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5 Marketing Predictions for the Next 5 Years

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Introduction

Predictions used to be a corny ploy to get people to buy a tabloid. They were based on dreams and the alignment of the stars, if they were based on anything tangible at all.

Today we've developed machines that learn how to accurately predict what customers really want, based on real data for each individual. Over the next five years, we will see the digital landscape change even more, and only through looking ahead can we make sure we're not left behind.

Right now, trends are developing — consumers are choosing the channels where they want to engage with brands. Just 10 years ago, the mobile phone emerged as a completely new channel, and today mobile development continues to give consumers more of what they're looking for.

This rapid technology growth impacts marketers in a profound way. We know that human-driven personalization does *not* scale. Just as machine learning has made it easier for marketers to deal with mountains of data, there are technologies being developed and leveraged right now that will further help marketers and customers engage in a way that they both benefit from.

Once again, it's time to look ahead to identify the trends and tech that are most likely to survive the hype cycle and become the must-haves of the near future. In this whitepaper, we'll explore five predictions we believe marketers should prepare for in the next five years.
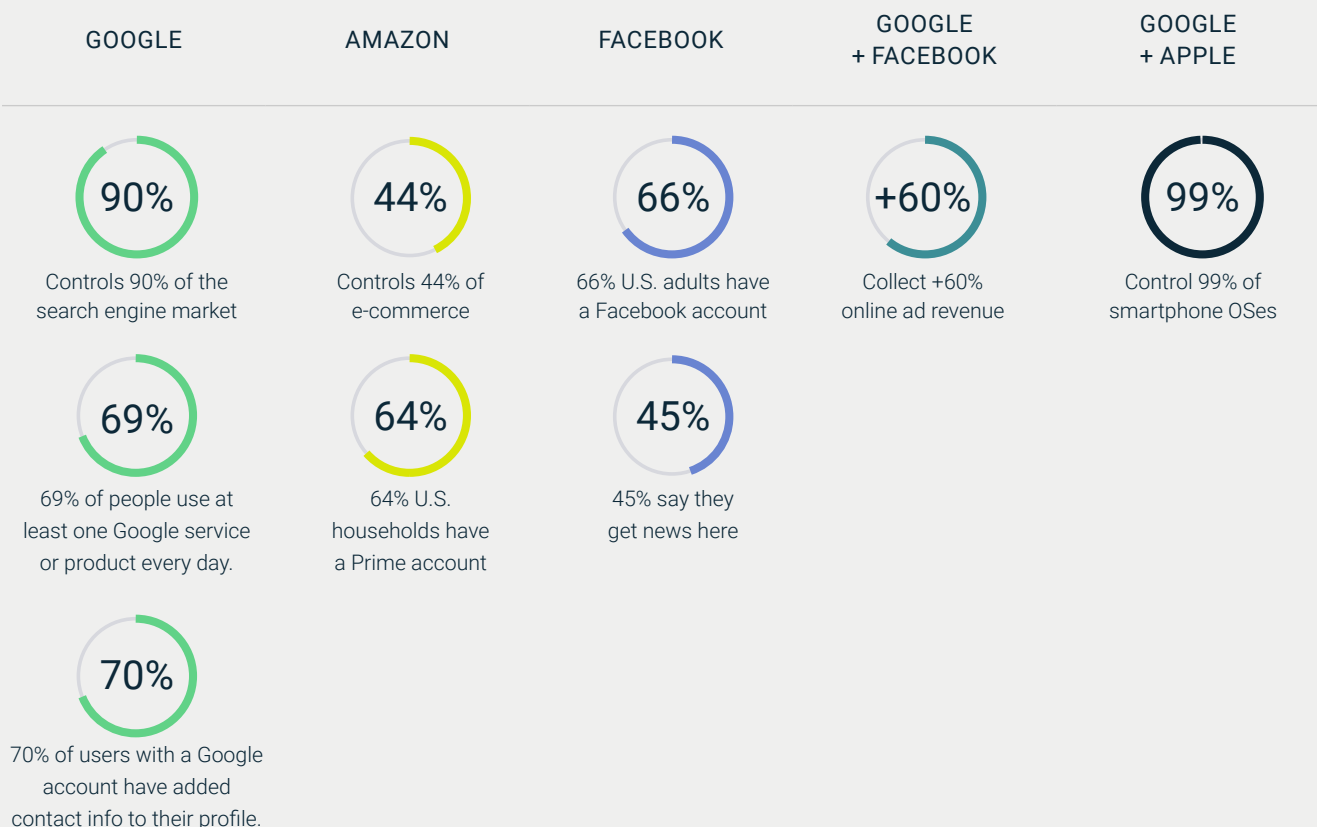
Blockchain will become a greater core component of marketing.

Identifying customers digitally is one of the most important and most difficult things a brand must do. For a long time, we used cookies to track web behavior, but since they expire and only measure a visit in the moment, cookies were never a long-term solution. An email address is a better method (as is cross-device identification, covered in Prediction #3), but best of all will be an encrypted blockchain ledger, a very unique way to identify an individual customer.

Beyond the best-known cryptocurrency use cases, blockchain is finding its way into financial institutions and the medical industry, where electronic health records provide a sample of how such an identification system can work. Innovation will continue over the next five years, and companies will start making blockchain IDs available to everyone, finally giving consumers real control over their data and who they share it with.

