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# INNOVATING ECOMMERCE

## NINE TOP TRENDS FOR 2017

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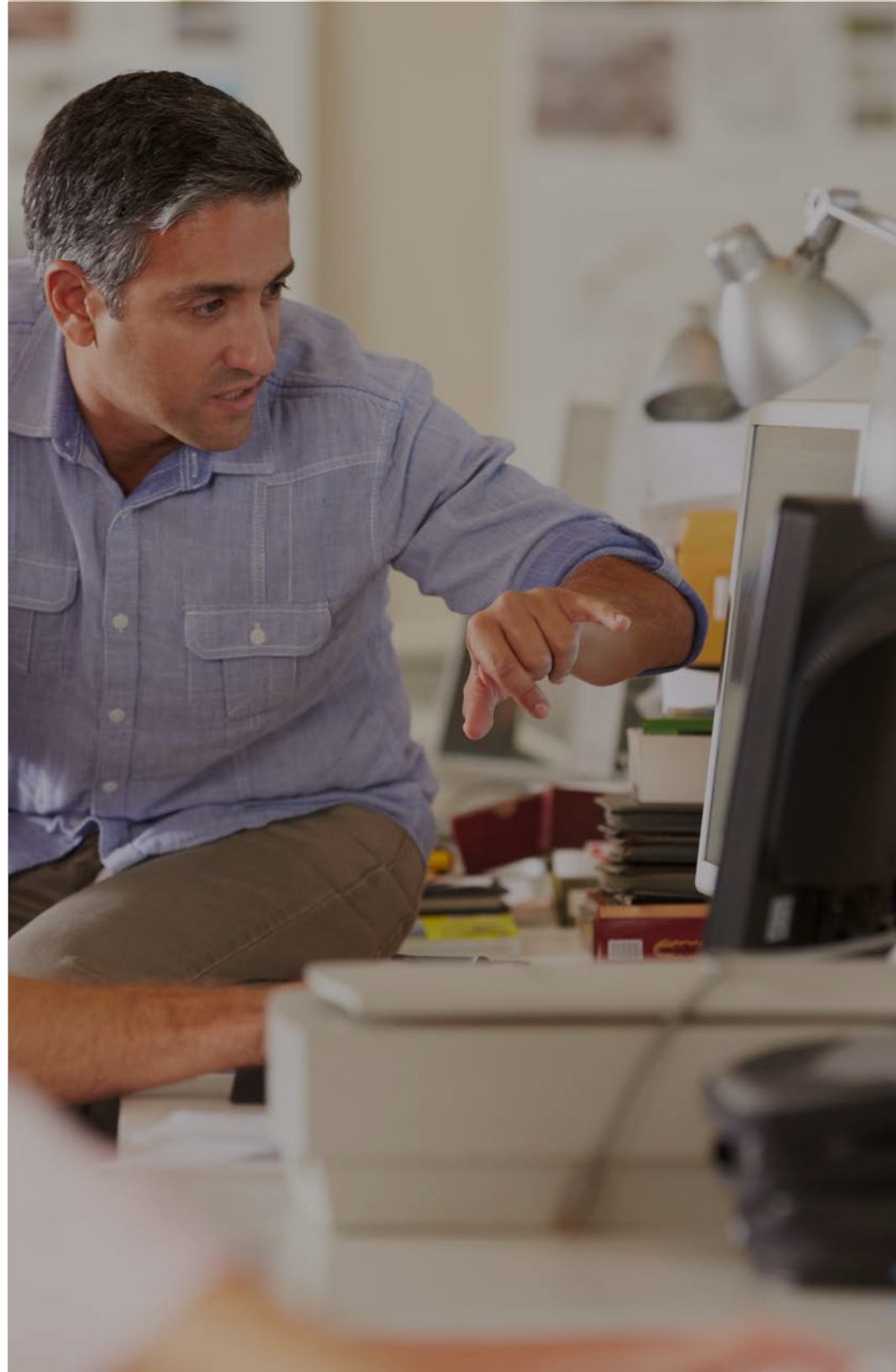
# INTRODUCTION

Commerce has historically been impacted by economic growth and more recently by the evolution of the connected world. But connectivity growth has slowed in the U.S. and emerging countries, and gross domestic product, a broad measure of economic output, either slowed or shrank in more than half of U.S. states in 2015.

