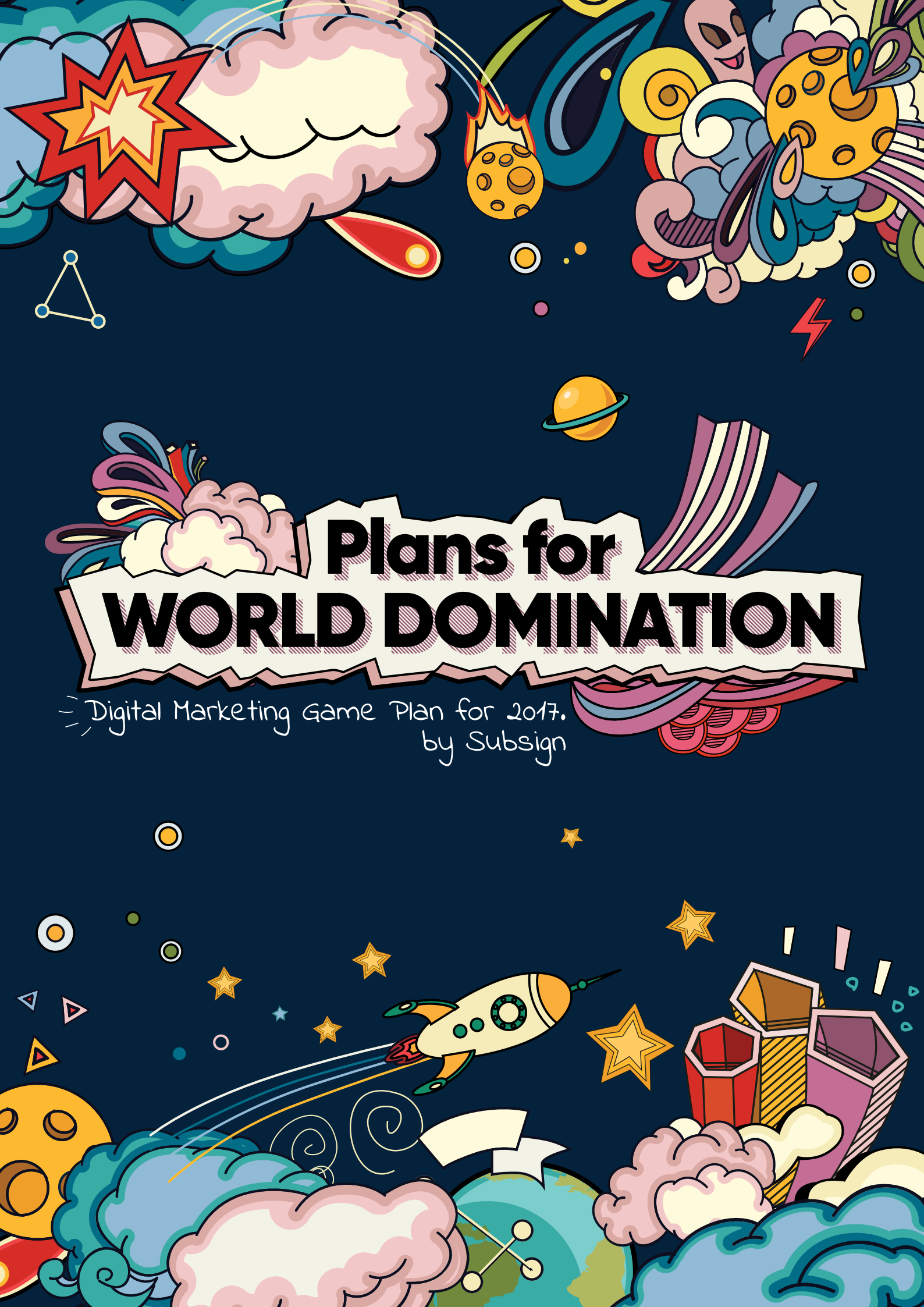

Plans for
WORLD DOMINATION
Digital Marketing Game Plan for 2017.
by Subsign

# Digital Marketing Game Plan for 2017

With the start of the new year we focus on what is ahead and plan for a successful future. While the ever-shifting digital landscape may render our predictions invalid, it's still worth analyzing what might be on the horizon as means of trying to understand where we're at, and where we're headed, as we plan for the next 12 months.

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## The Time is Now

# Major Trends Ahead.

Graduations, Weddings, Birthdays, Holidays, Marvel, Star Wars ... Let's get to the good stuff for the coming year that's going to shape your marketing strategy.

## Big Platforms are Dropping the "Social" and Upping their game.

Facebook boasts almost **1.8 billion monthly** active users (MAUs). And the crazy thing is, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

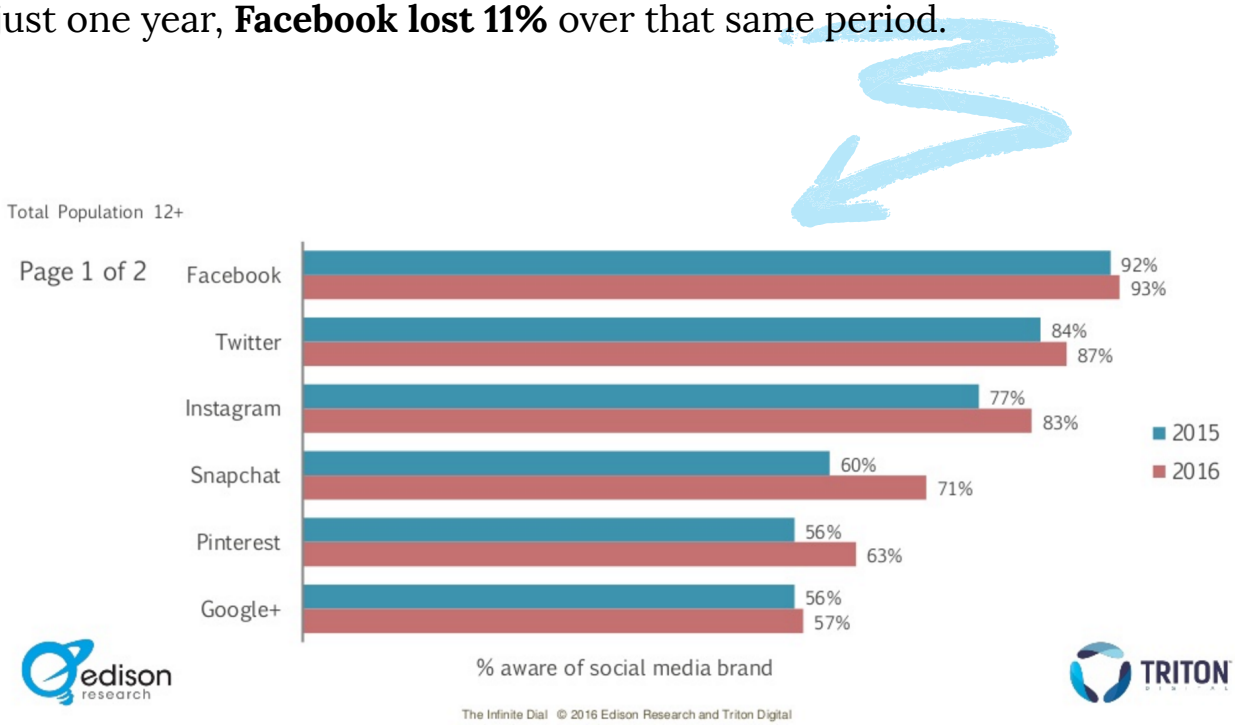
In 2013, younger demographics began deserting Facebook in droves, seeing it as "**uncool**". Mark Zuckerberg responded by loosening the platform's attachment to the Facebook label, effectively "**unbranding**" the social media giant. At the time, its acquisitions – including Instagram, WhatsApp, and Oculus VR ProGeo OY – continued to function as stand-alone apps, without any apparent connection to Facebook. The idea was to diversify by breaking all the activities into usages: segment and conquer, as they say.

**And it worked !**

Zuckerberg's strategy cemented Facebook as the world's undisputed social leader. But in the digital world, things can change at the speed of a tap, or a click ...

Indeed, growing media giant Snapchat could well spice-up the social landscape. Sure, its user base is only about **20% of Facebook's**, but Snapchat makes up for its size disadvantage with engaging video content that resonates with the 18 – 24 year old demographic. It's an environment that Facebook has struggled to secure.

According to the latest Edison Research study, Facebook (*including Messenger*) remains the most popular social platform among Americans 12-24 years old, with **32% saying they use Facebook** most. Snapchat **registered second with 26%** - but here's the troubling news for Facebook: while Snapchat leapfrogged past Instagram by gaining 11% in just one year, **Facebook lost 11%** over that same period.




There may be more tumultuous seas ahead as the current generation continuously seeks-out new platforms to satisfy their whims.

But regardless of their recent gains, Snapchat isn't wasting time patting themselves on the back. They're repositioning their brand as a camera maker and are diversifying beyond their flagship app (*just Like Facebook*). As CEO Evan Spiegel explained in a recent blog post:

> *"Now that we are developing other products, like Spectacles, we need a name that goes beyond just one product – but doesn't lose the familiarity and fun of our team and brand."*

This could pave the way for serious new lines of business for this ambitious young company.

Snapchat's strategy is representative of a growing trend as networks ditch their "**social**" tag. Pinterest is now a "**catalogue of ideas**," rather than a social network. Even Twitter followed suit - in April, they switched their designation from a "**Social Network**" to a "**News**" app in the Apple Store. What's behind the shift in social strategy? It's about evolving social media's role from a fun distraction, to a vital everyday behavior... just like breathing.

There are several routes that social networks could take to achieve that level of importance - they could merge into existing conglomerates (*Linkedin acquired by Microsoft*) build their own empire through diversification (*Facebook or Snap*), or try existing as small "**outsiders**". One thing is certain: **they're building momentum as big** (*digital*) brands. And as fragmented as the landscape was, the time of consolidation has arrived.

## The "Super reality" wave.

Oculus Rift, PlayStation VR, Gear VR, HTC Vive ... they may not be household names just yet, but these Virtual Reality (VR) headsets will be knocking at your door soon enough. For the uninitiated, VR is an immersive experience in which your head movements are tracked in a three-dimensional world, thanks to the use of headsets and mobile devices. And this year, **ALL the major players** from the GAFAs (*Google*, *Apple*, *facebook*, *Amazon*) to Mainstream Media like The New York Times want a bite of this juicy market.

Speaking of juicy, you probably heard of a little game called Pokemon GO that blurred the line between the physical and the digital. This wildly popular app gave players just a taste of augmented reality ... and left them starving for more.

And, of course, there's mega-influencer, Facebook. At their F8 conference back in April, Facebook unveiled its roadmap for the next 10 years. As expected, it's heavily focused on **AI** / **VR** and **AR**.

With the acquisition of Oculus Rift, Mark Zuckerberg is already making good on his Virtual Reality ambitions - and there's plenty more to come. Thanks to their acquisition of Two Big Ears (*a spatial audio company*) Facebook is creating an ambient information environment. Here, people will tap into the experience so easily that it will flow through their lives like electricity or blood through their veins.



