data axle

2020

Digital Marketing Trends

Our experts share the most notable innovations

Introduction

What are the biggest digital marketing trends that will define savvy brands' growth strategies in 2020? For starters, our experts agree that we'll see an increase in the number of ways marketers can connect with their audiences. This means more channels, more uses for marketing technology, more opportunities for audience segmentation and personalization, more custom content, and so on. To help marketers set goals and plan for 2020, we spoke with seven experts at Data Axle to get their take on some of the most burning questions and trends brands will be asking about in 2020.

Meet our experts.

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Number of marketing channels continues

Technology innovations in digital marketing continue to accelerate, leaving marketers with more channels than ever to incorporate into their strategy. In fact, a recent infographic identified 51 distinct ways brands can use to connect with consumers both online and offline.[1] Here's how marketers can adapt to new and emerging marketing channels:

Prioritize the user experience

Heather B.

There is no shortage of ways for marketers to promote their brands' products or services, but consumers still expect a seamless experience across any and all channels brands have a presence in, whether it's their physical location or their Instagram page. This is where marketing technology comes in – solutions can be set to "talk to each other" to build the foundation of an organization's marketing engine. Brands can start by connecting customers' offline and online data, automating social media campaigns, and customizing messaging to reflect real-time store information and inventory.

Nearly 1/2 of consumers said they would be willing to pay more for a shopping experience that exceeded their expectations, but frustrated consumers were twice as likely to say they would pay more for an exceptional experience.

2019 Accenture Consumer Study

47%
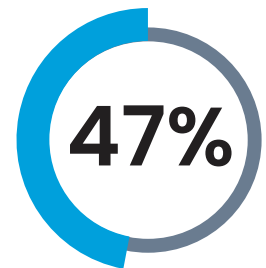
Explore shoppable social posts

Nessa

Non-standard purchasing channels, like the in-app purchasing feature by Instagram which allows users to purchase items without leaving the app, will help ease the burden for brands. Marketers should capitalize on this opportunity while remembering that proper implementation is important. In the case of Instagram, most users are accessing the app on their smartphones so keeping the process short and simple is key - avoid taking them off platform, utilize auto-fill enabled payment options (Paypal, Google Pay etc.), and offer to save their profile for a quicker checkout in the future.

Make use of voice-activated devices

Consumers are looking for fast, easy, and meaningful interactions which explains the rise of voice-activated devices as a communication channel. Voice-activated devices provide a quick and informal setting for brands to connect with their target audience. For example, Domino's AnyWare program, developed to make pizza ordering easy and fast, boasts 11 different ways customers can place an order, including voice-activated commands sent to Amazon's Alexa and Google Home.[2]

Erica

Domino's AnyWare program

Another example comes from a leading bank in the UK, NatWest. The bank started a pilot program that allows customers to check balances and recent spending through their Google Home device - a great way to use conversational marketing to provide convenient customer experiences.[3]

Heather W.

Marketers should be careful with voice marketing as the variety of accents in American English along with local colloquialisms and speech patterns can lead to inaccurate search results. Since home devices can generally be used freely by anyone in the vicinity, children, pets, and house guests are added to the search mix. With an inaccurate voice detection, searches can turn up some NSFW results and frustrate users. Last year's viral sensation, when Alexa refused to play "baby shark" for a toddler, is a perfect example of how lack of context and unknown speech pattern can negatively affect a device's voice detection performance.[4]

Leverage conversational marketing for branding and SEO strategy

Heather B.

A report from ComScore says that by 2020, 50% of all searchers will be made using voice; meaning people are going to be talking more and typing less as technology evolves.[5] Specifically, brands that use SEO as part of their marketing program will need to make updates in order to keep their existing placements on search results pages from major providers like Google and Bing. A few web updates to consider include optimizing online content for Google's featured snippets, adding local business schema for easier search engine detection, and updating any third-party listings or publications to reflect the changes done on your website.

More than

40%
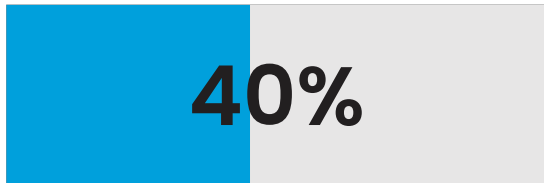
of all voice-search answers were pulled from featured snippets.