The Big Four Controls 70%-90% of All Digital Consumption

GOOGLE	AMAZON	FACEBOOK	GOOGLE + FACEBOOK	GOOGLE + APPLE
90%	**44%**	**66%**	**+60%**	**99%**
Controls 90% of the search engine market	Controls 44% of e-commerce	66% U.S. adults have a Facebook account	Collect +60% online ad revenue	Control 99% of smartphone OSes
69%	**64%**	**45%**		
69% of people use at least one Google service or product every day.	64% U.S. households have a Prime account	45% say they get news here		
70%				
70% of users with a Google account have added contact info to their profile.				

Blockchain will emerge as an enabling consumer-first technology that puts consumers in control of their data.

Today 70%-90% of digital consumption is controlled by Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Apple, and that's not good for humanity, where these four giants essentially control our digital IDs in a centralized fashion. The future lies in decentralized computing while still making consolidation of user data possible. Consumer-controlled data is slowly gaining traction. Take Europe's GDPR for example, where brands must secure double opt-ins from customers who then allow brands to market to them. Blockchain, as a decentralized platform, will permit customers to browse and buy however they like independent of the big media black boxes.

Companies will build a blockchain product that consumers will pay for to establish their own blockchain identity.

Companies will also emerge that provide blockchain encryption services to consumers. A brand would have to match a portion of the individual customer's blockchain with some other piece of identification to begin targeting that person — and only with the customer's permission. In addition to acquiring and investing in digital ledger startups, Google has been testing blockchain in their cloud since 2016. More businesses will follow suit when blockchain becomes cheaper than cloud storage.

There will be a lot for both sides to gain: better personalization for customers since their blockchain identifier is basically their own personal AI engine, gathering personal data and behavior. For marketers, blockchain will become one extremely accurate way to achieve one-to-one personalization.

Brands don't have to build anything, but they need to be ready for consumer blockchains.

Marketers won't need to create a brand-specific technology to accommodate customer blockchains; instead, we will have to adapt to whatever technology wins out and standardizes blockchain — similar to the recent HD DVD vs. Blu-Ray war. When that happens, brands must ask themselves the critical question: "How will I use blockchain to learn about my customers?"

What blockchain means for marketers

When this technology becomes mainstream, customers are not the only ones who will benefit from it. Marketers will reap rewards from the tech as well.

- Database risk reduction: A decentralized database makes it difficult for your entire system to go down.

- Brand independence: Rather than heavily relying on Google the way you have up to now, blockchain will provide brands with more control over their first-party data.

- Harder to hack: With cloud storage, when a hacker makes a change to customer data, that change will get made in every copy of the data from then on. Blockchain relies on a node network where everyone else touching the data will know when a hacker tries to edit any part of the ledger.

- Cost savings: Blockchain eliminates the need for many third parties, since brands will be managing the blockchain ledgers themselves.

- Secure transaction history: Decentralized blockchains rely on multiple users in the node to verify the data independently of the creator. Once a transaction is verified, it can never be changed again where it is in the chain, but you can update the transaction as a later piece of the ledger. This kind of permanence coupled with blockchain's multi-user verification will preserve a clean purchase history.

Display advertising, as we know it, will finally die.

The closer we've gotten to true one-to-one personalization, the less relevant display ads have become. Over time, they have increasingly interrupted the customer experience and led to a proliferation of ad-blocker software, not to mention a diminishing rate of return for advertisers. Today, as first-party data becomes even more valuable, brands will have to wean themselves off display ads and leverage their own data to serve up the most relevant content for customers.

"In the past few years, 11% of web users and 26% of desktop users have been using ad-blocking programs, and this number continues to grow, proving that we can no longer send one-to-many messages. As ad-blocking tech has continued to improve, brands are seeing decreasing success with display ads."
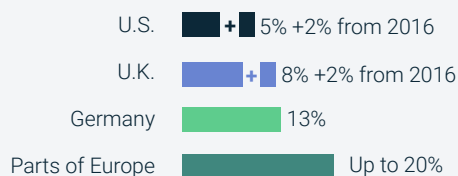
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Ad blocking is becoming more prevalent.

In the past few years, 11% of web users and 26% of desktop users have been using ad-blocking programs, and this number continues to grow, proving that we can no longer send one-to-many messages. They just aren't that effective anymore. As ad-blocking tech has continued to improve — and as consumer distaste for interruptive banner ads has grown — brands are seeing decreasing success with display ads. We have to rethink how each customer wants us to engage with her, and display ads go against the desire for personalization shaping the customer's expectation.

Who's Blocking on Mobile?

U.S.	5% +2% from 2016
U.K.	8% +2% from 2016
Germany	13%
Parts of Europe	Up to 20%

Interruptive advertising doesn't bring in new customers.

In 2013, the average web user saw 2,000 banner ads a month and clicked 0.1% of them. By 2016, 0.4% of users clicked a banner ad, and that's as good as it got. If we've learned nothing else from the past couple years, we know that the online customer experience, whether it's on a desktop or a smartphone, continues to become more tailor-made for each individual customer, and no one wants a banner ad or a pop-up message to interfere with that CX. Marketers have to rethink ads they're running on Twitter or YouTube and rely on their own first-party data to drive acquisition.

What the death of display ads means for marketers

First-party data is also good for retention, because ideally every piece of data you collect from customers should go back into optimizing the relationship. However, as customers demand a personalized experience, marketers need to do more than secure permission to use customer data and be respectful enough to never hit a customer with an irrelevant and interruptive display ad. We have to think about better ways to respect our customers' trust in us and leverage the value of first-party data to give them the experiences and conversations they want most.