Zuckerberg recently announced that the future VR headsets will be the size of a normal pair of glasses, and will handle augmented and virtual reality at the same time. It's a path that resonates with Google CEO Sundar Pichai as well. "*In the long run*" Pichai pointed out,

> *"We will evolve from a mobile first world to an AI first world."*

But even that sounds rather tame compared to Zuckerberg's medium-range goal of… teleportation by 2025. You read that right.

But Facebook isn't the only one with bold plans. Snapchat has long had augmented reality inspired Lenses, and now they're rumored to have big plans moving forward. First, they purchased smarteyeglass developer Vergence Labs in 2014. And then there was the launch of Spectacles in September and it's rebranding to Snap. Even Twitter, seemingly mum on the subject, hired a Director of VR and AR to "*Empower us all in the spatial computing revolution.*"

What's the key takeaway for brands? Social Networks are no longer standalone. They're becoming more like electricity – less visible and yet more deeply embedded in people's lives. As Dan Lynch (*Interop and SRI International*) wrote:

> *"The most useful impact is the ability to connect people. From that, everything flows."*

Brands will need to adapt to this new "*ambient information environment*" by integrating new technologies such as **VR**, **AR**, and **IA**.

The challenge for brands lies in creating "*electronic empathy*" in order to connect humans in a deeper, more profound way.

## **The robots are here!...** Well chatbots at least.

As consumers dump traditional networks in favor of messaging apps, brands are taking notice.

2014 marked the first time brands reached out to consumers via messaging apps. Companies such as Feeligo promote the use of "**branded stickers**" in private conversation areas, for advertisers to connect with their audiences. These customized digital stickers immerse consumers in the universe of the brand, and are available free within the platforms.

In 2016, chatbots emerged as another major trend to watch. Chatbots are applications that reproduce codes of a conversation in order to generate automated communication with users. Thanks to chatbots, it's now possible to order an Uber, manage dinner reservations, and secure airline tickets all via text message. Convenient, fast, and accessible via smartphones, bots may well revolutionize online sales and give birth to "**conversational e-commerce**" – a whole new Social AI customer service. As chatbot technology develops on messaging platforms, we expect it to become much more prominent in 2017.

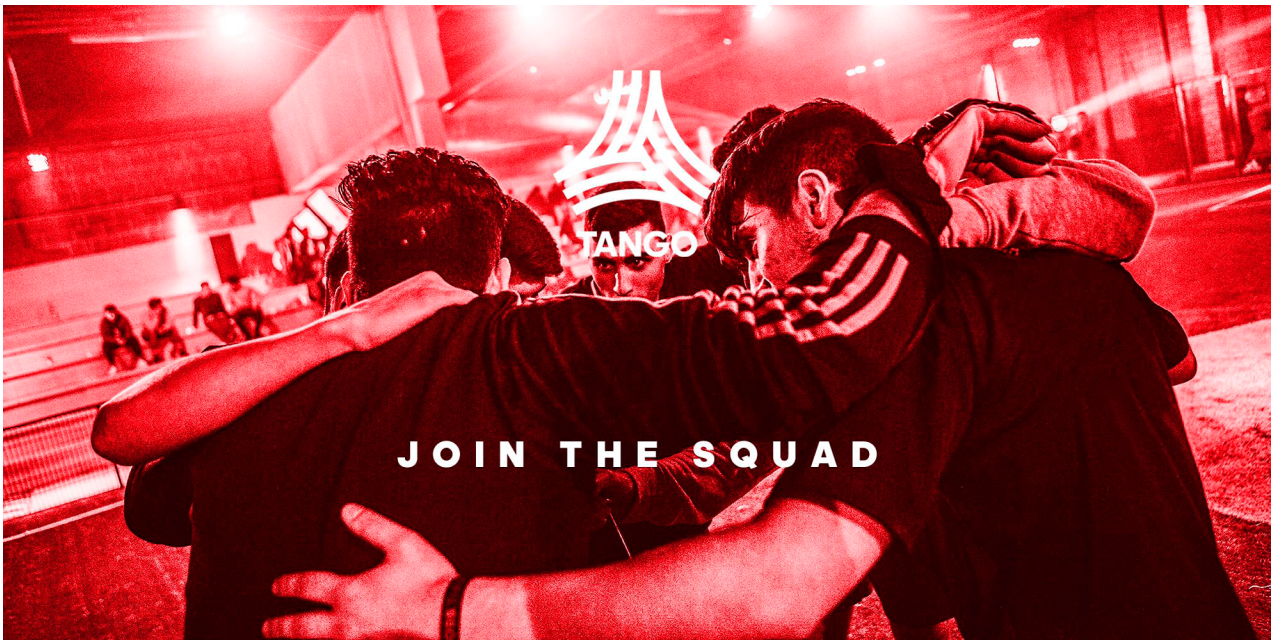
But before you put all your eggs in one basket, it's prudent to consider the following:

• **The human connection** - There is strong evidence to suggest that brands are best served with a balanced approach: AI and Human. For instance, Facebook's virtual assistant 'M' employs human-powered interactions. This produces a more authentic glimpse of its users desires than just automated Chatbots could.

• **Chatbots as a Co-star** - With all the expectations, it's worth noting that chatbots are but one tool in your marketing arsenal. When targeting the "**dark social**" world *(sharing which takes place in private)*, it's no longer the brands that initiate dialog with their consumers, but users who initiate a dialog with brands. This flips marketing strategy on its head and forces brands to cultivate a more personalized human connection, while maintaining the privacy of their audience.

The key takeaway? **Chatbots are valuable**, but they can't do it all. Brands need diverse forward-thinking marketing strategies.

Adidas is an excellent example of a brand completely redefining its influencer marketing through dark channels - back in May, Adidas launched communities for hyper-connected football obsessives. These "Tango Squads" *(about 200 members each and growing)* operate on direct messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and Line. They're managed by an Adidas in-house team that shares exclusive content and product news with the squads before it is publicly revealed through Adidas official channels.



Why the bold move by Adidas?

Their global communication director, Florian Alt in a post for Marketing Week, put it this way:

> *"It's not about sheer reach, what the hyper-connected kids bring is mass awareness. These are the guys who will push out your stories and content. They give it longevity and authenticity, because they are talking in a private messaging environment. If it comes as a referral from your mate, you're much more likely to pick it up than if it comes from a brand."*

Alt went on to argue that content is perceived as far more authentic if distributed to 500 kids with 2,000 followers each, than if it's delivered to one global influencer with a million followers.

It's a major strategy shift for large brands, but there's no arguing with the results. And if brands of all sizes wish to grow their relevance with desirable demographics, they need to follow suit and tap into the world of dark social.

# Content Marketing.

Content marketing is a great promotional tool for businesses and has become one of the most trusted mediums by consumers - in fact, it's been found to outrank TV and radio ads, billboards and magazine and newspaper ads in terms of trustworthiness.

This is why so many businesses are spending more on content marketing, and this trend looks set to continue for the simple reason that it works.

So, if you're not using content marketing yet to promote your business, 2017 is the **perfect time to start**.

## Video rules all.

Video has exploded in 2016 and the next year presents the perfect opportunity for marketers and businesses to catch up with this trend. But we will talk more about it in the **Video Marketing for 2017** chapter.

## Other forms of visual content.

Although video is extremely popular right now, other forms of visual content are still performing at very high rates. Images, infographics, slide presentations, are all still very popular and can help to drive more engagement and conversions for your business.

Consumers want more than just text only content and search engines are also finding better ways of indexing visual content, which means it can also help with search engine optimization.

Try to use as much visual content as possible on your website, and relevant images within your blog posts, social media, even if you're not on a visual-only platform like Instagram, visual content will still help you drive more engagement on your updates and clicks on the links you share.

Be courageous and try to create unique visual content for your content marketing strategy, rather than use stock images.

## Interactive content.

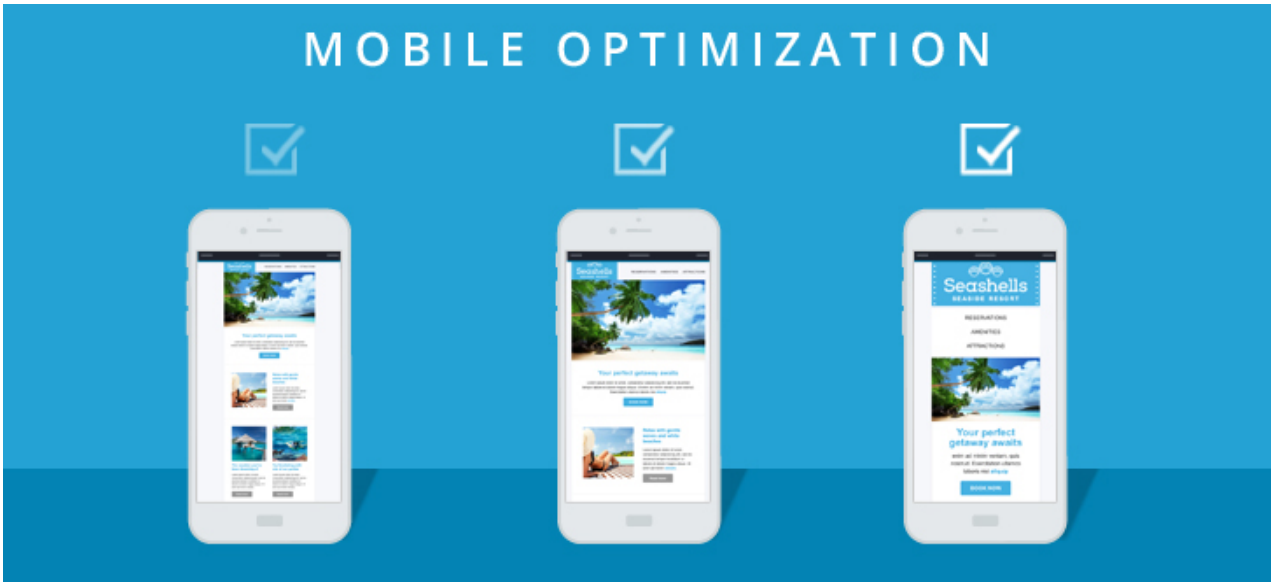
People like to be more involved, and interactive content provides the perfect opportunity for your client or potential prospect to be more active.

As a content marketer, one of the biggest goals is to drive as much as engagement as possible and interactive content - by definition - helps you do that.

Interactive content is also much less used than other forms of content, so it can help you stand out. Interactive content also appeals to users on a different level, since they get to be a part of it as active participants and not just consumers.
You don't need to come up with interactive content every week though – it's one of those types of content that you can use more sparsely to grow your engagement and increase your reach from time to time.

## Mobile Device Optimization.

The number of people using mobile devices to check their social media and for consuming content is growing at a very fast rate. As an example, mobile video plays have gone up **844%** between 2012 in 2015. In fact, between 2014 and 2015 alone, that number grew by **74%**.




