develop, they also reduce the human emotion, and the value of personal touch. In time they will evolve like Google's assistant, to be almost imperceptibly artificial.

Data: You don't need to create a big data solution to take advantage of what data can offer immediately, nor do you need to become a data scientist overnight. Importantly, ask yourself what data you have access to and of that, what data that can improve the customer experience.

It can be very simple things, even using the data from your current web or social analytics to better understand your different audiences, the CTR from your mailers, against your current customer database, the likelihood that they are more receptive to any future specials, etc.

But when you are ready for the big data guns, get out there and try the different offerings as they are vast, and often nuanced for different businesses.

The last theme is a theme of **constant change**, being comfortable with this constant change, embracing the disruption and asking yourself each time, "what can my business learn from this shift?"

ABOUT MARK TOMLINSON

Mark started his digital career in 1997, navigating the likes of Netscape and Mosaic. Part of a small group of digital entrepreneurs in South Africa, he went on to start his first agency in 1999. Six years later, he co-founded Hellocomputer, an agency he built to be "more human", putting people at the very center of everything they do...

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