* It's worth mentioning that blockchain technology (see Prediction #1) could actually be a solution to display ads. Not only will marketers be able to track ad performance much better than our current system allows, but the brands who are paying the most attention will have the chance to greatly improve the messages they send through various channels.

Cross-device identification
will become a necessary part
of omnichannel marketing.

It's 2019 — and while a lot has changed, consumers are still demanding personalized omnichannel experiences, and marketers are still scrambling to make sense of the incessant dune of data piling up.

But in the years to come, omnichannel marketing will get a facelift and integrate more closely with existing IoT. Customers also will have another piece of identification — along with blockchain ledgers covered in Prediction #1 — to ensure they get what they want from their favorite brands. Cross-device identification (XDID) will become the driving force behind identifying customers and delivering consistent experiences across all channels. Marketing teams will use XDID to create more relevant, personalized, and measurable results for customers.

"XDID will not be the answer to all your personalization woes. Cross-channel identification gives marketers the ability to start better understanding the person behind the data. In a sense, XDID will be the next step in omnichannel marketing and will allow you to paint a broader, more specific picture of the person using multiple devices to interact and shop with your brand."

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What is cross-device identification?

With cross-device identification (XDID), marketers can match connected devices (like smartphones, tablets, computers, smart cars, etc.) to individual contacts, giving brands the ability to purposefully target customers across their preferred devices and channels, whether that's on a tablet, through Netflix, in their Tesla, or any other touchpoint a customer uses. The XDID technology usually sits within a data management platform and comes in two forms: deterministic and probabilistic.

Deterministic XDID for accuracy at scale

The deterministic method is the most accurate and scalable for marketers. It involves connecting individuals with their devices based on known digital IDs like email addresses, website logins, and social media accounts.

For example, a company like Amazon may be able to identify and connect individuals to their devices based on the apps you have on your phone or when you log in to their website. If you're looking for a certain product, you may jump on your phone to search for the product on the Amazon app. If you're logged in as a Prime Member, Amazon can automatically connect your smartphone to you as an individual customer.

While the deterministic cross-device identification method is the most powerful for marketers who have direct access to their data, those marketers with siloed data will find it difficult to execute. If you're using several different marketing tools to collect data, it will be hard to leverage this data if it's not in one platform that's accessible across the organization.

Probabilistic XDID for anonymous data

What if an individual isn't using a login of some kind to engage on your platforms? This is where the probabilistic method comes into play. This method takes anonymized data signals and cross-references existing profiles to see if an individual can be identified. By using digital signals like IP addresses, browser type, location, and certain behaviors, probabilistic XDID may be able to identify and match individuals to the devices they are using. For example, if a customer comes to your website on her smartphone and she has an IP address that matches an existing individual, the probabilistic method will use other signals to see if this user is a potential match. The main issue with this method is the lack of certainty. Because it's based on probability, marketers can't be absolutely certain that they've identified the correct user and matched that user with their preferred devices.

What XDID means for marketers

XDID will not be the answer to all your personalization woes, but it does give marketers the ability to start better understanding the person behind the data. In a sense, XDID will be the next step in an omnichannel marketing approach, allowing you to paint a broader, more intricate picture of the consumer using multiple devices to interact and shop with your brand.

While these kinds of identification will help you target both known and unknown contacts, XDID should aid in your marketing strategies but not define them. It gives marketers the ability to better understand each customer on a personal level and market to them in a way that delights them to the point of purchase. Essentially, marketers who adopt XDID will truly be able to market to customers with the right message, at the right time, on the right channel by collecting data that builds the most complete customer profile. It may also present opportunities to engage customers in real time (see Prediction #5).

Voice re-emerges as a distinct channel and internet interface.

Digital assistants (Siri, Google, Alexa, etc.) have been around a few years, and they continue to get better — most notably in terms of learning how their owners speak and even determining the intent behind certain general questions — but it's the potential for voice search that has everyone scrambling, especially in the mobile arena. Imagine being able to shop and purchase just by talking at your phone.

By August 2018, 25% of U.S. voice command users searched with voice for new products. Only 10% used voice to purchase anything. This is mostly due to a lack of faith in digital assistants and smart speakers, after being shown irrelevant recommendations (28%) or not being able to find an item they searched for (24%).

But innovation will take voice beyond these issues, because people who do use digital assistants prefer voice (70% with an average 150 words per minute) over typing (29% with an average of 40 words a minute).

"Voice as a channel will provide new revenue and spark innovative advertising. Over the last decade, we've seen a big shift from desktop to mobile, and while that shift is still happening, voice will move us further away from desktop, not because that's what brands think should happen (currently voice is not bringing in as significant revenue as email or web), but because that's what customers are voting for with their actual voices and the 100 million or so smart speakers in their homes."

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A new channel with broad implications for marketers

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Get to know your customers in a whole new way.

There are significant differences in the way people search on a keyboard and the way they do it when speaking in everyday language, and there are lots of things you can learn about what your customers prefer from the way they talk their way through a search. For example, people are more likely to use one to three words in a keyboard search, but voice allows us to ask more conversational questions and reinvigorate long-tail keywords. As our tech gets more accurate in translation (via Natural Language Processing, which is currently around 95% word recognition, the same threshold of accuracy as human speech), brands will learn new and critical things about the way customers want to interact.

The unified profile as a pillar of the omnichannel approach

With voice having the potential to offer new insights about customer behavior and intent, the data gathered from voice will contribute to the unified customer profile and give brands a more precise picture of each customer so that brands can better serve them. The main danger here is simply that voice data shouldn't end up in a silo where it has no impact on your omnichannel marketing.