And it's not just videos that have grown in popularity on mobile, but all kinds of content. People have their phones and tablets with them everywhere they go, they have Internet and they also have a lot of time that they need to fill up while they're in transit. They're looking to consume content, be their provider.

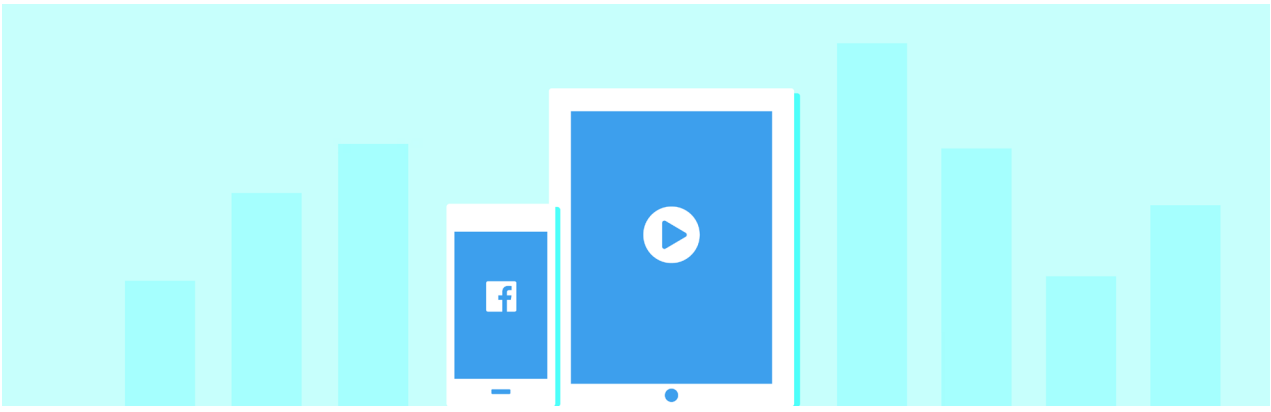
All of this means that marketers need to make sure that their content is properly optimized for all kinds of mobile devices, or else people will simply not bother with checking them out. After all, there's so much great content available, why should they lose any time on something that they can't see or read comfortably?
Content marketing is going to be a cut-throat industry in 2017, even more so than this year. Marketers will have to think outside the box in order to stand out from the crowd.

# Social Media.

First let's start with the predictions for each of the major social platforms in 2017, starting with the big one – Mark Zuckerberg's ever-expanding giant.

## Facebook.

2016 has been another huge year for Facebook. They've added 197 million more monthly active users and recently crossed a billion mobile only MAU for the first time. The future of the network – as reiterated by Zuckerberg in their most recent earnings call - is video, with more emphasis to be put on live-streaming and 360 content in particular over the next 12 months. And that will cause a significant shift in the platform – here's what you can expect.



**Video first** – Facebook's been refining their focus on video for some time, and you can expect this to continue into next year. Just recently, Facebook announced a trial of a new camera option which Zuckerberg sees as eventually taking over from the text box as the default status update tool. The new camera will be easily accessible from the home

screen and will appear with a Snapchat-style interface, including new visual features like masks and other interactive tools.
This new option – the latest in Facebook's efforts to beat out Snapchat – is currently being trialed in Ireland and will likely be rolled out to all regions early in the new year. And, importantly, it'll include new visual enhancement features that go beyond those that are currently available on Snapchat.

The impetus here is obvious – Facebook sees that the next generation of users are gravitating towards this **'camera-first'** style of interaction, and they want to appeal to those users to keep them on Facebook. A big driver in getting new people interested in Snapchat is their cool visual tools like Lenses – if Facebook can provide better, more innovative tools on this front, that might help them keep those users on Facebook instead. After all, most people already have larger established networks of their friends on Facebook, why not just use Facebook's **"Lenses"** instead?

And while this won't kill Snapchat, it will slow their growth, which will increase the pressure on Evan Spiegel to innovate faster. And that could be good or bad, depending on how they're able to execute.

You might not personally be that into selfies and broadcasting yourself, but this will become more and more common on Facebook, advancing the platform's shift towards becoming **"mostly video"** by 2020.




**Facebook Live** – Live has seen major growth in the past year. According to Facebook, the number of people broadcasting via Facebook Live has increased 4X since May, while live videos are drawing significantly more engagement than other types of posts on the network. That said, the real money in live-streaming is likely to come via established broadcasters, as opposed to everyday users.

Nevertheless, expect Facebook to keep pushing the issue on Live and working to unseat Periscope (*if they haven't already*) as the key live-streaming platform. Facebook's already launched a new advertising push to get more everyday users broadcasting, and that focus will continue to be a priority into 2017. On top of this, expect Facebook to announce more live-streaming partnerships with major broadcasters and move to screen more exclusive content through Facebook. It wouldn't be a surprise to one day see people tuning into the Facebook breakfast show, as opposed to Good Morning America and the likes – in the next

12 months, that's the type of premium content you can expect. Exclusive, Facebook TV broadcasts that draw a larger audience to Live – both in terms of viewers and creators.

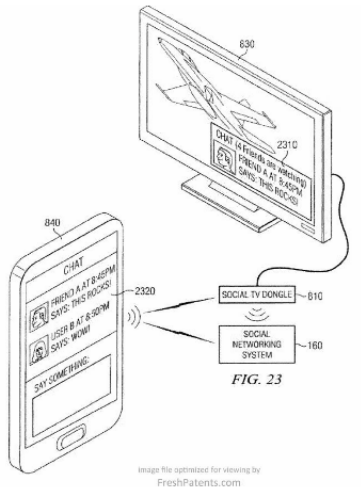
But the real win on this front will be reaching people's home TV screens. While more and more people are consuming content online, the TV set remains the primary viewing device - our homes are constructed around the TV being the key entertainment source. In order to really make Facebook a genuine competitor for traditional TV broadcasters, Facebook needs an easy way for people to connect Facebook to their TV set.

They're already making moves on this – last month, Facebook released a new and improved way to stream Facebook content to your TV via Apple TV or Google Chromecast.

And that's a positive first step, but it's still only reaching a small percentage of the TV viewing audience (*there are around 25 million Apple TV units in circulation and 30 million Chromecast devices*). In order to really make a splash, Facebook will likely need to provide another alternative that makes it easier to everyone to connect their TV to Facebook.

They're already working on this – a patent filed last year shows that Facebook is working on their own TV dongle that would act as a conduit between your phone and the TV set.



But that would mean Facebook would need to move into commercial hardware production, something that's a big step to take. If the payoff is there, however, and it can significantly boost their viewing audience, I'd expect Facebook to do it – I actually wouldn't be surprised to see the platform **provide such connective devices for free**, purely to drive future uptake.

If they can do this, that's the next big threshold for Live, that's what will take live-streaming to the mainstream in a big way, disrupting all aspects of traditional TV as we know it. It's big, it's ambitious, but no one is better placed to pull it off than Zuck and Co. Expect movement on this around the middle of next year.




**Virtual Reality** – But the next frontier for Facebook is virtual reality, and this will also become the thing everyone's talking about next year. But don't expect VR to have an all-consuming entertainment takeover effect right off the bat.

First off, the cost of a fully operative VR-enabled system is still fair re-

strictive. An Oculus Rift headset will set you back **$ 599.00**, and that's without the Touch controllers – the combo of the two costs **$ 798.00**, as per the Oculus website. You also need a high-end PC to effectively run Oculus content, so all up you're looking at upwards of **$ 1,500.00** for an Oculus VR setup, putting it out of the reach for most consumers.



The other element to consider is that while virtual reality will be the next big thing, at present, there's not a heap of content out there. Anyone who's ever used a Google Cardboard device knows this – while the experience is great, there's just not enough good content to keep you engaged - and that's not even next-level VR material. Because of this, VR is still a while off becoming an essential component, but momentum will continue to build in 2017, with new use-cases and opportunities showcased by Facebook and other providers (*and worth noting, Google's Daydream View headsets go on sale this week*).



In order to boost the appeal of VR, however, Facebook will be ramping up those mid-step options, including 360 content. Facebook's been quietly advancing the presence of 360 videos and photos on the platform, providing the ability for all users to upload 360 photos back in June.

In 2017, expect Facebook to provide more tools to help more users get on the 360 bandwagon, while also giving 360 material a reach boost in the News Feed, providing extra incentive for brands to create 360 content.

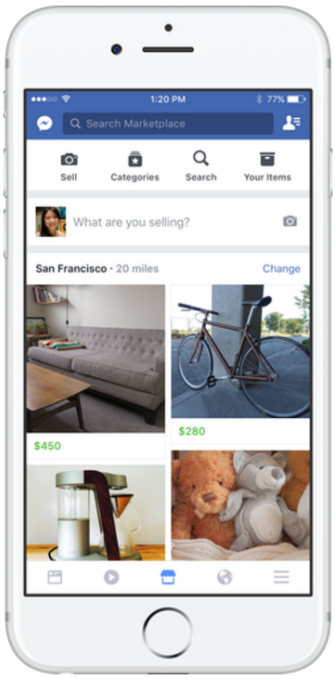
But the biggest shift next year, I'm predicting, will be the arrival of at least one 360 movie. That'll bring 360/VR into the wider public consciousness in a big way, and will get people buzzing about the next level of communication. And Facebook will be right in the middle of it. After that happens – or a similar, significant 360 release – everyday users will be given more ways to create their own 360 content, and that will usher in the next stage of the evolution towards VR.



Also, expect Facebook to add new augmented reality elements to Facebook Live, Instagram Stories and their new camera option, highlighting the future of interacting in the virtual world.

**Facebook Search** – One lesser discussed aspect of Facebook's evolution has been the growth of on-platform search. As noted by Zuckerberg back in June, Facebook's now facilitating more than **2 billion** on-platform searches every day, with search activity rising **33%** in just nine months. The platform's now working to actively boost this trend, introducing new recommendation and event tools to help users find more of what they're after, as well as their new marketplace option to facilitate more common on-platform search activities.

This not only helps Facebook boost on-platform engagement, but it also keeps those users away from Google – if Facebook can provide more active options on this front, that'll help boost their position as the only website users ever need to visit.




Facebook has tried to improve their search functionality several times, with Graph Search, then later with their improved, real-time search and discovery tools, which, as evidence by the above stats, has obviously boosted on-platform search activity, but neither of these options have been able to take optimal advantage of Facebook's full knowledge graph. On one hand, Facebook don't want to provide too much data access, as it's that knowledge graph that fuels their ad targeting system. But on the other, the more traffic they can take from Google the better.

