2021 Digital Marketing Trends Predicted
by
Digital Agency Leaders
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We have asked 26 digital agency leaders about their insights into 2021 digital marketing trends.

—from These 26 digital agency leaders are chosen from the best digital agencies in the world. While reading this eGuide, you will hear the words from New York, London, Sydney, Hong Kong and more.

We believe their predictions about “2021 Digital Marketing Trends” will be insightful to explore for any person interested in digital marketing.

Here are some highlights:

- 22 out of these 25 digital agencies (88%) stated that the number of their in-house colleagues will increase in 2021.

- 22 out of these 25 agencies (88%) will be working with a hybrid office system. One agency will be working from home while two agencies will be working at the office.

- According to these 26 digital agency leaders’ predictions, top three trending services for digital agencies will be web design and development (53.8%), eCommerce marketing (46.2%) and SEO (42.3%).

- As for the top trending industries, retail (61.5%), media & entertainment (53.8%) and IT & technology (38.5%) are the ones leading.
We all know that the world of digital has been growing for decades and will continue to grow for many years to come, but 2020 has massively accelerated this growth.

According to Google Trends, searches for "SEO" have almost tripled in 2020 in comparison to the previous. Other trending topics that have surged include ecommerce, social media marketing and there are many many more. This is just one of the many indicators that demonstrates how businesses are paying more attention to their online marketing mix because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"A lot of businesses that weren’t focusing on their online presence are realising that they must have a polished digital offering in this new world of lockdowns and online reliance."

This is creating a lot of activity and we are seeing this in the number of agencies that require more specialists due to growth in work. And even when the pandemic is over, businesses that are starting to see the benefits of investing in their online offering won’t look back.

Trending services for digital agencies will be social media marketing, SEO and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, food & beverage and media & entertainment.
I’m not so sure anyone can predict what is in store.

Much of the brick-to-click trend will continue (moving offline to online), but the question will be for how long? And specifically, how will brick and mortar and in-person businesses fare?

“Personally, I see a slow return to "normal" for many, but B2B businesses will face an interesting challenge.”

How will remote work affect marketing? Zoom, Google Hangouts, and tech has seen a surge, but what is in store for rental properties, hardware, and more? Only time will tell.

I think it will be critical for brands not only to move online but find a voice. Before it was a fight of the brands that were online... Now that everyone has been forced online, it will be a fight against everyone!

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, social media marketing and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, healthcare and real estate.
We design, build and optimize human-centric intelligent digital platforms. Our core strengths are in building global, data driven, intelligent, experiences.

Guiding users through the marketing funnel, with human-centric and personalized digital customer service and support flows that are personalized experiences is essential in 2021.

User Experience is becoming more personalized than ever, making this an exciting year for our agency moving forward.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, AI driven personalized on and off site, and global websites serving local content.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be healthcare, media & entertainment and IT & technology.
The key question in 2021 will be which trends stick and which ones will turn out to have been temporary.

“People haven’t stopped wanting to go on holiday, so as soon as that’s an option again expect a resurgence in demand for travel and accompanying innovation in the travel industry.”

Remote working is a different thing – to what extent will it stick and to what extent will companies revert to the norm when they can? Either way expect the demand for remote working products and services to continue to grow in 2021.

On the economic front uncertainty will continue to rule as the vaccine is rolled out amid periodic lockdowns. More startups are founded at times of economic uncertainty, and we’ve certainly seen an uptick in enquiries from new founders throughout 2020. The same logic applies to established companies as they look to innovate and build new products to adapt their offering.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, UI/UX design and mobile app development.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, education and travel & tourism.
Andrew Whitehead
Creative & Managing Director at Devotion

The challenges posed to many businesses and consumers throughout 2020 set the tone for the 2021 trends. Businesses that pivoted may see a permanence to the new approach, teams that moved to remote working may stay that way, and consumers will be given new ways to engage with brands in a deeper and more personalised manner.

Digital experience will be a huge trend in 2021 as brands find new ways to engage consumers remotely. While AR has been around for some time, the changing nature of engagement will accelerate this trend, spearheaded by tech giants like Apple and Facebook. As part of this trend, visual search will continue to grow in importance as consumers look to replicate real-life experiences.

"Google Listings and Local SEO will be more important than ever as consumers look to support local businesses, and Google looks to refine relevance for users continually."