What voice means for marketers

There's still time to prepare for the rise of voice or risk being left behind. Here are a few things you should focus on:

- Make sure your website loads fast, that images and files are optimized, and that your mobile web is set up to be responsive.

- Figure out what the most-often-asked questions are in voice search and adjust your SEO strategy.

- Include long-tail keywords in your SEO strategy to match the way customers actually ask questions in voice search.

- With 22% of voice search queries concerning location-based content, focus on local searches by including phrases like "within 5 miles," and "near me" or "around me."

All marketing will be done **in real time.**

At its most basic level, real-time marketing is the ability to provide personalized, relevant offers to customers in the moment across all channels, something that once seemed impossible to ever pull off. However, over the last eight years, the concept of real-time marketing has largely come to fruition through sporadic campaigns like newsjacking, where a brand piggybacks on current news events in an effort to share the spotlight and nab some timely attention for themselves.

One of the most popular examples of this type of real-time marketing came during the 2013 Super Bowl. There was a power outage during the game, blanketing the entire stadium with abrupt darkness. Within minutes, Oreo capitalized creatively on this with its "dunk in the dark" graphic tweet.

In less than one hour, the message had been retweeted more than 10,000 times. And now, even six years later, we're still talking about it. A tweet. Not a complex strategy, but a simple, quick post on Twitter.

Today, real-time marketing has become… well, a lot more real, especially as brands have taken a more customer-centric approach to all marketing operations. Many consumer brands even have people on standby, dedicated to responding "right now." In the near future, meeting customers in the moment will become table stakes for brands, because all marketing will be done in real time

It's all about being in the moment.

It's something many of us dream about: being able to help a customer in her moment of need, and personalization is just entry level for this kind of one-to-one attention. We already know that today's consumers demand more than clever, timely messages delivered en masse. Instead, they want real-time value, and they want it in a way that is personally relevant.

Marketers will have to adapt to this expectation by using apps, mobile-responsive sites, and most of all, voice. Brands may soon be building real-time customer interaction centers where a human marketer leverages the power of the machine to engage customers in the very moment they're making a decision. Really, real-time marketing is the culmination of everything marketers are already doing, so it shouldn't be surprising how fast this might happen.

Technology will be the enabler, not the strategy.

Real-time marketing has its greatest potential for customers searching with voice (as discussed in Prediction #4), but the technology that will make it seamless is still being developed on top of present-day machine learning and automation.

Of course, we are already starting to see this evolution in voice search and virtual assistants where the speed and accuracy of a reply could mean the difference between acquiring a new customer and losing an existing one. Think of it this way: When a consumer asks Alexa to order batteries, what brand will she ultimately receive?

Thanks to today's rapidly evolving technology — and setting brand loyalty aside for the moment — the brand that is optimized for voice search will win that sale without the consumer consciously knowing.

The amazing thing is that we're not far off from this kind of real-time marketing becoming possible, and we should expect a standardized real-time mechanism within the next five years. But like everything else in modern marketing, your tech should help you achieve your objectives rather than stand as the strategy.

Get your brand in your customer's long-term memory.

Overall, real-time marketing is much less about what you can technically do in the moment than it is about WHO you are as a brand every day. Branding is a 24/7 operation, and the single marketing goal that every organization can do in real time is find a way to get the brand permanently lodged in the customer's mind. That might depend on an excellent CX and/or a real-time presence.

Going back to the example above about asking Alexa to order batteries, many consumers don't want to leave the choice to tech to find the best optimized brands. They already have a brand in mind that they trust, and they will ask Alexa for that brand by name.

What real time means for marketers

Even in the midst of the most advanced technological landscape the world has ever seen — amongst all the AI, AR, VR, ML, and data science — it all truly comes back to brand. Brand awareness and affinity have always been foundational to a company's success. But as technology advances and consumer expectations for personalization continue to rise, brand will increasingly become even more important — especially the ones who stand for something that resonates on a personal level. Consumers think of these brands, their products, and their services in the moment of decision. Then, and only then, can the technologies that are advancing at lightning speed — like blockchain (Prediction #1) and cross-device identification (Prediction #3) — serve your brand up to consumers in real time.

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Is Your Organization Ready?

As the marketing world continues to evolve rapidly and often without warning, it's key to constantly evaluate the industry and marketplace to stay current and competitive when change happens — or risk being left behind. Among the trends we will see over the next five years, they will all center around customers and the experience they demand from brands.

As consumers, this ultimately means life will become increasingly more personalized and convenient — in ways we can't even fully imagine today. Experiencing a marketing campaign will feel less like, well, marketing and more like being served. Consumers will have the world at their beck and call. They will have the ability to simply vocalize a need, desire, whim, or request and be served with results that perfectly align with their unique preferences.

Consolidation of vendors not only lowers cost, but it's a way to unify siloes. Even today, many brands do not store their data in one platform, forcing them to build customer profiles in multiple places with no single view. Personalization requires that unified profile, and over the next five years, technology will help make this easier for marketers who are today still building campaigns manually.

Innovations— blockchain technology, voice search, and cross-device identification— and new regulations, like GDPR, are driving the democratization of data, and no longer will only a handful of companies control it all. This will create new opportunities for marketing teams and those companies who can recognize the emerging trends with the greatest potential and build a strategy ahead of the curve.

How is your organization preparing for the coming marketing shift over the next five years?