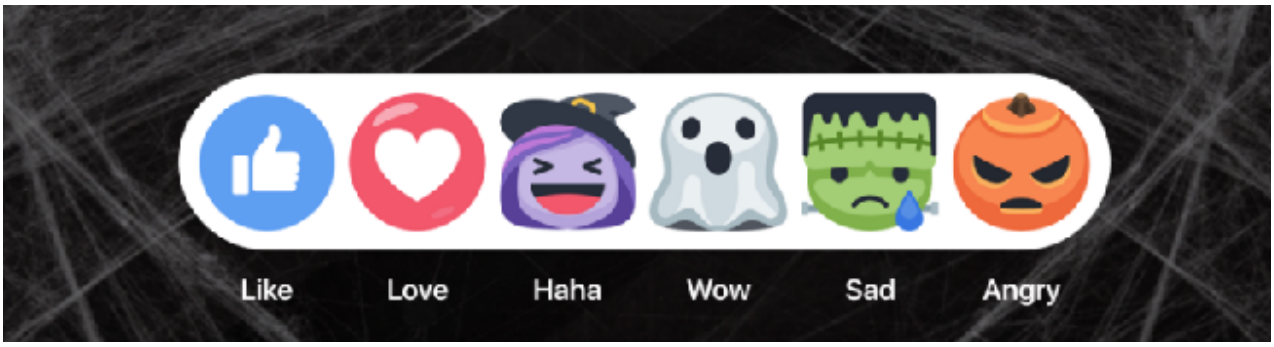
Facebook is no doubt working on new, improved search tools, which will utilize their advanced machine learning to index more content, including images and video, and provide better, automated guidance tools. Expect to see them release something on this in the new year, combining more search capabilities via machine learning, based on what people are typing in their status updates.

**Messenger Business** - Facebook's been working to build out Messenger as a new platform for direct connection with brands - Zuckerberg says that Messenger is in stage two of their three tiered app development framework. And while more than 33,000 automated bots are now active on the platform, consumer adoption of Messenger bots has been slow. Part of this is likely due to a perceptual shift - people are used to communicating with friends via Messenger, not brands, and they can browse products or find out information easily via other sources, like Google - the definitive use-case for Messenger business hasn't yet been proven to the wider audience.

Facebook will continue to push Messenger bots, but in 2017, expect them to start providing more compelling use-cases from the business perspective - i.e. the use of Messenger bots to automate these simple interactions will save you money in labor costs. That may also mean Facebook needs to simplify the bot creation process to appeal to smaller brands who would see the most benefit from such cost reductions. If they can get businesses promoting Messenger and bots on their behalf, that'll take a lot of pressure off Facebook to do all the pitching, and will lead to more people adopting Messenger for direct engagement with brands, boosting the the platform. The hard part, of course, is simplifying the bot creation process. Expect Facebook to provide a means for businesses to create their own Bot workflow, or provide a cheaper, easier way for smaller brands to work with Facebook and their development partners to do so.
Some of the current use case for bots are interesting - the platform's recently added eBay and Shopify integrations, adding to what's on offer via message. But in order to get people using bots, they need to get the businesses themselves advocating as to why people would want to connect in this way. That'll be the next big push for Messenger bots.
Also, another interesting bot application - diagnosing medical conditions based on users inputting their symptoms. Technical processes like this may also provide compelling examples to drive increased adoption.

**Reactions** - There's an interesting question around what becomes of Facebook's Like alternatives - their expressive '**Reactions**' emoji-set. Made available to all users back in February, the intention was to provide Facebook with more ways to express their responses more easily, but research has shown that adoption of Reactions thus far has been poor. A recent report found that Likes still make up almost **93%** of all such responses on the platform, showing that most users haven't changed their behaviors despite the new options being present.

Does this mean Reactions is a failure? Facebook has found other ways to spice them up, releasing custom, event-themed Reactions, including one to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Star Trek and more recently, a Halloween set.




The problem is that those fun characters also found themselves in some less than ideal placements on topical stories.




So while it does seem that Facebook could potentially use Reactions as an advertising tool, and boost interest in the option at the same time,

there are additional considerations like this to keep in mind. Given this, it may be better for Facebook to just remove them - but then again, they do provide additional value within Facebook Live broadcasts, giving viewers a wider range of ways to express their appreciation as they watch.

Given this, I'd expect Reactions to remain, and I do expect to see more themed Reactions, including possibly a few promotional tie-ins - you can imagine movie studios would be keen to get in on this. But at the same time, I don't think Reactions are going to become a significant part of the Facebook experience, nor would I expect them to be providing a new wealth of audience data, as originally expected. Facebook's got other priorities, and the user response has been pretty clear.



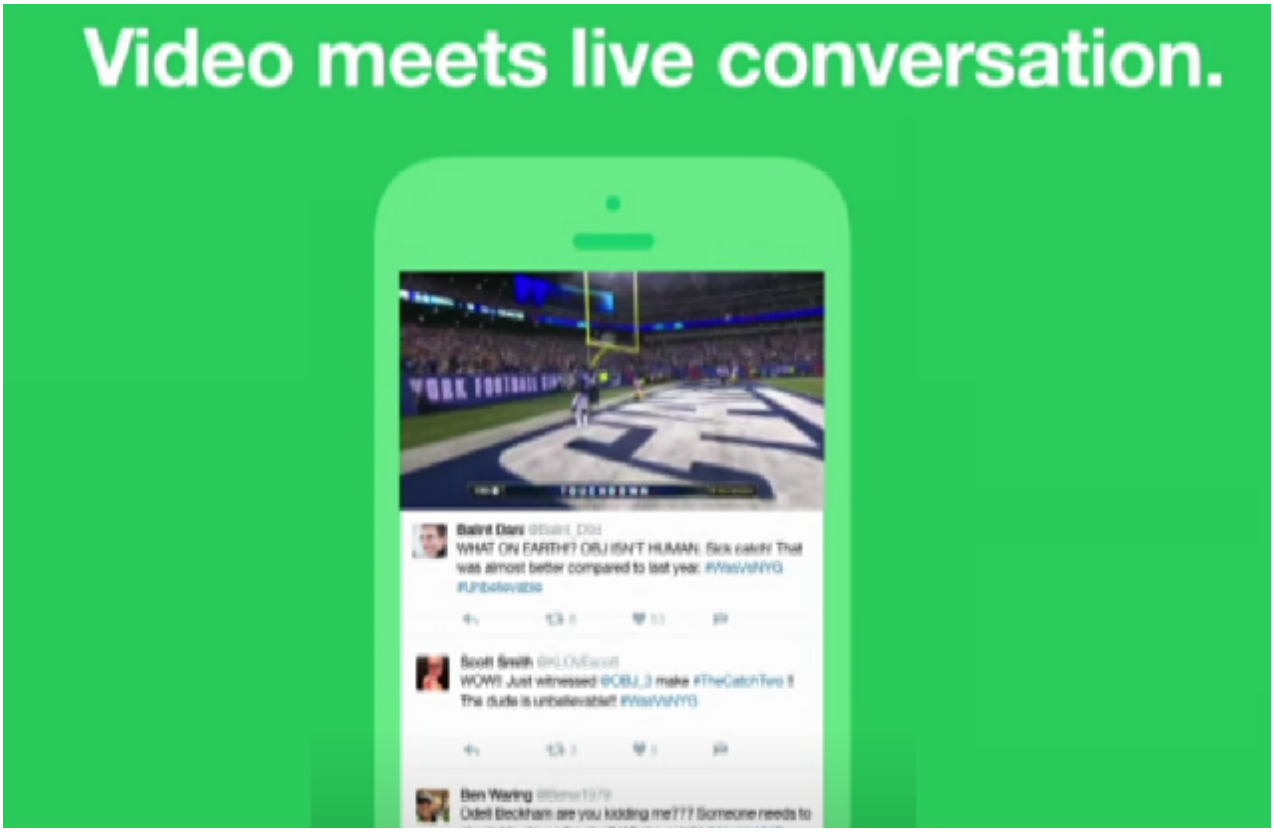
## Twitter.

No platform's future has been more discussed that Twitter in 2016. The micro-blog giant has faced all sorts of challenges and problems, and none of them, as yet, have been resolved. So what does Twitter do next? There are a few areas in which we'll see Twitter increase their focus.

**Live-streaming** – It's no secret that Twitter's placing big bets on live-streaming. The platform recently reiterated this at their "#Whats-Next" event, with COO Adam Bain saying that

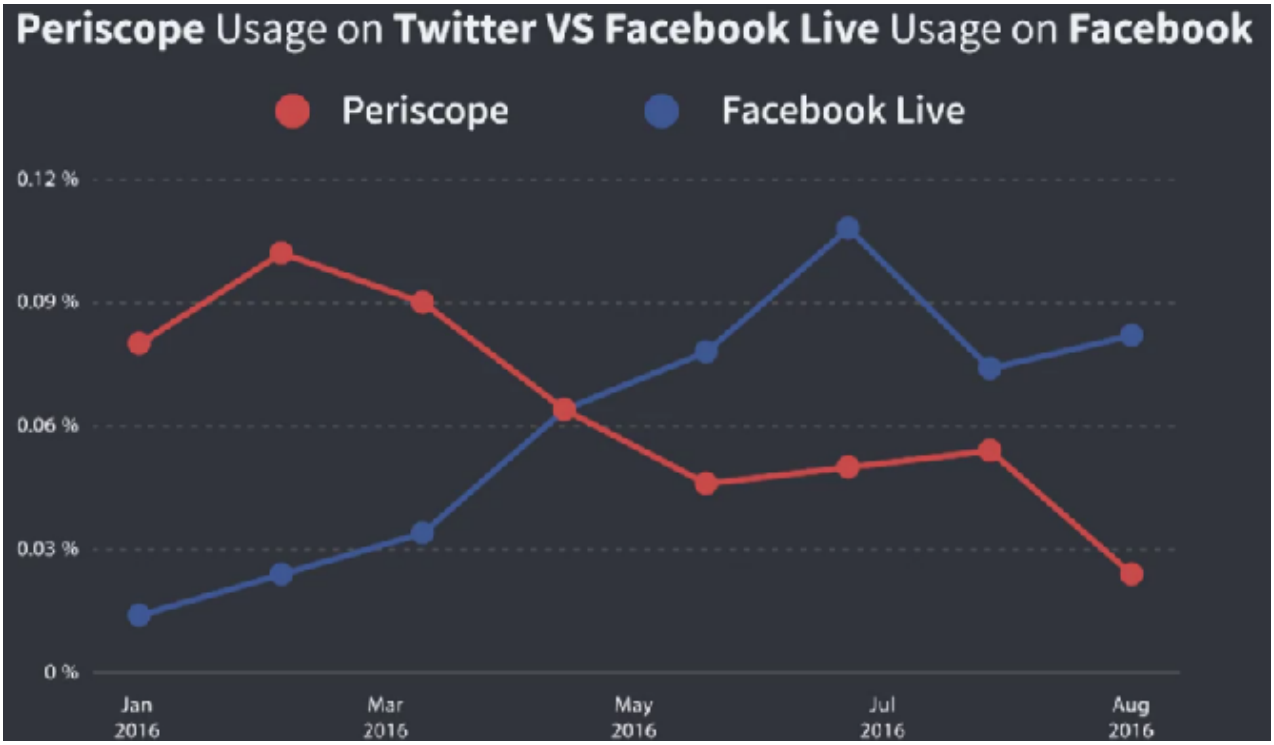
*"Live is the purest embodiment of what the platform is all about, enabling users to be part of what's happening right now, at any given time."*

As such, Twitter's concentrating on making live content a centrepiece of the Twitter experience – and with research showing that one in two Twitter users are active on the platform while watching TV, that focus makes sense. But with Facebook also working to appeal to that same audience, the challenge is significant.