Brafton, 8 voice search statistics in 2019 and why they matter

3/4

of smart speaker owners perform searches for local businesses on a weekly basis.

53%
say they perform these searches every day.

Search Engine Land, It's time for local business to take voice search seriously

Rohit

Conversational marketing now impacts a range of marketing functions - including the use of chatbots and search algorithms that prioritize keywords phrased as questions, and voice recognition becoming a standard in most (if not all) smart home devices. For those looking to incorporate conversational or voice marketing into their strategy, the path to success starts with laying the basic ground work. Keep it simple and ensure that you have a solid content plan and access to technology that will fulfill the core requirements. For example, brands with a more global presence should prioritize a solution that can cater to more diverse accents and local nuances over a solution than can answer a higher number of questions.

For marketers who have yet to optimize for questions-based queries, analyzing a 30-to 90-day search history of terms that led users to your website (sourced from search and media accounts like Google AdWords and Amazon Media) is a great starting point to see what your audiences are asking. Not only will you find opportunities to improve your SEO strategy to include more conversational searches, but you will also be able to use these findings to improve the relevance of your website's FAQs and customer support pages.

Nessa

8 in 10

consumers are willing to use messaging apps to get customer service
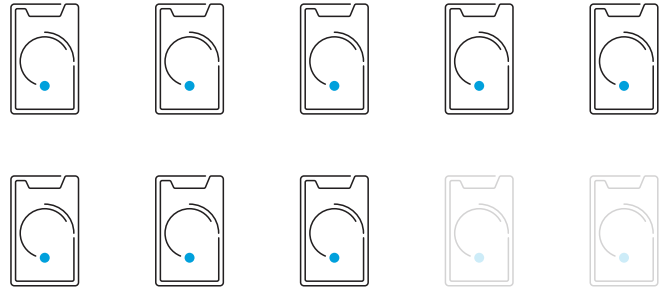
Business 2 Community, Does Your 2020 Marketing Strategy Include Conversational Marketing?

Seek input from your partners

In addition to utilizing the technologies themselves, marketers should always aim to make the most of their existing marketing technology, tools, and resources. Staying up-to-date with the latest innovations and demanding that solution partners adapt accordingly will help marketers avoid falling out-of-touch with their target audience.

Heather B.

Having a solutions partner that understands your marketing strategy and the underlying factors that drive your decisions will go a long way in making integration with emerging channels feel seamless to your audience. Channels come and go – but with the support of a marketing partner over a vendor (that only executes based on given direction), brands will be better equipped to first assess if the latest 'it' channel fits with their overall strategy and if so, be able to adapt quickly and effortlessly.

Heather W.

Audiences are increasingly vocal with their values and preferences

Technology adoption in U.S. households

2005	2019
5%	**79%**
of adults in the U.S. used social media	of adults in the U.S. used social media

https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media

Recent data research from Oxford found that in 2005, 5% of US adults claimed to use social media. In 2019, that number was 79%. Marketers now have more ways than ever to track audience values and preferences. Here's how brands are making the most of this trend:

Think beyond standard data collection methods

Erica

In addition to sharing product likes and dislikes on multiple channels, consumers are getting more comfortable, more frequent, and more critical in expressing how they feel about brands in those same channels. Brands should take advantage of this information and complement more common customer data points (i.e. email preferences, web activity, purchase history). For example, social listening tools can be used to track real-time brand mentions and keep tabs on conversations about your brand (and your competitors). Valuable data can also be collected from a number of additional sources – chatbot interactions, live chats with support, Facebook messaging, and more – and be used to improve future interactions. This will give marketers more comprehensive insight into their audience and go a long way in providing a more holistic brand experience to consumers.

Heather B.

A powerful way to appeal to your target audience is to tap into their emotions – what they are passionate about, who they follow online, etc. Having a deeper connection with your prospects and customers is an indication that you not only understand the needs of your target audience, but also the 'why' behind the need. This differentiates your brand and lowers the barrier to purchasing for consumers who share the same values and pick you over the competition. An increasingly popular way to create that connection is to partner with influencers that speak to your target audience. An effective collaboration can quickly put your brand on the map.

Heather W.