Social commerce will continue to grow, and see social media move from a discovery and engagement channel to a conversion channel. Brands will also look to consolidate some of their social activity with a rationalisation of platforms and a focus on ROI.

Virtual events will become the norm and lose their novelty factor. As such, brands will need to understand how to drive engagement around these events and provide attendees’ experiences that drive conversion.

And lastly, while not necessarily a digital marketing trend, 2021 will see consumers increasingly looking to support brands with a clear purpose. Brands that can differentiate themselves, stand for something, build trust, and drive participation will be better placed to succeed in these constantly changing times.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, social media marketing and SEO.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, IT & technology and travel & tourism.
As you may have known, many businesses will transfer their business to Digital in 2021, especially the Retail Industry. However, most of the companies will cut their budget on marketing side at the same time.

We expect that the request of digital transformation from our clients will be increased but the project price will be decreased if compared with pre-Covid-19 stage.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, UI/UX design, and mobile app development.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be food & beverage, retail, healthcare, real estate, fashion, and travel & tourism.
Albin Lix
Founder & Managing Director at Digital Business Lab

From a global perspective, we foresee a new social media era, which will remain powerful yet under more constraints. Alongside the fast-growing online consumption, new digital and social media boundaries are emerging in Asia due to data protection, economic, social realities, etc.

"Every market is currently developing its social media ecosystem on top of a distinctive culture to maximize its digital sovereignty."

It is already the case and likely to advance over the next few years, for instance, LINE in Japan, KakaoTalk in South Korea, WeChat (and many others) in China, etc. Hence our mission is to assist every organization in penetrating all regions with more advanced social media expertise, to engage with the right audience on the right channel taking into consideration local cultural specificities.

For brands, 2021 will be a year for the route of business recovery and restoring financial health. Instead of conventional brand building, the top priorities reset to short-term targets and highly ROI-centric actions. It includes adopting tactical social media ad retargeting to drive sales from the audience with high interest in specific brands or products, and cost-effective yet engaging social media formats with exceptional ingredients that drive quick conversion.

GO LIVE! Live streaming and live shopping for sure will be 2021 critical trends as the online population/consumers are craving for a more seamless, high-quality, and “click-and-purchase” experience. Social Media Live stream doesn’t require costly video equipment and post-production, but keep in mind that high-quality live streaming requires preparation, just like a play. Regarding live shopping, more social platforms are integrating eCommerce-oriented functions, including WhatsApp, which will serve as a one-stop shop instead of an extension of eCommerce.

Trending services for digital agencies will be live streaming, video production, eCommerce marketing, PPC and content marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be education, IT & technology and real estate.
In 2021, I think we can expect digital marketing channels to change and innovate faster than before. This will offer new, exciting and effective ways to connect with audiences and deliver growth.

Almost every advertiser’s audience behaviour has changed and as we still await to see what exactly the ‘new normal’ will be, one thing that has become clear is that digital marketing will continue to be more important than ever.

Advertisers will spend more on digital in 2021 as a result, and this will speed up innovation and change.

For example, Amazon and TikTok ad platforms will continue to become more sophisticated and most probably launch new marketing products following their growth. Google, Facebook, and LinkedIn are likely to speed up innovation in face of increased competition and data privacy concerns, and relatively new but quickly expanding channels like connected TV and audio streaming ads will become more widespread through platforms like The Trade Desk.

Digital marketing has always known to be fast paced, and 2021 is likely to see it get faster!

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, SEO and PPC.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, media & entertainment and IT & technology.
I’d say that technology innovations have typically been the core drivers to what becomes the next digital marketing trend.

The latest developments in AI (and ML specifically) and how this can work hand-in-hand with a well-considered programmatic strategy, is a strong indication of what to expect next.

Knowing more about your audience through smart data collection (who, when, why, where, and how) will ultimately help develop more robust acquisition and conversion strategies, and will be what allows us to target more effectively through greater personalisation.

On the less exciting side, I think the latest privacy protections and data security considerations will naturally play a role in how we approach digital marketing, but it is what it is, and we just need to work smarter in how we deploy ‘personalisation’ strategies.

Outside of that, if COVID has taught us anything, then it’s that people’s boredom levels have increased and will continue to do so. This is where the ‘short-form’ video strategy helps to capture the even shorter attention span of the younger demographic. As much as it pains me to say, but I guess this is where TikTok for business will find an even stronger voice!