Twitter's hoping to use their live event coverage as the next stage of the platform's growth, integrating Twitter and TV together so we're no longer talking about '**second-screening**', it'll just be the screen. And it might just work – definitely, Twitter, as a platform, is more conducive to live event discussion than Facebook, but the trick, as with Zuck and Co, lies in getting Twitter's live content onto people's TV screens. Twitter's working on this, but Facebook has more resources – expect both to announce new home TV set integrations in the next year, along with more programming. Each will resonate with some audiences, but the actual content is what will ultimately drive their success. On this front, Twitter has **deals with several major sports**, putting them in a good position to at least compete for those eyeballs.

In terms of live-streaming for individuals, Periscope's reportedly already struggling to keep up with Facebook Live, as per data from Socialbakers.

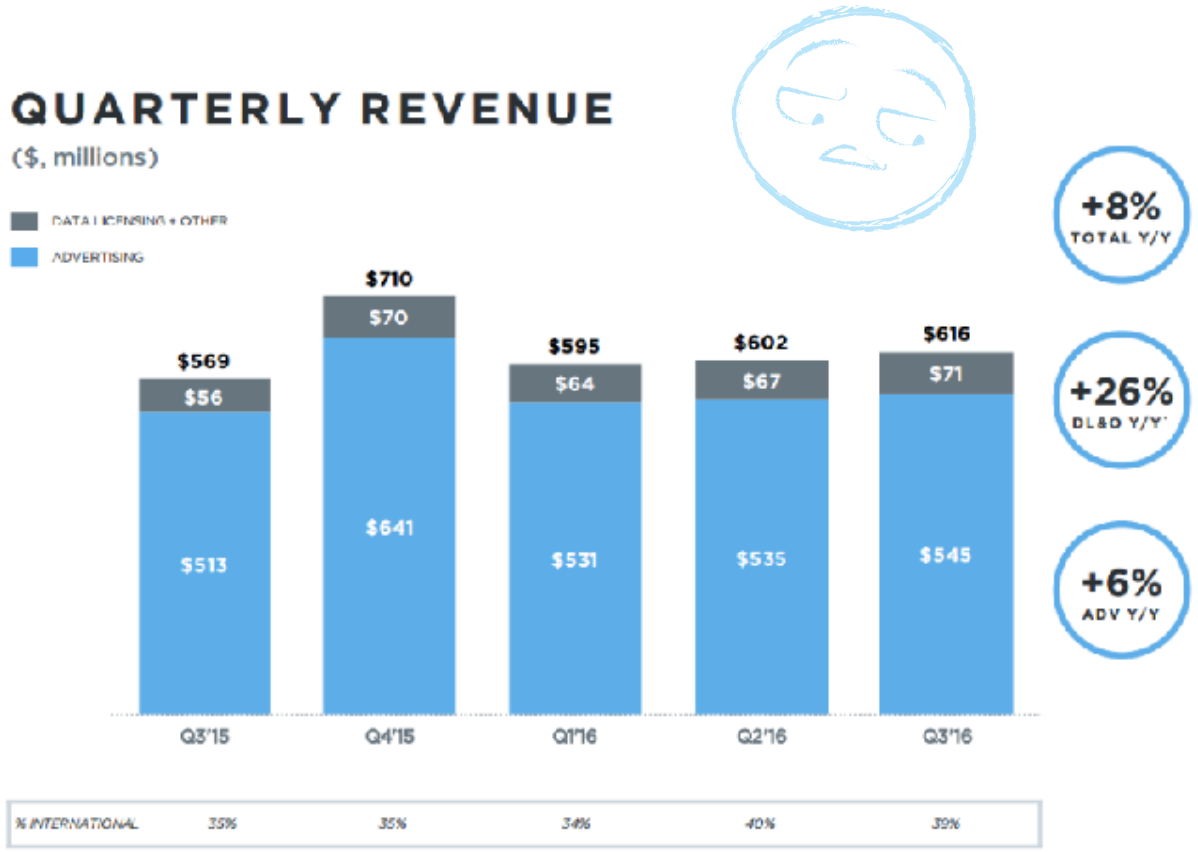



You can see why it would be hard for Periscope to compete on this front, Facebook is just so much bigger - yet at the same time, Twitter wants to be the home of what's happening now, and when major events happen, like this year's House of Reps **#NoBillNoBreak** protest and the Dallas police shooting, it's Periscope content that gets the focus, providing unique, live perspective beyond the realm of traditional broadcasts.

Because of this, I can't see Twitter shutting down Periscope, as such, but I do believe Periscope will be wholly integrated into the Twitter app, and that Periscope, as a separate app, will cease to exist.
The logic of such a move would make sense – there's just no point having another side app for people to go to when you really want all the conversation on Twitter itself. Such a move obviously comes with challenges – integrating full Periscope functionality into Twitter will come with technical difficulties. But as Twitter works to streamline and refine their focus, such a move makes sense.

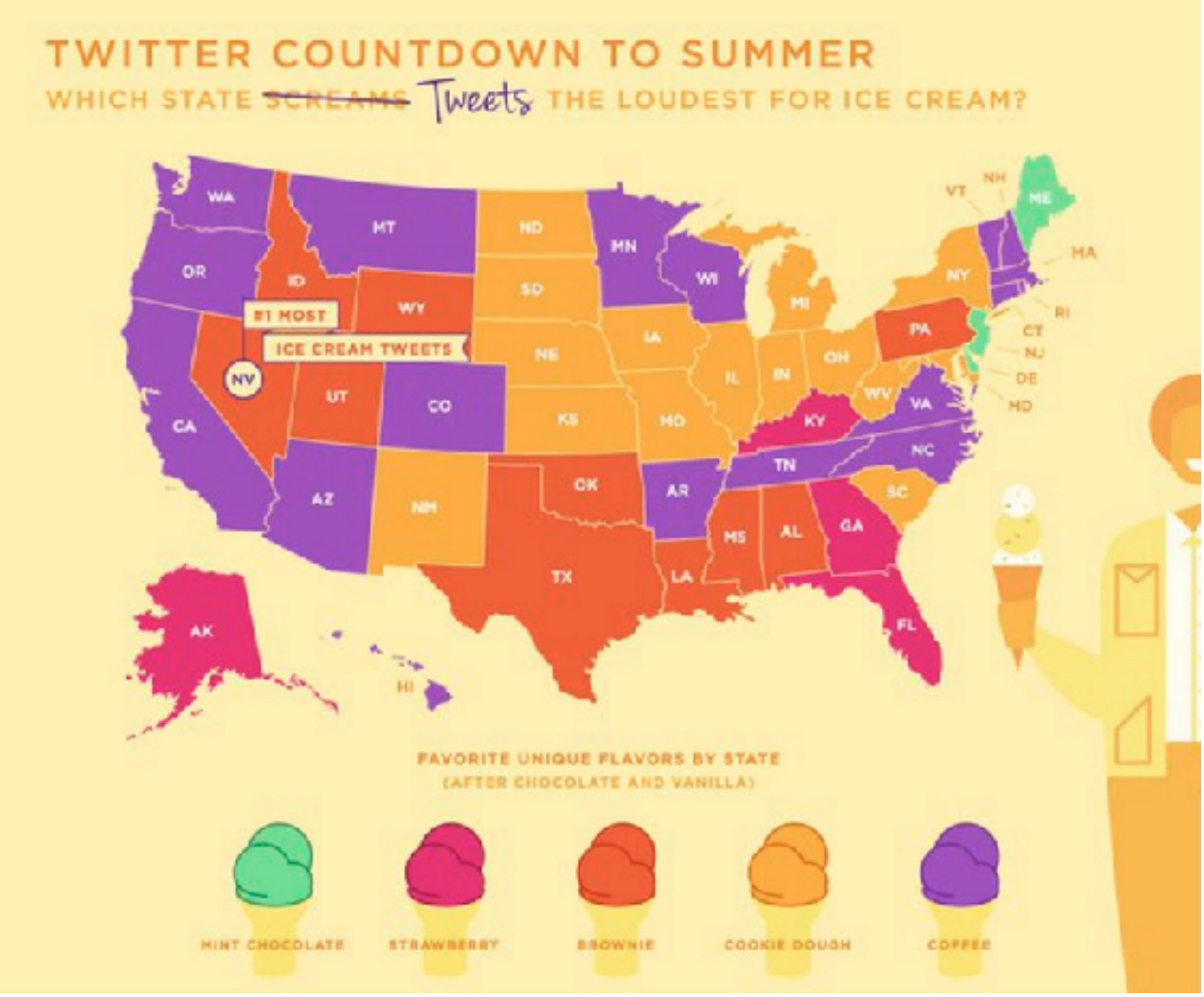
**Data value** – Over the past few years, Twitter's been working to claw back control of their data to build a more sustainable source of revenue from their available insights. The problem with having an open network – the "global town square" as Twitter like to refer to it – is that all those conversations are out in the open for anyone to analyze, and subsequently profit from.

This is exactly what's happened with Twitter – in large part, the whole social media monitoring industry has been built on the back of tweet mentions, and most of the money raised by these third party providers completely bypasses Twitter itself. Facebook have been able to build a multi-billion dollar ad network on the back of their data targeting, LinkedIn too is now looking to capitalize on their vast, protected, data set. Over time, Twitter too has been working to get more control of this element – and you can see the results in their revenue figures. In 2016 alone, Twitter's data revenue has **increased 26%.**



Twitter will look to emphasize this further in 2017 as they work to improve their revenue position – but to do this, Twitter needs to work on showcasing the value of their data not only to businesses, but also to everyday users.

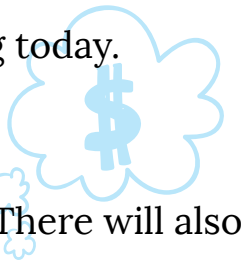
For example, no platform is better placed than Twitter to highlight wide scale behavioral trends and shifts – yet via Twitter's data blog, we normally just get light-hearted insights like this.




That's entertaining, sure, but expect Twitter to focus on showcasing why and how their data is valuable, what important insights can be gleaned via tweet beyond just basic trends. For instance, what if instead of the above, Twitter provided stats which showed how shopping trends have evolved over time via Twitter conversation, and how those discussions

have impacted on real-world sales results. What about if Twitter highlighted growing trends, based on tweet mentions, similar to how Facebook does, but more advanced, with regional breakdowns and heat maps. Twitter will be working to highlight such data uses, and provide better data tools, including improved search and discovery capacity, in the next year.