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About Emarsys

Emarsys is the largest independent marketing platform company in the world and the only marketing platform that knows your industry. With embedded, industry-specific turnkey solutions, our software enables truly personalized, one-to-one interactions between marketers and customers across all channels — building loyalty, enriching the customer journey, and increasing revenue. This enables companies to scale marketing decisions and actions far beyond human capabilities.

Since 2000, Emarsys has helped over 2,200 brands in over 70 countries to connect with 3 billion customers around the world. Each day, we deliver more than 350 million personalized interactions across email, mobile, social, and web, leading to millions of daily purchase events on our software. Learn more at emarsys.com.

Resources

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Today 70%-90% of digital consumption is controlled by Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Apple, and that's not good for humanity, where these four giants essentially control our digital IDs in a centralized fashion. The future lies in decentralized computing while still making consolidation of user data possible. Consumer-controlled data is slowly gaining traction. Take Europe's GDPR for example, where brands must secure double opt-ins from customers who then allow brands to market to them. Blockchain, as a decentralized platform, will permit customers to browse and buy however they like independent of the big media black boxes.

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What blockchain means for marketers

When this technology becomes mainstream, customers are not the only ones who will benefit from it. Marketers will reap rewards from the tech as well.

- ‣ Database risk reduction: A decentralized database makes it difficult for your entire system to go down.

- ‣ Brand independence: Rather than heavily relying on Google the way you have up to now, blockchain will provide brands with more control over their first-party data.

- ‣ Harder to hack: With cloud storage, when a hacker makes a change to customer data, that change will get made in every copy of the data from then on. Blockchain relies on a node network where everyone else touching the data will know when a hacker tries to edit any part of the ledger.

- ‣ Cost savings: Blockchain eliminates the need for many third parties, since brands will be managing the blockchain ledgers themselves.

- ‣ Secure transaction history: Decentralized blockchains rely on multiple users in the node to verify the data independently of the creator. Once a transaction is verified, it can never be changed again where it is in the chain, but you can update the transaction as a later piece of the ledger. This kind of permanence coupled with blockchain's multi-user verification will preserve a clean purchase history.

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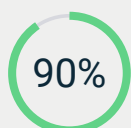
— Allen Nance, CMO, Emarsys

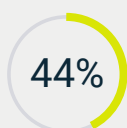# **The Big Four** Controls 70%-90% of All Digital Consumption
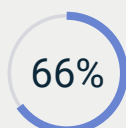
GOOGLE	AMAZON	FACEBOOK	GOOGLE + FACEBOOK	GOOGLE + APPLE

90%

Controls 90% of the search engine market

44%

Controls 44% of e-commerce

66%

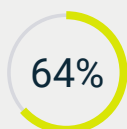66% U.S. adults have a Facebook account
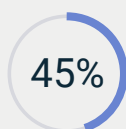
+60%

Collect +60% online ad revenue

99%

Control 99% of smartphone OSes

69%

69% of people use at least one Google service or product every day.

64%

64% U.S. households have a Prime account

45%

45% say they get news here

70%

70% of users with a Google account have added contact info to their profile.

Display advertising,
as we know it,
will finally die.

The closer we've gotten to true one-to-one personalization, the less relevant display ads have become. Over time, they have increasingly interrupted the customer experience and led to a proliferation of ad-blocker software, not to mention a diminishing rate of return for advertisers. Today, as first-party data becomes even more valuable, brands will have to wean themselves off display ads and leverage their own data to serve up the most relevant content for customers.

"In the past few years, 11% of web users and 26% of desktop users have been using ad-blocking programs, and this number continues to grow, proving that we can no longer send one-to-many messages. As ad-blocking tech has continued to improve, brands are seeing decreasing success with display ads."
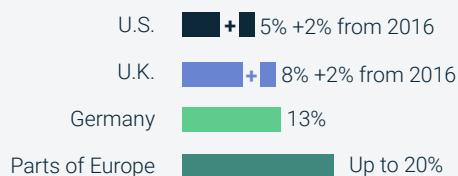
— Allen Nance, CMO, Emarsys

Ad blocking is becoming more prevalent.

In the past few years, 11% of web users and 26% of desktop users have been using ad-blocking programs, and this number continues to grow, proving that we can no longer send one-to-many messages. They just aren't that effective anymore. As ad-blocking tech has continued to improve — and as consumer distaste for interruptive banner ads has grown — brands are seeing decreasing success with display ads. We have to rethink how each customer wants us to engage with her, and display ads go against the desire for personalization shaping the customer's expectation.

Who's Blocking on Mobile?

U.S.	5% +2% from 2016
U.K.	8% +2% from 2016
Germany	13%
Parts of Europe	Up to 20%

Interruptive advertising doesn't bring in new customers.

In 2013, the average web user saw 2,000 banner ads a month and clicked 0.1% of them. By 2016, 0.4% of users clicked a banner ad, and that's as good as it got. If we've learned nothing else from the past couple years, we know that the online customer experience, whether it's on a desktop or a smartphone, continues to become more tailor-made for each individual customer, and no one wants a banner ad or a pop-up message to interfere with that CX. Marketers have to rethink ads they're running on Twitter or YouTube and rely on their own first-party data to drive acquisition.

What the death of display ads means for marketers

First-party data is also good for retention, because ideally every piece of data you collect from customers should go back into optimizing the relationship. However, as customers demand a personalized experience, marketers need to do more than secure permission to use customer data and be respectful enough to never hit a customer with an irrelevant and interruptive display ad. We have to think about better ways to respect our customers' trust in us and leverage the value of first-party data to give them the experiences and conversations they want most.