To get a full understanding of consumers, marketers should have a variety of data from 1st, 2nd and 3rd party sources, be able to make sense of it, and ultimately use it to execute programs based on consumer preferences and values. There are different ways to get there - utilizing a CDP (customer data platform), enlisting the help of data scientists, partnering with a full-service agency, and more. But it's still up to the marketer to prioritize what's most important to them before deciding on a suitable route.

More relevant data = more fuel to acquire new customers

The global big data market (based on revenue) is projected to grow to $103 billion by 2027, more than double its expected market size in 2018.[6] Consumers are becoming more selective with the messages they engage with and with the products they buy. In response, here's how marketers are leveraging data to ensure their messages are relevant, personalized, and interesting to customers:

Step 1: Work with what you already have

Nessa

Data can seem infinite so it's important to identify what data points will make a true impact on your marketing goals. Whether you aim to build brand awareness, acquire customers, or increase your existing customers' share of wallet, you should always start with the data that's already at your fingertips to create a high-converting audience for each campaign. For example, if the goal is to acquire new customers, using referral tactics can be very effective for marketers who are able to identify active social media users within their customer base. Start with creating a segment of the group and then design a targeted promotion that offers store credit as an incentive for users who share a branded offer or product review with their social networks.

Erica

Marketers looking to convert brand followers into buyers, regardless of channel should begin by identifying their campaign's objective and defining the right audience to help them achieve it. For newer channels like social media, only relevant and timely messages can drive engagement. Instagram for instance, has a Custom Audiences feature that brands can use to target a specific segment (via email address or phone number). They can then use that audience profile to create a narrative uniquely relevant to that group, instead of showing a standard generic ad.
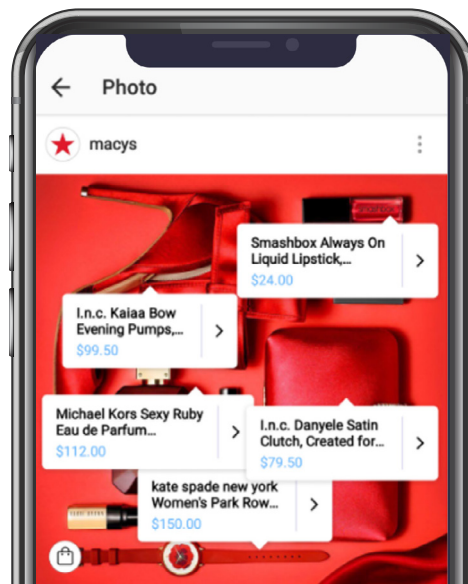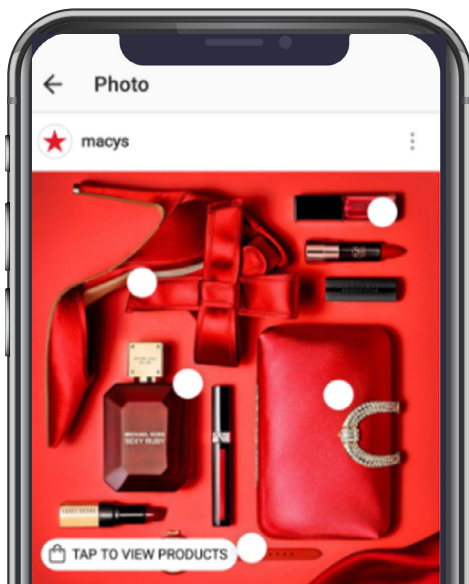
Macy's recent Go Red for Women campaign for heart disease awareness is a great example of mixing campaign imagery (red theme) with a consumer's product(s) of choice. A simple yet enticing image (or video) in an attractive setting can go a long way in helping consumers associate that product with a positive experience.

With the prevalence of podcasts, YouTube videos, and Instagram stories as a means to broadcast and consume content, brands are starting to follow suit, branch out and step outside of their comfort zone. With the variety of different channels and ways people can consume content, they are in control more than ever of the way they engage with marketing content.

This expectation of control – from selecting a preferred content delivery method, setting your indoor heating to a specific temperature, to deciding when and where you'd prefer to interact with brands - is redefining the marketing landscape. Not only will we see more and more brands letting consumers customize what types of messages they receive and when, but also sending them dynamically constructed emails, for example, that only render content modules with optimized potential for conversion.