**360 Tweets** – With 360 and VR content becoming the next big thing, Twitter too will be looking to get on board. This is less a prediction than a known shift – Twitter recently noted that they're looking to release something on this front early in the new year. What form 360 video in tweets will take? I don't know, but Twitter's VP of Ad Development John McFarland has noted that it'll be better than the types of 360 content we're seeing today.



**For sale?** – There will also be ongoing speculation about a possible sale, and/or a leadership change at Twitter. Will Twitter be sold? I expect it will, though it depends on how they're streamlining and refining efforts go from here on out. Twitter has a lot of cost overheads that they need to restructure and fix before any company will be willing to pay Twitter's asking price, and if they can slim down and hone in their efforts on the key points that generate the most interest, and ultimately, revenue, that'll make the platform a far more appealing proposition. But in doing so, they may also find that they can go it alone, especially if live-streaming picks up the way they hope.

By mid-2017, we'll know where the platform is at and if their efforts are working. If they're not, Twitter will be sold, and likely for a fair bit less than they're currently asking.

That said, I do think we'll see a leadership change in 2017 either way. Jack Dorsey isn't necessarily doing a bad job, but as Twitter looks to really zone in on the key elements that matter, they could do with a more experienced, and less emotionally attached, CEO who can take the platform to that next stage, whatever that may be. Dorsey is currently the CEO of two companies, and he looks to have given all he can in ideas and changes. I do think, one way or another, we'll see a new Twitter CEO.



**Edit Tweets** – I can't see them adding this anytime soon. The fact that they've now held out on it so long seems to suggest it's just not going to happen. For one, it only appeals to existing users who probably aren't going to stop using the platform anyway. In addition, it takes away resources from other elements that are critical concern – like tackling on-platform trolls and bullying.
That said, you never know.

**On-Platform Abuse** – Twitter will need to take some big, bold steps on this, even if only to show just how seriously they're taking the issue. They've introduced new tools and options this year, and have more coming, but they'll need to announce something significant on this front early in the new year to really underline their efforts. Twitter's been improving their machine learning capacity, I'd expect this is what they'll use to detect and eliminate more hate speech and abuse.

## Instagram.

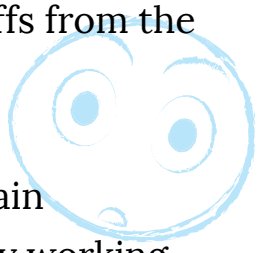
**Stabilization** – Instagram has seen some pretty big changes in 2016, including the expansion of ads on the platform, the introduction of a feed algorithm and the arrival of Stories. Given this, and the cumulative effect they've had on the user experience, I'd expect Instagram to have a period of stabilization in 2017 as they let these new features settle and grow amongst the audience.
That's not to say Instagram will be resting – both of these features will continue to evolve, but I wouldn't expect any more wide-scale changes of this magnitude for some time.

**eCommerce** – In terms of their ad options, Instagram has already flagged the next level of product ads on the platform, in the form of shopping tags.



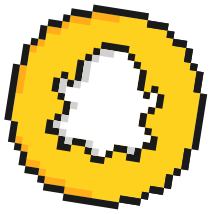
In itself, this is a significant shift – it'll take Instagram well beyond a platform focused on images and art, and well towards becoming a fully fledged shopping network. But the user numbers back up such implementation – research shows that 60% of Instagrammers learn about products and services on the app, while 75% take actions like visiting sites, searching, or telling a friend after being influenced by a post on Instagram. The introduction of shopping tags will eventually change the perception of the platform, and as such, Instagram will likely roll them out slowly. As interesting as the new option is, I wouldn't expect them to be made widely available for some time yet.

**Stories** – Facebook's boldest challenge to Snapchat yet, Stories is already being used by 100 million Instagrammers daily. The thing is, Instagram announced that number back in August and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg reiterated the exact same usage stat last month. Does that mean usage of Stories hasn't grown?
It's hard to know if there's anything to be gleaned from that, but it does suggest that Instagram still has a way to go to fully capitalize on Stories. Expect Instagram to add improved visual features like MSQRD video masks and Facebook's own new reactive filters to enhance Stories and make it a more viable option. Instagram will also look to improve the speed and lag issues reported by some users, while working to better emphasize Stories creators in Explore in order to boost the appeal of the offering to creators – particularly those who may be cast-offs from the closure of Vine.



**Visual Search** – And another area where Instagram could gain significant momentum is in visual search. Facebook's already working on visual search elements – if Instagram could add such functionality to their platform, that would provide a significant boost in data collection and ad targeting capacity. Expect an announcement on this in the first half of 2017.

## Snapchat.



**Trying Times** – 2017 is already looking like a more challenging one for Snap Inc. Though the platform is reportedly planning on an IPO early in the new year. Facebook's been accelerating its efforts to slow Snapchat's momentum, introducing Snapchat-like features into all of their apps and aiming to bring those tools into regions where Snapchat adoption is low - effectively beating them out before they even have a chance to compete.

Those efforts will be more significant than many might expect – if Facebook can stop Snapchat expanding its footprint, that'll significantly slow their progress, which could have big ramifications for a publicly listed Snap Inc. (*exhibit A: Twitter*). Facebook's also looking to introduce better, more innovative tools and features, and when combined with their scale and resources, it's hard to see Facebook losing, long term, if they want to carry out the fight with the yellow ghost.
Thus far, Snapchat has succeeded by being faster to innovate, by being cooler than these older networks. But that may not hold out in 2017 – Snapchat has a strong audience base and will continue on, but growth will be harder, and that could become a more significant problem over time.

**New Options** – That said, Snapchat is working on new ad types and formats, and they're looking to improve their analytics to boost the platform's credibility and appeal to big business. If Snapchat can continue to introduce innovative ad tools and offer better targeting, the platform will remain a desirable one for brands looking to reach that younger audience.

Really, Snapchat don't need to compete with Facebook's scale, so long as they can highlight the strength of their hold on the Millennial market. That position will becoming increasingly hard for them to hold if Facebook can come out with better options, but Snapchat does have a good record, thus far, on this front.

**Spectacles** – Spectacles will no doubt prove popular, largely because of their 115 degree angle lens.



Here's what @Spectacles means by "**circular video**". Such a simple well-executed idea.

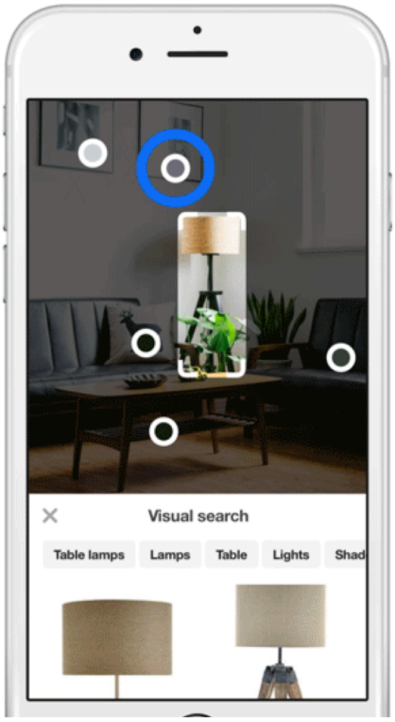
The question, really, is how popular they'll be. Snapchat has the cool cache that comes with being such a popular app amongst younger users, and Spectacles will be the thing to have after they launch, but their ongoing success and impact will be tied to what else Snapchat can offer to enhance the experience. Snap Inc. is talking about "**enhancing**

**real life experiences**" rather than simply capturing them, and on that front, it seems logical to expect that, eventually, they'll be looking to add some sort of augmented reality overlays via Spectacles, even if that's not part of the initial launch.

Tech investor Jason Calacanis predicted earlier this year that Snapchat would use Spectacles to show Snapcodes above people's heads – that's the sort of next level integration Snapchat seems to be working towards, given their recent hires and work in VR/AR tech. If they're able to do this, and offer more than what initially seems available with Spectacles, that'll help the platform maintain their momentum and their appeal among younger users.

## Pinterest.

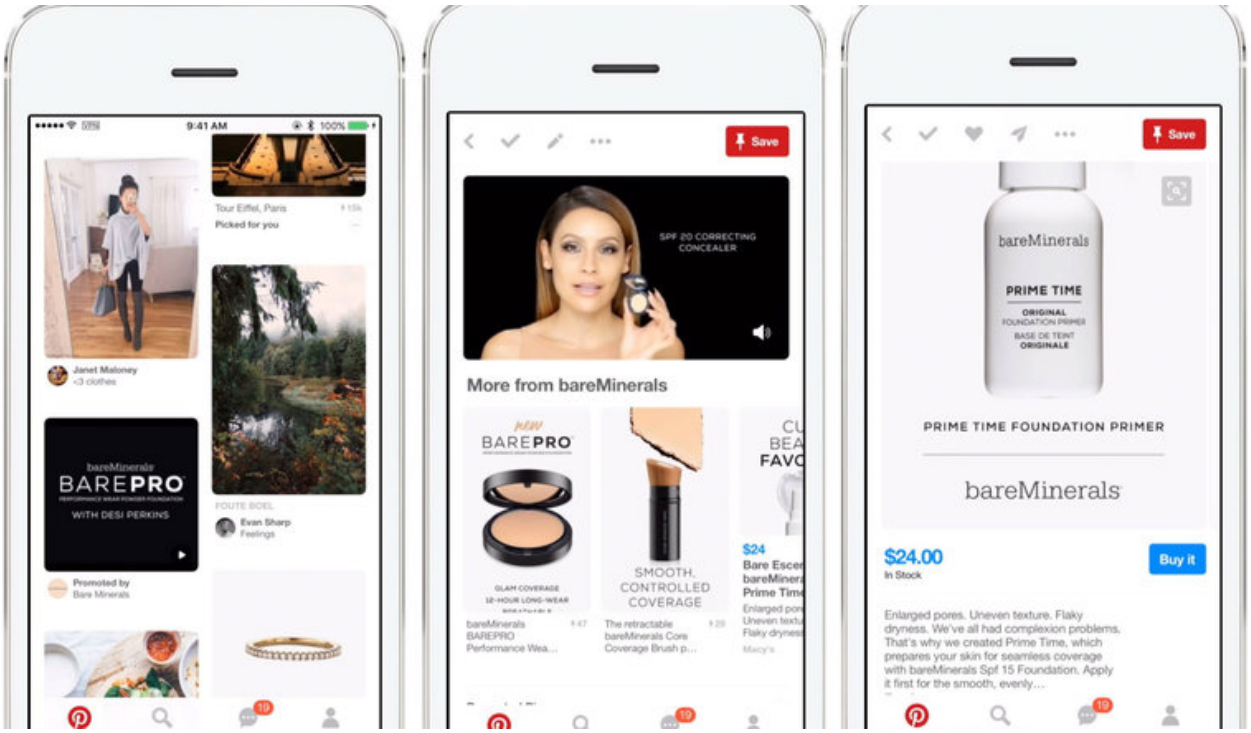
**Search Evolution** – Pinterest has made significant advances in their on-platform search functionality over the last year, particularly in regards to image recognition within Pins.