Trending services for digital agencies will be SEO, UI/UX design and programmatic marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be media & entertainment, IT & technology and automotive.
Digital Marketing in 2021 is in a unique time and place... Humans are more hyper-connected than ever.

“There are always so many attributes a brand or business must consider in their marketing messaging, but one that will stand out is "trust".

Evaluating your trust with the news, technology and brands is rapidly changing the choices in products and services people make. Those that can think quickly and act locally, while delivering on the global scale is imperative to sustained success for growth-focused brands.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, content marketing and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, food & beverage and education.
Ben Wheelhouse
Marketing Services Director at Emote Digital

Much more cross-border advertising, now that the world is even more online.

“The growth of affiliate and content channels, catching up to traditional search.”

Facebook and Instagram continue to become more and more ecommerce focused.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, social media marketing and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be media & entertainment, real estate and fashion.
The “digital transformation” gold rush will continue to explode as organisations forced to transition to digital in the wake of the pandemic realise their lack of internal expertise and focus on integrated strategy, testing and optimisation, and structural issues like siloing and synchronous/asynchronous communications, place a stranglehold over their transition.

This environment will create a lush forest of opportunity for talented digital agencies to flourish in. Working with agencies will open the doors to niche areas of expertise across all facets of digital for transitional businesses, essentially allowing them to ‘recruit’ from the agency world for specialist digital functions on an ad hoc basis.

"Under this model, I fully expect to start seeing more high-value companies being run by a very small core internal team supported by a series of specialist agencies."

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, SEO and PPC.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be media & entertainment, IT & technology and real estate.
We’ve seen brands, big and small, pivot towards a digital-centric marketing model. This means traditional brick-and-mortar stores have had to set up an online storefront and sell through e-commerce channels.

Further, more people are working from home or shopping online – we’ve seen spikes in social media and search engine usage.

This means optimizing for both those platforms are paramount to being successful in 2021.

Trending services for digital agencies will be SEO, UI/UX design and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be food & beverage, media & entertainment and travel & tourism.
Shane Liuw  
General Manager at First Page Digital Singapore

It’s just going to get crazier for the world of digital marketing with expected advanced technology built to disrupt the industry. We are seeing a boom in digital marketing project enquiries and I do not see it slowing down.

“Consumer behaviour will be skewed mostly to online/virtual permanently post pandemic and businesses will be forced to embrace digital transformation whether they like it or not to survive.”

Callum Sherwood  
Technical Director at First Page Digital Singapore

As we can see from Covid, companies are pumping their marketing spend into Digital Marketing instead of traditional. What has been particularly interesting for us personally is the increase of demand - “digital transformation” is a term that was thrown around, what has happened this year has forced companies to “digitally transform”. What is great for us as an agency is that when a company begins their transformation, they essentially get a taste for what digital marketing has to offer.

Insights wise, I believe the digital marketing space has been forced into people’s lives more than ever.

“Due to Covid, people who were deemed “traditional” consumers who may have gone to their local supermarket to get groceries were forced into using apps/websites to get what they need.”

There will be a certain percentage of people who won’t go back to their previous ways. In my opinion, this year has been a “gateway” for digital adaptation, due to people having to adapt to the new normal covid has introduced. I’m excited for 2021 – I think it’s going to be uncharted territories for Digital Marketing across the board.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, SEO, content marketing, PPC and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, food & beverage, media & entertainment, real estate and IT & technology.
The increasing sophistication of digital marketing and the financial pressures faced by brands will converge, and greater demands will be placed on agencies to fill increasingly ambitious gaps.

As technology and martech tools continue to fill the gap previously filled by low-level agency tasks, the demands of brands on agencies will continue to evolve from “do it for me” toward “think for me.”

The role of agencies will become increasingly consultative, playing a support role to help stretch in-house teams new, unprecedented challenges as they continue to adapt to new normals.

On the search front, UX and content will converge and supersede traditional SEO, as the capabilities required to effectively rank grow well beyond single experts, and toward large teams working in sync.