Scott

Don't forget about attribution

Measuring success through past performance data will always be one of the tried and true ways to tell if you are reaching the right audiences. Therefore, attributing conversions to the appropriate marketing campaign is the key to knowing if your marketing spend is generating the desired results. Without that connection your marketing budget, might as well be spent on mass advertising.

Heather W.

Consumers continue to have high expectations

Consumers are placing higher importance on purchasing from brands that share their values. In addition, their expectations for personalized messaging and exceptional experiences remain high. In fact a recent survey found that 44% of consumers are willing to switch to brands with more personalized marketing communications.[7] Here are our experts' tips to meet consumer demands and differentiate your brand in 2020:

Have a strong brand presence and stick to it

Nessa

Organizations should have a clear brand vision and voice that aligns with their target audience. There are always going to be consumers who criticize your brand and the way it relates to their values and expectations and that's OK. Those consumers are not a part of your target audience. Strong brands have a clear voice that is reflected in all they do – from the product development process and how they formulate a marketing strategy to how they define company culture and media relations.

Many brands that attempt to appeal to a broader audience risk watering down their identity which sometimes leads to producing goods or services that don't meet the needs of their core customer. Here are a few brands with concrete brand identity that clearly articulates who they are and what they stand for:
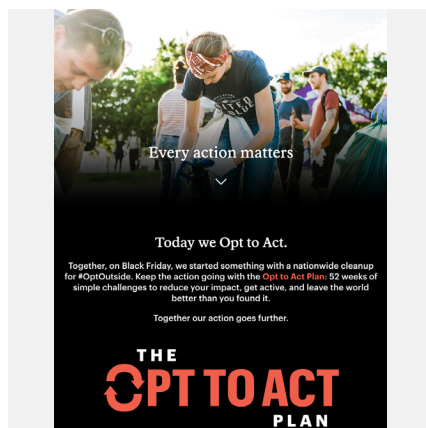

REI

Mission: #OptOutside began as a moment that turned into a movement. Now it's a mission—that's why we're equipping everyone to act. But when it comes to reducing our impact, we know individual choices aren't the whole story. Businesses need to act, too.
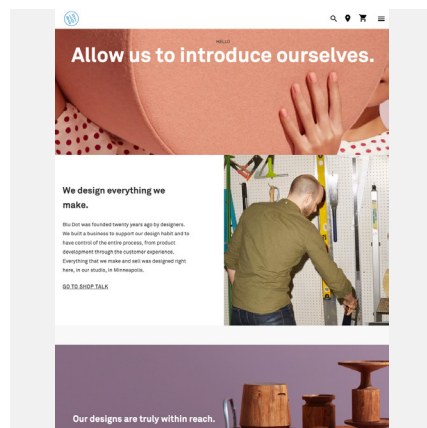
Blu Dot

Mission: Our goal is to bring good design to as many people as possible. That means creating products that are useful, affordable, and desirable. To make that happen, our design process is founded on collaboration.
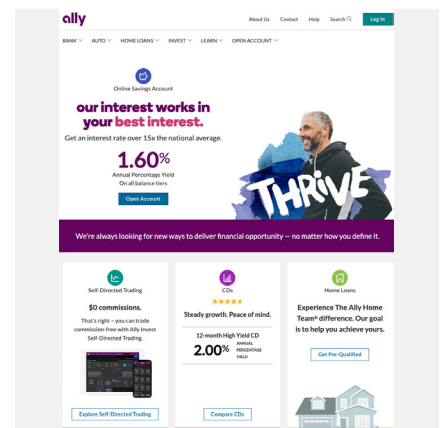
Ally Bank

Mission: Our commitment to our customers has been at the core of who we are for 100 years. We're relentlessly focused on "Doing it Right" and being a trusted financial services provider to our consumer, commercial, and corporate customers.

# Treat the customer experience as a top priority

Kristin

Businesses are trying to provide an automated, timely and seamless customer experience that captivates consumers and promotes repeat interactions. But the availability of hundreds of data points to inform this effort is making it a rather daunting task. The good news is that technology can support the process. Customer journey orchestration, predictive modeling, multi-channel personalization, and real-time interactions are powered by technology and designed to help marketers continually improve the quality and depth of customer experience in order to remain relevant to their audience.

Heather W.