The next level of that will be the introduction of augmented reality shopping – essentially, this will enable users to place virtual objects within their homes to see how they fit. So if you see a new chair you think would look great in your house, you'll be able to overlay that object within a photo of your house to see it in place.
This is still a way off, but Pinterest has already flagged functionality which will merge their image search capacity into the real world:

> *"Pinners will soon be able to snap a photo of a single object like sneakers - and get recommendations on Pinterest, or even take a photo of an entire room and get results for multiple items."*

In itself, being able to take a photo of any real-world object and find it on the platform will be a significant step forward if Pinterest can perfect it. But the extension of that, where you can overlay objects into your real world setting, will change how people use the platform significantly.



**Pinterest Video** – Pinterest's newly introduced video ads will prove to be a big winner. That's not exactly a big prediction - there's been a 60% increase in videos on the platform in the last year – but these new video units will cause a significant shift in Pinterest best practices. As more brands use more video, it'll become the thing to get maximum attention on the site, which will force all Pinterest marketers to up their game and make the switch to more engaging, moving, Pins.

## LinkedIn.



**Data Evolution** – With the backing of Microsoft, LinkedIn is in an excellent position to build out their key platform offerings and transform HR as we know it. Thus far, LinkedIn has never really utilized their vast professional data set in any meaningful way. But latest signs show that's changing, and with that shift towards more data-driven functionality will come enhanced use cases for LinkedIn, both as a recruitment and advertising platform.

For recruiters, LinkedIn's data banks will enable them to make smarter hiring decisions, and eventually even automate the selection process to a large degree, based on platform-defined best matches. This same process will also help job-seekers and graduates improve their standing, as LinkedIn's data resources will be able to spell out the courses they should take, the jobs that best fit and the career that will be most fulfilling for them, individually, based on insights from their 467 million user database.

Expect LinkedIn to make some big, transformative announcements on this in 2017.

**More content** – LinkedIn has seen major growth in on-platform content creation and consumption, and they're working to advance this with improved content recommendations and on-platform search tools. In addition to this, LinkedIn's also looking to add native video in an effort to become the hub for professional news and information.

Expect to see LinkedIn work to emphasize their on-platform content options, and improve their targeting to provide each user with more relevant content matches, with specific focus on LinkedIn Publisher originated posts. By providing a defined path for each user to follow to get more information on any given subject, or build their standing as an industry thought leader, LinkedIn can also better guide people towards their own resources, like LinkedIn learning. As such, your on-platform activity is not only important for your own engagement, but for LinkedIn's wider data-tracking purposes.

It's safe to say that there's a lot going on in social media circles - and I haven't even mentioned things like Instant Articles/Google AMP, Facebook's Trending News debacle and image recognition-triggered ads on Twitter.



# Video Marketing.

Social media is always in flux, and one of the biggest shifts right now is video.

The development of improved mobile technology has enabled widespread video consumption - available always and at anytime. And although video content isn't new, it's certainly growing, and will to continue to expand in 2017 and beyond.
Don't believe us?
Check out the following video statistics reported by Insivia:

• One-third of all online activity is spent watching video, **74%** to be more exact.
• The average user is exposed to **32.3 videos in a month**.
• **75% of online video viewers** have interacted with an online video ad this month.
•**75% of executives** watch work related videos on business websites at least once a week.
• **36% of online consumers** trust video ads.
• **33% of tablet users** watch more than an hour of video daily.
• **78% of people** watch at least one video online a week.
• **55% of people** watch at least one video online a day.
• **77% of business** executives watch business related video content weekly.
• **81% of organizations** feature their videos on their brand website.
Clearly, video is a stronghold that will likely thrive and grow for some time yet.



While nothing is ever certain regarding what's in store for social media, the following seven video trends can certainly be anticipated:

## The Rise of 360-Degree Videos.




A recent case study by Magnifyre revealed something noteworthy about the 360-degree video format - the average percentage of people who viewed a 360-degree video was **28.81% higher** than for the same video in a non 360-degree format. The case study also showed that twice the number of viewers watched the 360-degree video to completion.

Of course, not every video will be suitable for the 360-degree format. But one excellent use for 360 is product videos used by sales teams.

A staggering 90% of users say product videos are helpful in the purchasing-decision process. For real estate or large equipment that cannot conveniently be shown to a prospect, a 360-degree video is an effective way let someone feel like they're looking at the product "**in person.**"

## Videos Watched on Multiple Devices.

According to a Think with Google report, **85% of adults ages 18-49** use multiple devices at the same time. It also reports that two thirds of YouTube users watch YouTube on a second screen while watching TV. This tendency to watch videos across several devices (*including* TV) will probably increase.
What does all this mean for your 2017 video marketing plan? It means you shouldn't rely on one video platform if you want to reach your audience effectively.

Once you post a video, distribute it on all social platforms your audience is likely to use.

## Increased Audience Engagement on YouTube.



The Think with Google report also says **half of 18 to 34-year-old** YouTube users would drop what they're doing to watch a new video by their favorite creator. If you don't currently have a YouTube strategy

planned for 2017, now is the time to create one.
What's also noteworthy in the report is the passion among teens and Millennials who view YouTube - when asked which video sources they "**couldn't live without**," they listed YouTube as the top choice. **Four in ten** Millennials said they only trust YouTube for videos about causes they care about, while **six in ten** YouTube viewers reported that a YouTube creator has changed their lives or the way they see the world.
Even more remarkable - teens reportedly watch **64% less TV** than adults (*age 35 and older*) because they're making time for online video.

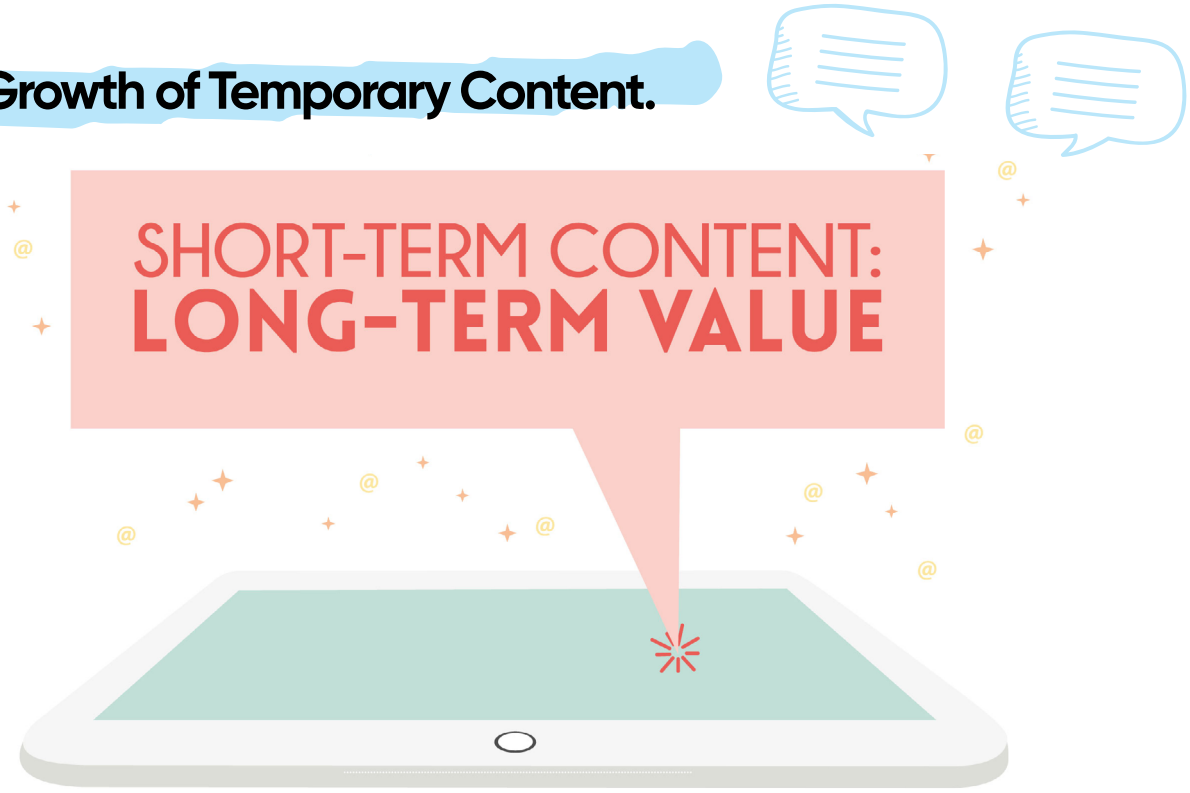
## The Growth of Live-Streaming.



Considering that Facebook recently paid media companies $50 million to produce live videos on its platform, it's clear that the popularity of live-streaming is growing. Are you ready to incorporate it into your marketing strategy?
To break into the live-streaming trend in 2017, one effective tactic is to show your audience what's "**behind the curtain**." Give them an exclusive peek into parts of your business that haven't been revealed yet.
Examples might include showing a product being made in the factory, or maybe a tour of your offices and introductions of your staff.

Also: Is your business planning to host events or conferences in 2017? Live-stream them. This will attract many from your audience who can't be at the conferences in person.
Daily check-ins and updates also work well for live-streaming. Share today's new, useful tip that's related to your product or service.
Examples: business tips, marketing tips and how-to's, and useful info like PhotoShop tips or other software shortcuts.
And along with Facebook Live, Periscope will continue to be a major live-streaming platform in 2017, as will Snapchat.

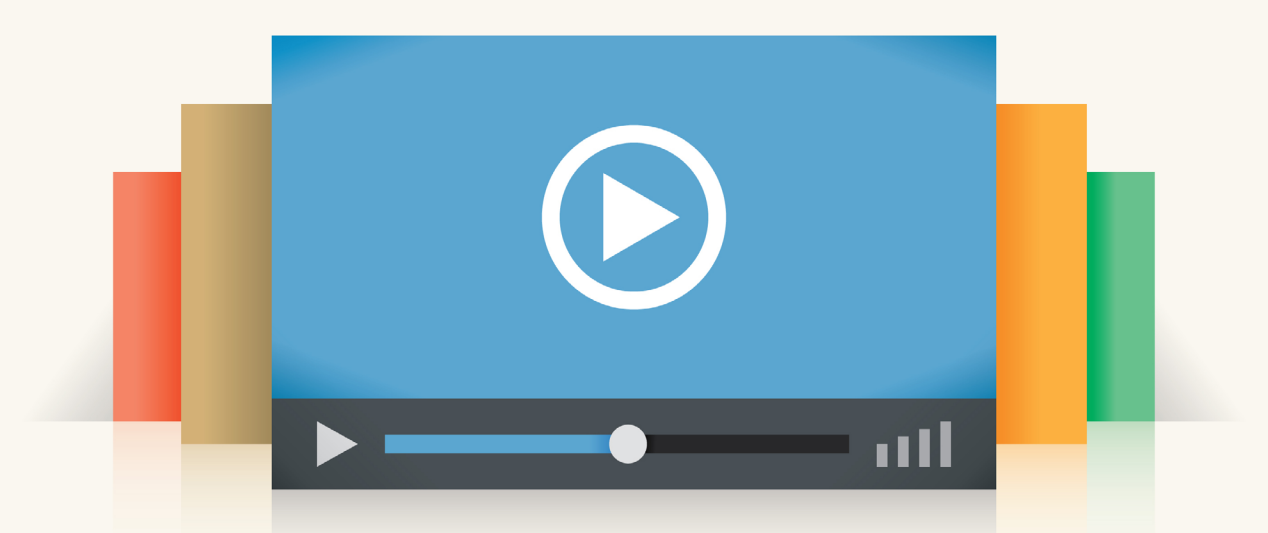
## The Growth of Temporary Content.