Trending services for digital agencies will be SEO, PPC and digital strategy.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, food & beverage and IT & technology.
Almost every company in the world has probably had to speed up their digital transformation work during 2020 due to coronavirus. Shopping habits have changed, too, and although shopping online has been an increasing trend for many years already, it has taken another huge leap forward this year with physical stores closed in many countries. Some of the changes of 2020 may reverse slightly, but some of the major step changes will likely be with us for some time. So, online shopping and increased competition in e-commerce retail is likely to be a very interesting topic. We’re also expecting more data shakeups into 2021 and beyond. As digital marketers we will need to learn to do more with less granular data. Google Analytics 4 is already silently preparing us for this, referring to ‘signals’ not ‘events’ in much of its documentation. Cookies are due to be phased out soon, too, so expect to hear more about this in the coming years.

One good thing I see as a result of this loss of granular detail is that we’re going to need to be better generalist marketers, not just digital advertisers. We know advertising works, after all, but digital ads have pushed us down a route in which many people only act in the short term, and longer term brand building work is overlooked. A change away from this will be good for the industry, and the individual advertisers, too. We’ve seen some interesting automations being introduced to Google Ads this year and we expect automation to continue to evolve in paid ads for some years to come, until the ad platforms really get it ‘right’.

But nevertheless automation is coming, so we need to prepare for this and begin to take more strategic roles in order to remain effective and relevant.

Overall I’m expecting 2021 to be another exciting year!

Trending services for digital agencies will be social media marketing, SEO and PPC.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, media & entertainment, fashion and automotive.
The COVID-19 pandemic has been an accelerator for many organisations to properly invest in digital transformation and take advantage of the increased demand in online purchasing and the increase in time people are spending online in general. 2021 will be a continuation of this acceleration as the early movers reap the benefits and those slower to move finally make the jump. This will result in organisations spending more on their digital platforms, the integration between those platforms, and promoting traffic to those platforms. Organisations will be spending more but also focused more on real results as the economic situation puts pressure on all sectors.

True omnichannel commerce will be a focus for organisations as they try to differentiate through seamless customer experiences across a multitude of channels.

Newer technologies like voice, VR, AR, MR, will continue to slowly play their part (but not takeover from web, mobile, and social). And behind the scenes, organisations will move towards a microservices approach to their marketing technology stack utilising tools and frameworks like headless CMSs, Jamstack/MACH architectures, customer data platforms (CDPs), modern front-end frameworks like Gatsby and Next, and overall a more connected API and cloud-first approach to technology decisions.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, content marketing and UI/UX design.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, healthcare and education.
Victoria Samways
Marketing and Brand Manager at Major Tom

There have been many significant advances in digital marketing this past year. In 2021, you can expect companies to start to understand the full power of digital marketing and begin to improve their skills within the industry. For example, HubSpot’s new offline conversion tracking (OCT) feature is a complete gamechanger. The ability to better train Google and Facebook on what higher quality leads look like will reduce a company’s CPL, which is an opportunity not to be missed.

Marketing budgets will be under scrutiny, but you’ll notice organizations are cautiously optimistic about the future; more action will be taken to improve attribution tracking and implement OCT. This way, marketers can optimize the right channels and get buy-in from leadership.

You’ll also see digital marketers identifying new opportunities to nurture relationships remotely.

“Video became popular for social ads but now you’ll notice an increase of its use in marketing emails and websites — to add that human touch, building stronger connections with prospects.”

They will also work more closely with their partners and vendors to identify new business opportunities and cross-sell to customers using digital marketing.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, social media marketing and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be food & beverage, healthcare and education.
Max Whicher
Co-Founder & CBO at Spin Brands

As consumers continue to reflect on the perceived downsides of social media, they will be more drawn to optimistic and relatable content. Brand transparency will create positive sentiment through displaying honesty and authenticity. Brands may change their understanding of genuine engagement and look beyond likes, followers and reach, towards sentiment, or intra-community interactions. Private digital spaces are predicted to become more favourable over public spaces. This could see more private Instagram users, and the increase in closed private Facebook groups.

Recent Political/Social movements have dispelled the myth that content has to be succinct and easily digestible/accessible to have immediate impact. As such, longer-form copy and long-form videos may increase. Brands will seek to react quickly to bottom-up political messaging, irrespective of location, as reactivity will be a barometer of authenticity.

Influencer marketing will become increasingly orientated towards micro-influencers with smaller, more engaged audiences.

"The development of native ecommerce on social media will encourage brands to incorporate ecommerce functionalities into their platforms."