Marketers will always stay ahead of the curve if they properly and consistently track their customers' preferences and are able to identify shifts in behaviors both online and offline. This can help determine how high-tech or in-depth they need to be with their CX approach. Take millennials as an example – findings show they are very familiar with the online experience and are more comfortable with new technologies than the next largest population group in the U.S., Baby Boomers.[8] Therefore, if your target audience consists of millennials, a mix of tried and true marketing methods paired with more cutting-edge tactics is a good place to start.

For example, an interactive 3D direct mail piece tailored to a millennial recipient might offer a link to view an augmented reality video of the product in use.[9] This application would be a great avenue for retailers like Warby Parker to provide an immersive virtual reality experience when consumers are trying on a new fashion accessory (shown below), or perhaps as a way for purveyors of big-ticket items to build anticipation for product launches like Ford's effort to let fans virtually configure the new all-electric Ford Mustang Mach-E[10] in advance of its official release later in 2020.
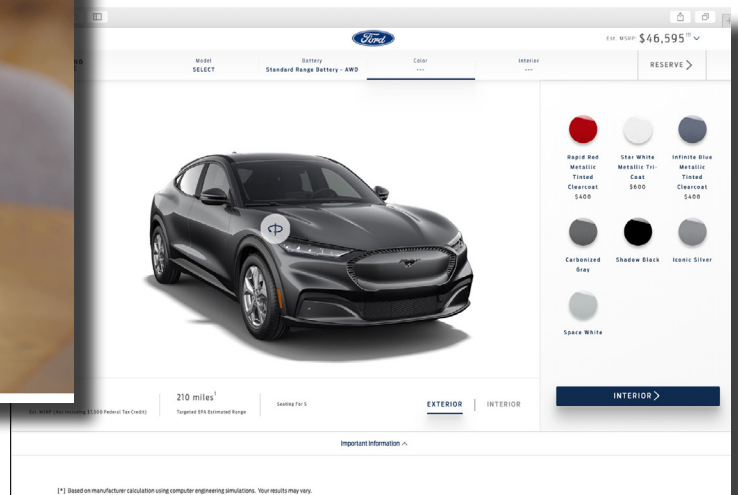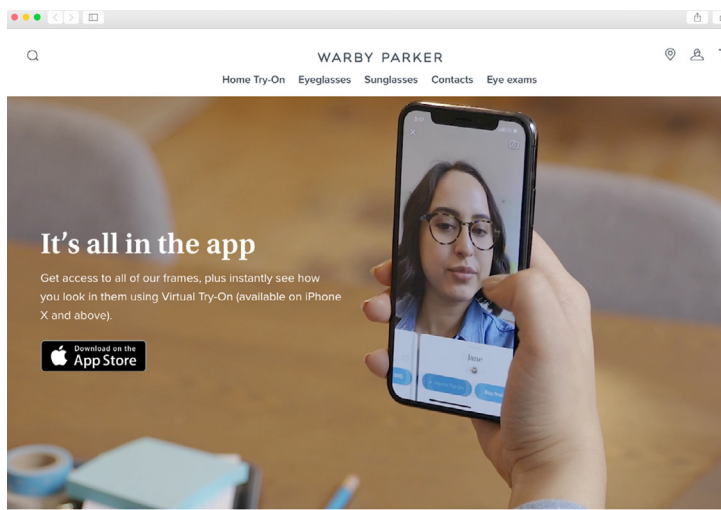
Scott