Speaking of Snapchat, this platform is growing in popularity – with ad revenue projected to reach almost $1 Billion in 2017. With the rise of Snapchat (*as well as Instagram*) it makes sense for many brands to also embrace "**temporary**" live video content.

Most of today's content marketing comes in the form of blogging - videos and visuals that are collected in a permanent content library or knowledge base. As such, content that disappears soon after it's published feels "**against the grain**" of what marketers are used to.
Although it may seem unnatural to see your marketing content evaporate into a digital purgatory, marketers need to remember that Snapchat is predicted to reach 217 million daily active users by the end of 2017. Millennials will make up the largest share of that audience, so if your business wants to reach Millennials, you should definitely consider posting video content on Snapchat.
Also, marketers should note that Snapchat users love the transparency of temporary videos. Because there's no editing or polishing, this type of content is perceived as both honest and engaging.

## Video Storytelling.



Storytelling has always been a part of how we communicate, and 2017 will only see more and more of it.
Telling stories through video is a highly-effective way to build excitement, nurture relationships, and motivate your audience. When done right, stories convey relatable information that evokes emotion and creates a memorable experience.

For an excellent example of some of the most effective video storytelling anywhere, check in with Gary Vaynerchuk. Also, a truly effective way to create video storytelling is to produce video testimonials and customer case studies.

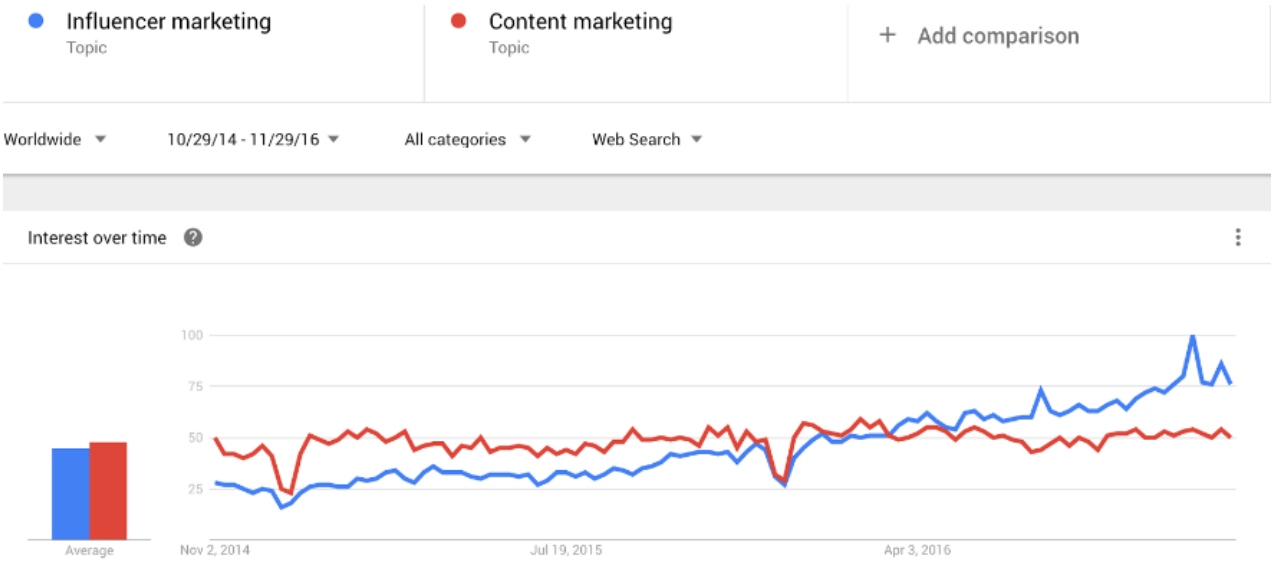
## Video Email Marketing.

Emails that incorporate video links can increase your email's CTR and open rate. Expect video content and email to increasingly meld together in 2017. Email audiences appreciate video because it's concise, convenient and interesting (*if done right*).

# Influencer Marketing.



Influencer marketing has become one of the hottest trends in the marketing landscape. With millions of pieces of content flooding the internet every minute, the cost of content clutter is rising for every brand trying to make an impact. As a result, brands have been on the hunt for new ways to get in front of their customers - the Google Trends graph below shows the shift in interest from '**content marketing**' to ' influencer marketing' over the last two years.




While the marketing landscape remains fast-paced and unpredictable, one thing is certain - influencer marketing is here to stay. And with more brands setting aside influencer marketing budget than ever before, it's important for marketers to look into the future and plan accordingly. Why? Because in this industry, tapping into growing trends presents a key opportunity to get ahead.

In the hopes of helping fellow marketers do just that, I've documented a few of my predictions for Influencer Marketing in 2017.

## The rise of rich media influencers will continue.

Gone are the days of press releases being mass mailed to bloggers - if your marketing plan involves this tactic I suggest you leave it in 2016. The content your target market is consuming has evolved, and as such, you also need to adapt your strategy if you want to make a lasting impact.

With platforms like YouTube and Instagram on the rise with consumers, more brands will turn to these rich media channels when looking to collaborate with influencers - a recent study by Google, for example, found that Millennials see YouTube stars to be more influential than celebrities.



**7 in 10**

YouTube subscribers say that YouTube creators **change and shape culture.**[5]



**6 in 10**

YouTube subscribers would follow **advice on what to buy** from their favorite creator over their favorite TV or movie personality.[6]

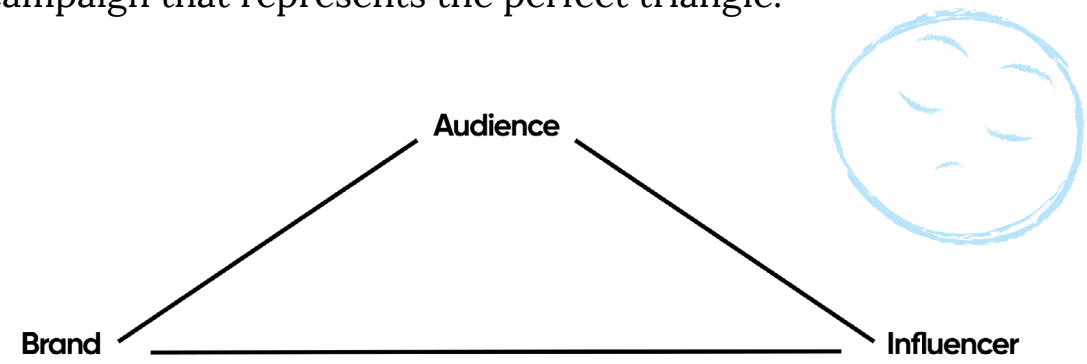
As a result of consumers demanding better quality content, and a richer experience, we'll see influencers (*and marketers*) really raise the bar in 2017 content wise. I predict Instagrammers and YouTubers will be in high demand in the years to come, and we can expect to see more campaigns like this collaboration between Mercedes Benz and Loki The Dog - Instagram's most popular wolf.

## The hype around rules and regulations will die down.

As the Influencer Marketing industry evolves, so too does the need for regulation. In 2016 we saw a great deal of hype around the introduction of the FTC guidelines. People got really worried, and I'm not sure why.

Rules and regulations are the signs of a healthy growing industry, every advertising vertical worth it's salt is regulated to protect the consumer - and personally, I feel that Influencer Marketing should be too. In essence, rules and regulations are put into place to protect the interests of influencers, brands and consumers. As these rules just become part of our day-to-day lives, the hype around them will ultimately die down.

We should think of the rules as guidelines to help us achieve our ultimate goal, a campaign that represents the perfect triangle.




**1.** The influencer benefits because they're proud of the content they've produced.
**2.** The audience benefits because they enjoy consuming this content.
**3.** The brand benefits because the content helps them meet business objectives.

If all of the above is met, will it really matter that there is an #ad tag attached?

## **The bartering mentality will slowly die** *(hopefully).*

When influencer marketing first started gaining traction in the market, brands would often offer influencers free products in exchange for a blog post or mention on social media. Many people saw this as harmless, but by accepting product as payment, a bartering culture was ultimately created.

I spend much of my job educating brands about the true value of influencers. In order for the industry to grow and mature, marketers need to evolve past bartering and get comfortable paying a standardized rate for the value influencers provide. One of the most important things our influencer platform provides is pricing guidance for both influencers and marketers. I do believe though that in the end, influencers are the ones who need to accelerate the standardization of pricing by quoting their rates - and sticking to them.



The influencer industry actually has many similarities to the evolution of retail. In the past, people would negotiate for discounts and exchanges on goods at markets, this was before prices were set and people were able to place a value on products. Standardizing the pricing in the Influencer marketing landscape is step one to evolving, and we're on the right track to get there in 2017.

## The platforms that survive, will be the ones that solve real business challenges.

This prediction is based around the evolution of influencer marketing in general. 2015 and 2016 saw a spike in new influencer marketing platforms, many saw an opportunity and built a front facing site boasting thousands of influencers as their main value point. The honest truth is, most of these influencer marketing platforms only solve a portion of the challenges marketers have - finding thousands of influencers is easy, finding the right one is hard.

The platforms that will survive are the ones that solve challenges marketers face working with influencers, not just finding them. Things like management, budget guidance, payment processing, integrated reporting, campaign insight, and most importantly - sustaining long-term relationships with the right influencers.

I predict that marketers will define the value of a platform by the challenges it helps brands and influencers overcome, rather than the size of the influencer pool available.

## Brands will own their own networks.

The strongest tactic for 2017 is that there will be a shift from platforms that "**own**" influencer networks, to platforms that allow brands to own *their own* influencer networks. Platforms that give brands the tools to build their own networks will be the ones that add the most value, mostly because you're giving the power to the marketers who understand their brands more than anyone else. I strongly believe that tech shouldn't restrict the relationship between brands and influencers, it should enable it.

If we get this right, we'll effectively give brands the power to really turn influencers into advocates, and that's the most powerful marketing tactic we have.

# The time is now.




For any brand or business that has yet to get serious about a digital marketing strategy, time is of the essence. Chances are, some (or all) of your competition is already deep in the game. To have a seat at the table and be deemed relevant to your audience, this is no longer an option it's a necessity.

**Ignore it at your own risk.**

For any questions, a professional digital audit or strategy feel free to contact us at:

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