Trending services for digital agencies will be social media marketing, PPC and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be food & beverage, media & entertainment and education.
2021 digital trends can all be understood in terms of a battle for space: specifically, the spaces where businesses and their customers interact online. Whilst Covid-19 has accelerated this change, the most forward-thinking brands have long been building digital spaces that are so valuable to their users, they can even eclipse the enterprise value of the previously ‘core’ business.

One key trend in this battle for space will be the increasingly two-way nature of consumer–brand collaboration: consumers demand engagement from brands, and brands learn how to leverage that shift.

When Supreme, a skatewear brand, sold a branded brick in 2016, customers weren’t really investing in the product but the marketing experience. This profitable discovery of ‘drop culture’ led to Supreme becoming a prize acquisition for VF Corp by the end of 2020. But if the experience is so valuable, do you really need to sell a product at all? Recent evidence would indicate that consumers are now displaying a desire to actively participate in brand marketing for little or no tangible return – the opportunity to share their digital space with brands is reward enough.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, UI/UX design and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be healthcare, media & entertainment and IT & technology.
With disruption from the iOS14 update predicted to interfere with Facebook and Instagram performance in Q3 and Q4, we expect to see channel diversification throughout 2021. Many eCommerce businesses have become entirely reliant on these channels for purchases and not just discovery (and never more so than in 2020 and during lockdowns), but 2021 is the time for exploring new sales channel opportunities, including an increase on organic platforms like SEO as well as email marketing.

"Following the pandemic, we also expect brands to invest in community-building, and goodwill campaigns from brands as customers are likely to have higher ethical standards."

Moreover, following on from 2020, it will be imperative that companies emphasise why they’re essential to their customer base. To do this, we expect much more authentic content and more transparency from the most successful companies.

Overall, we also expect an increase in small companies emerging more prominently on all platforms as consumer habits shift to support small and independent businesses.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, social media marketing and eCommerce marketing.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, food & beverage and healthcare.
Ben Foster
Managing Director at The SEO Works

In many ways the demand for digital has grown during the pandemic as more and more people go online. 2020 saw huge shifts in people’s behavior, including how they shopped, where they socialized, and how they chose entertainment. We also saw many smaller businesses start to take eCommerce seriously. The move towards investing more in digital, whether it’s through Social or Google Ads, a website overhaul, or taking SEO more seriously, is here to stay.

Moving into 2021, data will still be at the forefront of people’s minds. Google have announced plans to stop supporting third-party cookies on its Chrome browser in 2021, with Firefox and Apple offering similar protections in future updates.

“2021 will be the year we all have to start planning for a cookieless future, balancing a customised customer experience with the necessary privacy and security needs.”

Expect to see the emergence of Google Analytics 4, which has been designed to still track website and user behaviour, but without the use of cookies.

- Trending services for digital agencies will be SEO, PPC and eCommerce marketing.
- Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, healthcare and education.
In 2021 we will see even more businesses digitizing their offerings, and we’re not just talking about retail businesses.

“Traditionally "offline" products and services like landscaping, therapy, and group exercise have already begun migrating to digital platforms to service their clients, and this will continue!”

Except to see higher demand for e-commerce enabled websites and custom mobile apps to facilitate new forms of remote collaboration between businesses and their customers.

The pandemic has also spurred an influx of new business startups going straight to the web to market their products and services. For that reason, there will be a big demand for branding, package design, and web marketing services.

Trending services for digital agencies will be web design & development, branding and UI/UX design.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, healthcare and media & entertainment.
We’re focused on marketing automation and sales enablement.

We will not be back to "normal" business for at least Q1–Q2 of 2021 so organizations need to continue to adapt and utilize marketing and sales tools/tech to fuel their growth.

Trending services for digital agencies will be branding, content marketing, PPC and marketing automation.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be media & entertainment, IT & technology and education.
We will see a continuation in the move towards more human brands, as brands seek a place within digital communities they will need to act, talk, and think more human. We will also see a move from the major digital platforms to start taking responsibility for their role in some of the darker sides of our technology-obsessed culture.

We are going to see a reckoning of social media and its use with platforms understanding their civic responsibility. As part of this reckoning of social media, we are going to see knowledge become influence as the role of social media influencers changes as we all seek to better ourselves and our understanding of the world through digital channels.

Lastly, live video will come of age, finally as the experience economy explodes in the second half of the year.

Trending services for digital agencies will be social media marketing, content marketing and video production.

Trending industries for digital agencies will be retail, media & entertainment and fashion.
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