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Six Trends for Marine Marketers in 2019

Here is where you should be looking for opportunities

WANDA KENTON SMITH · DEC 19, 2018

While CX was ranked as the No. 1 marketing priority among top marketers in 2018, it still needs to gain traction and greater execution in the marine marketplace.

Anyone involved in marketing today understands that the changes to our craft are both exponential and exceptional. We're inundated daily with revolutionary technologies and app launches, platform breakthroughs and changes, not to mention the latest findings about new-customer preferences. Staying up with these fast-evolving trends requires constant study and monitoring.

As part of this year's crystal-ball edition, I've reviewed the hottest marketing trends for 2019. Here's the shortlist based on my experience in the marine community. The goal is to help you turn that new year's resolution about updating your marketing practices into reality.

1. CX Should Be Your Marketing RX

My September 2018 column was devoted to this topic. I also moderated a panel of experts at FLIBS for Marine Marketers of America on the same subject. While CX, or customer experience, was ranked as the No. 1 marketing priority by top marketers in 2018, it still needs to gain traction and much better execution in the marine marketplace.

If your business does not have a CX strategy, you are missing the boat. CX is not a one-time service interaction.

Rather, it embodies the lifecycle between a customer and a business through all phases of the relationship, from initial awareness to discovery, from nurturing to purchase, followed by post-service activity and, hopefully, advocacy.

My September column on TradeOnlyToday.com takes a deeper dive into this subject. The MMA/FLIBS panel Powerpoint also features best CX practices by four top marine marketers:

<https://marinemarketersofamericaorg.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/flibs-cx-powerpoint-presentation-2018-final.pdf>

2. Video Remains the Rage

Video is expected to account for 80 percent of all internet traffic this year.

You need to answer these questions:

- Are you investing a significant chunk of your marketing budget in video?
- Are you leveraging video to promote and engage with customers and prospects via all marketing channels?

- Are you producing short, shareable tips featuring company experts, airing live streams for your events, and producing brief, behind-the-scene stories?
- Have you converted your written FAQs with your prospects' most-often-asked questions into a video series?

Your marketing team should become proficient in video, not only on the technical side, but also in understanding how to best target distribution.

If you desire a strong ROI on your marketing dollars, my recommendation is to invest in a full-time, experienced video producer/storyteller. As Marcus Sheridan, author of *They Ask, You Answer*, says in his best-selling marketing book, a qualified videographer will pay for themselves many times over.

Instagram is enjoying unprecedented growth: in June 2018, Instagram recorded one billion monthly users with four billion posted likes per day.

IGTV, a new Instagram offering, is expected to propel this growth even higher. An exclusive social TV network designed for mobile usage, IGTV features vertical-format video playback and accommodates long-form video of up to an hour.

This new showcase is expected to attract brands and viewers alike. Some marketing wizards expect IGTV to rival YouTube in the next three to five years.

3. Content Marketing and User-Generated Content Counts

Having a comprehensive content marketing strategy and writer/producer is another recommendation. Your business should regularly publish content that can be repurposed across multiple marketing and social platforms. Your marketing team should also strategically be connecting with customers and actively soliciting user-generated content that can be shared.

To build trust with your audience, make sure to provide the right type of authentic content that educates and inspires. User-generated content, including stories, testimonials, images and videos, are perceived as highly relevant and believable among prospects. They typically feature non-paid customer endorsements that yield instant credibility.

Internal content marketing and user-generated deliverables serve as major contributors to brand building and improved SEO.

4. A-Teams today deliver AI

AI, among the fastest-growing trends in marketing, refers to artificial intelligence. Tech kingpin Hootsuite projects that by 2020, 85 percent of all digital customer service interactions will be facilitated by AI bots. Got your attention?

To enhance the customer experience, marketers should consider integrating chatbots on their websites. These simulated and branded online "personalities" can improve the customer experience by providing immediate, data-driven responses to common customer questions, while facilitating lead development. Chatbots allow the customer to enjoy a personalized experience and timely response, exactly when they want it.

MarineMax campaign and web manager Amanda Ward recently shared how AI is an integral part of the company's web and CX strategy. Perusing the MarineMax site, I encountered Brooke, the chatbot "site operator," who offered live assistance. Brooke was professional and personable. She addressed my boat trade, offered a free appraisal and invited me to schedule a VIP sales appointment.

On another visit, I encountered Elizabeth, who provided the same degree of enthusiastic service. If you want to learn how chatbots could be used in your business, go to boatchat.com.

Beyond chatbots, marketers will soon be able to leverage AI to develop demographic-profile targeting; assist with automated media buys; and pinpoint specific sales funnel timetables and messages.

5. Game-changers: Voice and visual search assistants

During the Christmas shopping season, a flurry of ads promoted personal assistant devices such as Alexa and Siri. While marketers have worked hard to harness text-search strategies, the fast growth of personal-assistant devices now requires that we enlarge the scope to include voice search and integration.

Pick a subject, conduct a traditional Google search and discover pages of results. Ask Alexa to search a topic and she typically provides an answer. As personal assistants continue to gain momentum, marketers must create a more conversational approach to providing content through voice applications, along with new strategies to push their marketing messages through her lips.

Comscore projects that by 2020, half of all searches conducted will be voice-based. This trend requires that we further adjust and customize our SEO initiatives to embrace emerging voice search strategies and voice recognition technologies.

On the visual search front, there is technology under way that will allow smart phone users to snap a pic and retrieve data about the photo subject, or something visually similar. It is coming soon and expected to totally disrupt the retail industry.

6. Getting Real? AR & VR.

Augmented and Virtual Reality trends have been planted for some time, and both are trending in popularity.

According to Forbes, "Augmented reality is quickly becoming one of the hottest trends in the marketing and advertising industries, recognized as an innovative and creative way of connecting with customers and increasing engagement."

The Forbes writer notes the AR market will continue to grow, reaching \$117.4 billion by 2022.

An early commercial application of AR technology was the "first-down" yellow line that appeared live on the field of play during football broadcasts.

Some modern applications include emerging 3-D advertising, the popular 'Pokemon Go' phenomenon and Snapchat's fun facial filters, among others.

We've all likely experienced virtual reality in a simulated world. Gamers and military training exercises are all over it. I own a Peloton spin bike and travel virtually all over the globe from the comfort of my home.

Savvy marketers are tapping this VR technology to create and develop exciting, immersive experiences for prospective customers.

Interestingly, I wrote a column many years ago about the future of marine marketing. I imagined slipping on head gear and being transported to a dream boat and cruising some spectacular port of call, feeling the sun on my face and wind in my hair. It seems like my former space-age, futuristic vision has finally become a virtual reality that is clearly within our grasp. MarineMax even held the industry's first virtual yacht expo in December.

A final thought

As part of your new year's marketing resolution, don't fret about your limited marketing budget or staff, or your ability to keep up with the times. Change is daunting.

You can't afford to stay idle and wind up swamped by a savvy competitor.

I recommend you spend time with your team, review the trends, investigate low-cost educational opportunities, collaborate on options, and then determine how you can move the throttle forward.

May this be your best and most successful year ever.

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