* It's worth mentioning that blockchain technology (see Prediction #1) could actually be a solution to display ads. Not only will marketers be able to track ad performance much better than our current system allows, but the brands who are paying the most attention will have the chance to greatly improve the messages they send through various channels.

Cross-device identification
will become a necessary part of omnichannel marketing.

It's 2019 — and while a lot has changed, consumers are still demanding personalized omnichannel experiences, and marketers are still scrambling to make sense of the incessant dune of data piling up.

But in the years to come, omnichannel marketing will get a facelift and integrate more closely with existing IoT. Customers also will have another piece of identification — along with blockchain ledgers covered in Prediction #1 — to ensure they get what they want from their favorite brands. Cross-device identification (XDID) will become the driving force behind identifying customers and delivering consistent experiences across all channels. Marketing teams will use XDID to create more relevant, personalized, and measurable results for customers.

_____

"XDID will not be the answer to all your personalization woes. Cross-channel identification gives marketers the ability to start better understanding the person behind the data. In a sense, XDID will be the next step in omnichannel marketing and will allow you to paint a broader, more specific picture of the person using multiple devices to interact and shop with your brand."

— Allen Nance, CMO, Emarsys

What is cross-device identification?

With cross-device identification (XDID), marketers can match connected devices (like smartphones, tablets, computers, smart cars, etc.) to individual contacts, giving brands the ability to purposefully target customers across their preferred devices and channels, whether that's on a tablet, through Netflix, in their Tesla, or any other touchpoint a customer uses. The XDID technology usually sits within a data management platform and comes in two forms: deterministic and probabilistic.

Deterministic XDID for accuracy at scale

The deterministic method is the most accurate and scalable for marketers. It involves connecting individuals with their devices based on known digital IDs like email addresses, website logins, and social media accounts.

For example, a company like Amazon may be able to identify and connect individuals to their devices based on the apps you have on your phone or when you log in to their website. If you're looking for a certain product, you may jump on your phone to search for the product on the Amazon app. If you're logged in as a Prime Member, Amazon can automatically connect your smartphone to you as an individual customer.

While the deterministic cross-device identification method is the most powerful for marketers who have direct access to their data, those marketers with siloed data will find it difficult to execute. If you're using several different marketing tools to collect data, it will be hard to leverage this data if it's not in one platform that's accessible across the organization.

Probabilistic XDID for anonymous data

What if an individual isn't using a login of some kind to engage on your platforms? This is where the probabilistic method comes into play. This method takes anonymized data signals and cross-references existing profiles to see if an individual can be identified. By using digital signals like IP addresses, browser type, location, and certain behaviors, probabilistic XDID may be able to identify and match individuals to the devices they are using. For example, if a customer comes to your website on her smartphone and she has an IP address that matches an existing individual, the probabilistic method will use other signals to see if this user is a potential match. The main issue with this method is the lack of certainty. Because it's based on probability, marketers can't be absolutely certain that they've identified the correct user and matched that user with their preferred devices.

What XDID means for marketers

XDID will not be the answer to all your personalization woes, but it does give marketers the ability to start better understanding the person behind the data. In a sense, XDID will be the next step in an omnichannel marketing approach, allowing you to paint a broader, more intricate picture of the consumer using multiple devices to interact and shop with your brand.

While these kinds of identification will help you target both known and unknown contacts, XDID should aid in your marketing strategies but not define them. It gives marketers the ability to better understand each customer on a personal level and market to them in a way that delights them to the point of purchase. Essentially, marketers who adopt XDID will truly be able to market to customers with the right message, at the right time, on the right channel by collecting data that builds the most complete customer profile. It may also present opportunities to engage customers in real time (see Prediction #5).

Voice re-emerges as a distinct channel and internet interface.

Digital assistants (Siri, Google, Alexa, etc.) have been around a few years, and they continue to get better — most notably in terms of learning how their owners speak and even determining the intent behind certain general questions — but it's the potential for voice search that has everyone scrambling, especially in the mobile arena. Imagine being able to shop and purchase just by talking at your phone.

By August 2018, 25% of U.S. voice command users searched with voice for new products. Only 10% used voice to purchase anything. This is mostly due to a lack of faith in digital assistants and smart speakers, after being shown irrelevant recommendations (28%) or not being able to find an item they searched for (24%).

But innovation will take voice beyond these issues, because people who do use digital assistants prefer voice (70% with an average 150 words per minute) over typing (29% with an average of 40 words a minute).

"Voice as a channel will provide new revenue and spark innovative advertising. Over the last decade, we've seen a big shift from desktop to mobile, and while that shift is still happening, voice will move us further away from desktop, not because that's what brands think should happen (currently voice is not bringing in as significant revenue as email or web), but because that's what customers are voting for with their actual voices and the 100 million or so smart speakers in their homes."

— Allen Nance, CMO, Emarsys

A new channel with broad implications for marketers

Voice as a channel will provide new revenue and spark innovative advertising. Over the last decade, we've seen a big shift from desktop to mobile, and while that shift is still happening, voice will move us further away from desktop, not because that's what brands think should happen (currently voice is not bringing in as significant revenue as email or web), but because that's what customers are voting for with their actual voices and the 100 million or so smart speakers in their homes. Voice may very well be our best digital option for real-time marketing (see Prediction #5).

Get to know your customers in a whole new way.