I recently heard that customers are more likely to rate a business highly if they had something go wrong with the product or service purchased but experienced great customer service while getting the issue addressed. While I wouldn't necessarily recommend that as a strategy (even if it may work), it does highlight the important role customer experience plays in a brand's success and reputation.
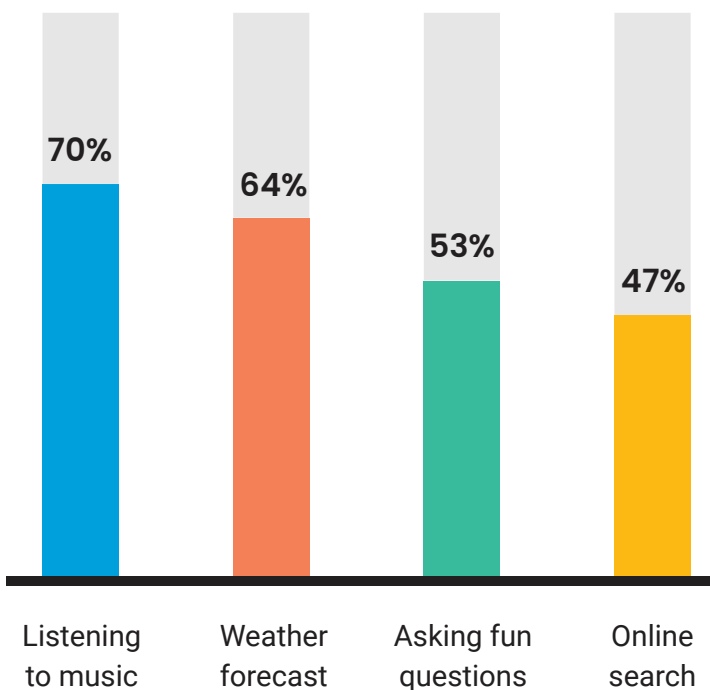
One way customers can shape their experience is through the use of opt-out options and preference centers. Even the most popular brands will have people who want to opt-out of their marketing communications, and this is an often overlooked or downplayed part of the customer experience. Preferences center options should be designed for clarity and should emphasize the point that customers are in control; whatever selection is made, it should be painless and take effect quickly.
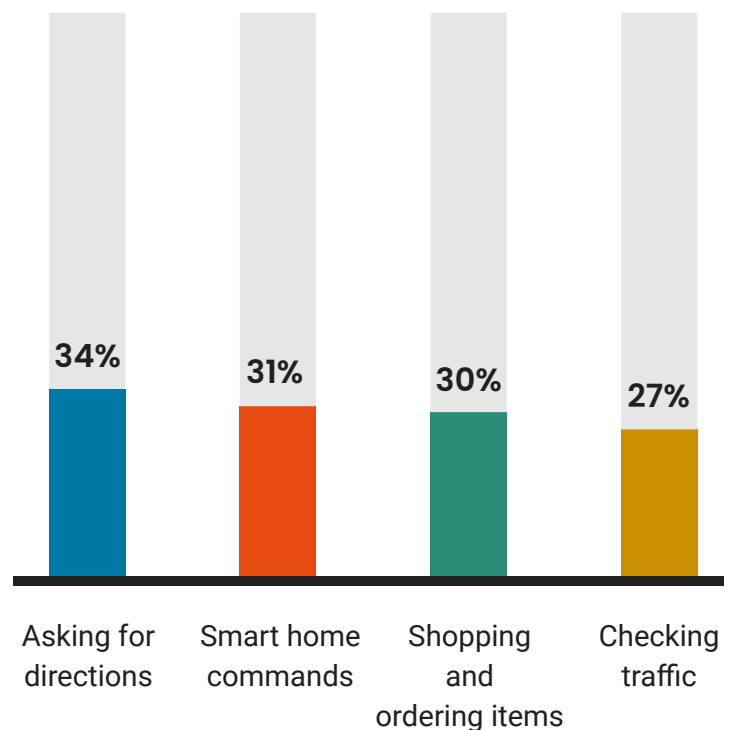
Erica

The dependence on smart technology to help make lives a little easier is growing, and so is the usage of previously mentioned voice activated devices like Amazon Alexa and Google Home. However, although nearly 60% of users have used them to shop, 45% feel they aren't getting the most from these devices, which means there is still much room for improvement.[11]

Top 4 most popular uses of smart speakers

70%	64%	53%	47%
Listening to music	Weather forecast	Asking fun questions	Online search

Adobe Analytics via CNBC

Emerging uses of smart speakers

34%	31%	30%	27%
Asking for directions	Smart home commands	Shopping and ordering items	Checking traffic

Higher demand for consumer privacy (and more regulations)

A recent Data Axle survey of 1,000 consumers found that **88%** were concerned about the security of their online data.

Consumers demand more privacy and transparency, and government regulations are passed to address this demand. Here is how brands can address the need for data privacy and security and use it to build trust:

Make sure you are compliant

Nessa

The biggest impact I've seen from new privacy laws is our clients' consistent focus on what they need to do in order to be compliant, especially with CCPA. They want to understand how to best execute upon a consumer's request 'to be forgotten' or opt out of cookies/pixels that track web sessions, which are the primary ways consumer data is digitally collected. As a result, the biggest change is most likely going to be an increase in the number of US brands that implement cookie options on their website (a common practice in the EU today). In addition, more marketers will likely leverage tag management solutions like Google Tag Manager or Adobe Launch (formerly DTM) for opt-in or opt-out notifications on their website, giving consumers better visibility and control over how their data is collected online.