There are significant differences in the way people search on a keyboard and the way they do it when speaking in everyday language, and there are lots of things you can learn about what your customers prefer from the way they talk their way through a search. For example, people are more likely to use one to three words in a keyboard search, but voice allows us to ask more conversational questions and reinvigorate long-tail keywords. As our tech gets more accurate in translation (via Natural Language Processing, which is currently around 95% word recognition, the same threshold of accuracy as human speech), brands will learn new and critical things about the way customers want to interact.

The unified profile as a pillar of the omnichannel approach

With voice having the potential to offer new insights about customer behavior and intent, the data gathered from voice will contribute to the unified customer profile and give brands a more precise picture of each customer so that brands can better serve them. The main danger here is simply that voice data shouldn't end up in a silo where it has no impact on your omnichannel marketing.

What voice means for marketers

There's still time to prepare for the rise of voice or risk being left behind. Here are a few things you should focus on:

- Make sure your website loads fast, that images and files are optimized, and that your mobile web is set up to be responsive.

- Figure out what the most-often-asked questions are in voice search and adjust your SEO strategy.

- Include long-tail keywords in your SEO strategy to match the way customers actually ask questions in voice search.

- With 22% of voice search queries concerning location-based content, focus on local searches by including phrases like "within 5 miles," and "near me" or "around me."

All marketing will be done **in real time.**

At its most basic level, real-time marketing is the ability to provide personalized, relevant offers to customers in the moment across all channels, something that once seemed impossible to ever pull off. However, over the last eight years, the concept of real-time marketing has largely come to fruition through sporadic campaigns like newsjacking, where a brand piggybacks on current news events in an effort to share the spotlight and nab some timely attention for themselves.

One of the most popular examples of this type of real-time marketing came during the 2013 Super Bowl. There was a power outage during the game, blanketing the entire stadium with abrupt darkness. Within minutes, Oreo capitalized creatively on this with its "dunk in the dark" graphic tweet.

In less than one hour, the message had been retweeted more than 10,000 times. And now, even six years later, we're still talking about it. A tweet. Not a complex strategy, but a simple, quick post on Twitter.

Today, real-time marketing has become… well, a lot more real, especially as brands have taken a more customer-centric approach to all marketing operations. Many consumer brands even have people on standby, dedicated to responding "right now." In the near future, meeting customers in the moment will become table stakes for brands, because all marketing will be done in real time

It's all about being in the moment.

It's something many of us dream about: being able to help a customer in her moment of need, and personalization is just entry level for this kind of one-to-one attention. We already know that today's consumers demand more than clever, timely messages delivered en masse. Instead, they want real-time value, and they want it in a way that is personally relevant.

Marketers will have to adapt to this expectation by using apps, mobile-responsive sites, and most of all, voice. Brands may soon be building real-time customer interaction centers where a human marketer leverages the power of the machine to engage customers in the very moment they're making a decision. Really, real-time marketing is the culmination of everything marketers are already doing, so it shouldn't be surprising how fast this might happen.

Technology will be the enabler, not the strategy.

Real-time marketing has its greatest potential for customers searching with voice (as discussed in Prediction #4), but the technology that will make it seamless is still being developed on top of present-day machine learning and automation.

Of course, we are already starting to see this evolution in voice search and virtual assistants where the speed and accuracy of a reply could mean the difference between acquiring a new customer and losing an existing one. Think of it this way: When a consumer asks Alexa to order batteries, what brand will she ultimately receive?

Thanks to today's rapidly evolving technology — and setting brand loyalty aside for the moment — the brand that is optimized for voice search will win that sale without the consumer consciously knowing.

The amazing thing is that we're not far off from this kind of real-time marketing becoming possible, and we should expect a standardized real-time mechanism within the next five years. But like everything else in modern marketing, your tech should help you achieve your objectives rather than stand as the strategy.

Get your brand in your customer's long-term memory.