Rohit

The consumer privacy dialogue is here to stay and will be primarily driven by the rapid growth of technology and automation in a world where consumers have a limited understanding of the what, why, and how of common data collection practices. Never before has there been such a significant commercial value derived from consumer preference and behavioral data. While the U.S. is not likely to implement as restrictive data policies as the EU in the immediate future, marketers should keep in mind that upcoming data regulations like CCPA will very likely be more robust and comprehensive than they've ever been.

Heather W.

Along with state-based privacy laws, be on the lookout for initiatives to create a mandatory data seller and buyer registry or licensing requirements for businesses to use customer data (similar to the licensing requirements for real-estate brokers). For example, Vermont passed a data broker law in early 2019 which requires businesses collecting and selling data about Vermont residents to register with the state.[13] Due to the growing abundance of new data forms and sources available to marketers, having a comprehensive data auditing process (audit trail) will be key to maintaining, safeguarding, and staying compliant with future laws about personal information.

55% of U.S. consumers say companies should have the primary responsibility for the security of their customers' online and mobile accounts.

While **44%** believe account owners should be responsible.

Just **1%** think the government should bear the onus.

- Companies
- Account owners
- Government
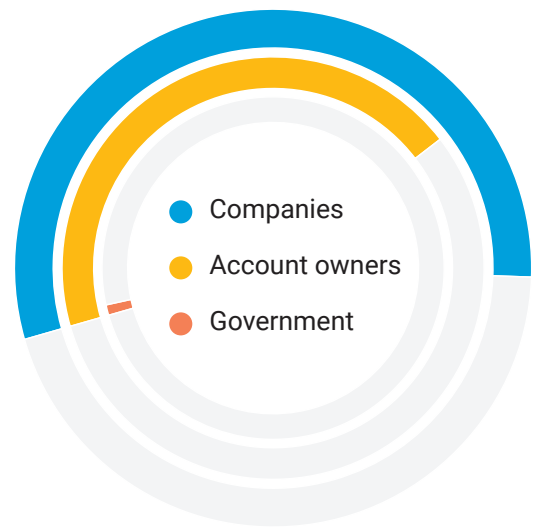
BroadbandNow, 26 Crucial Data Privacy Statistics

Be proactive

Rohit

The passing of consumer protection policies tends to lag behind the pace of technological advancements. So, to minimize risk – both with consumers and regulators – marketers should be proactive when it comes to protecting consumer privacy. Get involved in data security forums, alliances, and awareness efforts, stay current with regulatory developments around data privacy, and always be transparent with your customers.

Erica

Repeated privacy mishaps and security breaches have made consumers realize that their data is not as safe as they think, yet they still expect a personalized experience. Marketers will need to evolve personalization strategies and emphasize building trust in order to maintain customer relationships. Marketers should consider providing more privacy options that foster trust as well as messaging that reassures consumers that their data will be ethically used and protected.

Heather W.

Marketers are going to have to treat data privacy like driving their grandma on an icy road going downhill through an intersection (with Grandma holding her freshly made casserole on her lap). In other words – be careful with data privacy implementation or risk a potentially disastrous outcome. Brands should have a clearly defined and transparent system of data governance as part of their business-as-usual policies and avoid using confusing privacy and opt-out language.

Conclusion

Marketing continues to change at lightning speed, and brands must adapt and evolve accordingly to stay relevant and attractive to consumers. Whether it's to reflect shifting consumer behaviors or to integrate a new technology, having a learning mindset will help keep your marketing team motivated to take on new challenges, incorporate some of the trends and strategies outlined in this whitepaper and achieve better results.
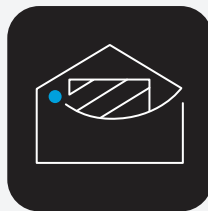
Sources

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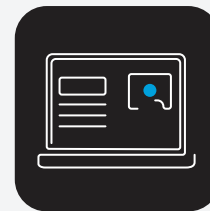
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