Overall, real-time marketing is much less about what you can technically do in the moment than it is about WHO you are as a brand every day. Branding is a 24/7 operation, and the single marketing goal that every organization can do in real time is find a way to get the brand permanently lodged in the customer's mind. That might depend on an excellent CX and/or a real-time presence.
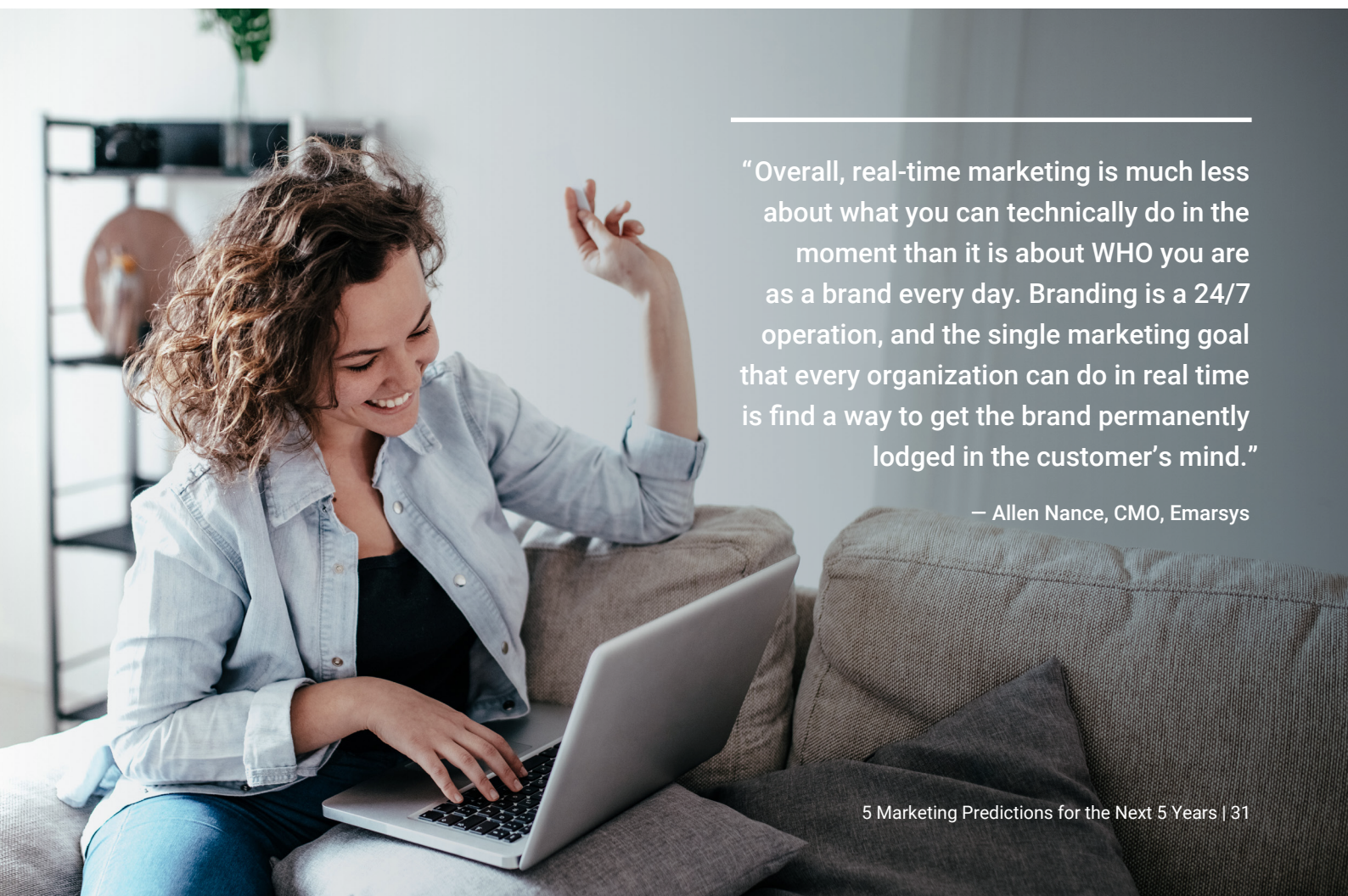
Going back to the example above about asking Alexa to order batteries, many consumers don't want to leave the choice to tech to find the best optimized brands. They already have a brand in mind that they trust, and they will ask Alexa for that brand by name.

What real time means for marketers

Even in the midst of the most advanced technological landscape the world has ever seen — amongst all the AI, AR, VR, ML, and data science — it all truly comes back to brand. Brand awareness and affinity have always been foundational to a company's success. But as technology advances and consumer expectations for personalization continue to rise, brand will increasingly become even more important — especially the ones who stand for something that resonates on a personal level. Consumers think of these brands, their products, and their services in the moment of decision. Then, and only then, can the technologies that are advancing at lightning speed — like blockchain (Prediction #1) and cross-device identification (Prediction #3) — serve your brand up to consumers in real time.

"Overall, real-time marketing is much less about what you can technically do in the moment than it is about WHO you are as a brand every day. Branding is a 24/7 operation, and the single marketing goal that every organization can do in real time is find a way to get the brand permanently lodged in the customer's mind."

— Allen Nance, CMO, Emarsys

Is Your Organization Ready?

As the marketing world continues to evolve rapidly and often without warning, it's key to constantly evaluate the industry and marketplace to stay current and competitive when change happens — or risk being left behind. Among the trends we will see over the next five years, they will all center around customers and the experience they demand from brands.

As consumers, this ultimately means life will become increasingly more personalized and convenient — in ways we can't even fully imagine today. Experiencing a marketing campaign will feel less like, well, marketing and more like being served. Consumers will have the world at their beck and call. They will have the ability to simply vocalize a need, desire, whim, or request and be served with results that perfectly align with their unique preferences.

Consolidation of vendors not only lowers cost, but it's a way to unify siloes. Even today, many brands do not store their data in one platform, forcing them to build customer profiles in multiple places with no single view. Personalization requires that unified profile, and over the next five years, technology will help make this easier for marketers who are today still building campaigns manually.

Innovations— blockchain technology, voice search, and cross-device identification— and new regulations, like GDPR, are driving the democratization of data, and no longer will only a handful of companies control it all. This will create new opportunities for marketing teams and those companies who can recognize the emerging trends with the greatest potential and build a strategy ahead of the curve.

How is your organization preparing for the coming marketing shift over the next five years?

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About Emarsys

Emarsys is the largest independent marketing platform company in the world and the only marketing platform that knows your industry. With embedded, industry-specific turnkey solutions, our software enables truly personalized, one-to-one interactions between marketers and customers across all channels — building loyalty, enriching the customer journey, and increasing revenue. This enables companies to scale marketing decisions and actions far beyond human capabilities.

Since 2000, Emarsys has helped over 1,500 brands in over 140 countries to connect with 3 billion customers around the world. Each day, we deliver more than 350 million personalized interactions across email, mobile, social, and web, leading to millions of daily purchase events on our software. Learn more at emarsys.com.

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