With an uncertain economy and a declining margin for error, the easy growth is behind us and commerce is adjusting. These challenges create opportunities for businesses willing to innovate and increase efficiency. Staying ahead of eCommerce trends can be the foundation for this digital transformation.

eCommerce sales have consistently outpaced expectations over the past 12 months, leading the market research company eMarketer to revise its projections. eMarketer forecasts U.S. retail eCommerce sales will grow 15.7% in 2016, the highest annual increase since 2011.<sup>1</sup> By those projections, 43.3% of U.S. retail sales growth will come from eCommerce in 2016. By 2018, eCommerce will surpass 10% of total retail sales in the U.S., and this steady growth is expected to continue through 2020.<sup>2</sup>

In this guide, we'll look at nine top trends in eCommerce for 2017, and discuss what you can do to prepare for them. You'll also see the findings from our survey of marketers and industry business leaders about what trends they are focusing on as they plan for the year.



# OUR SURVEY RESULTS

We surveyed marketers and industry business leaders to learn more about their commerce priorities heading into next year.

The following are their top focus areas, with omni-channel commerce of highest concern as they plan for 2017.

- 1 OMNI-CHANNEL COMMERCE
- 2 PERSONALIZATION
- 3 ADVANCED ANALYTICS AND DATA
- 4 MOBILE
- 5 APIs AND INTEGRATION
- 6 DIGITAL MARKETING
- 7 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE
- 8 SOCIAL COMMERCE
- 9 INTERNET OF THINGS (IoT)
- 10 LOYALTY PROGRAM
- 11 CLOUD

FOR COMPANIES IN THE CONSUMER MARKETS INDUSTRY, INNOVATION IN MOBILE IS TOP OF MIND.

# 57%

OF CONSUMER MARKET COMPANIES LISTED MOBILE AS ONE OF THEIR TOP THREE PRIORITIES

OTHER AREAS OF IMPORTANCE TO OUR SURVEY RESPONDERS:

- / User-Generated Content
- / Marketing Automation
- / Content Velocity





# TREND 1

## BLENDING OF THE PHYSICAL AND ONLINE EXPERIENCE

More and more, customers expect a seamless and consistent experience in any channel through which they interact with a company. Getting it right pays off, since omni-channel consumers spend more money, express greater loyalty, and provide more insight. But they also have high expectations.

### EXPEDITED ONLINE SHOPPING

When customers shop online and ship to a local store or to their home, they want transparent shipment tracking to know when their products will arrive, and to be able to change or resolve any issues in the process.

But the stakes are being raised by companies like Amazon and services like Google Express, where “membership” gives you fast and free shipping. However, while same- or next-day shipping may sound like the wave of the future, studies show that it’s not a priority for most shoppers. Forrester Research states that while 29% of online U.S. consumers are interested in same-day delivery, most wouldn’t pay extra for it.<sup>3</sup> In order for these types of shipping offers to be profitable, the right business and market conditions must exist.

Free shipping is increasingly an expectation rather than a perk. Recent surveys show that 88% of shoppers prefer free shipping in five-to-seven days over paying more to get items delivered in one-to-two days.<sup>4</sup>

### **VIRTUAL AND AUGMENTED REALITY AND COMMERCE**

More than \$1.1 billion was invested into virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR) companies in 2016.<sup>5</sup> As this technology becomes more ubiquitous, we will see its uses emerge more in the commerce world. For online stores, the major risk compared to brick and mortar stores is the inability to “try before you buy,” resulting in 4-6% conversion rates compared to physical stores where conversion is closer to 20-40%.<sup>5</sup>

This could change as the online shopping experience is enhanced with virtual and augmented reality. More than 66% of consumers say they are interested in shopping via virtual reality, with the majority of respondents citing virtual dressing rooms, shoe samplers, and furniture apps as the areas where VR could increase the likelihood of them purchasing a product.<sup>5</sup>

### **TAKEAWAYS**

- / Velocity is important, but convenience is more valuable to consumers.**
- / Bring harmony to your physical and online shopping experiences, whether through VR, AR or omni-channel commerce.**



## TREND 2

# MOBILE IS AN IMPERATIVE, NOT A RECOMMENDATION

In 2017, the twenty-billionth mobile phone will be sold. In 2015, U.S. consumers bought \$74.93 billion worth of goods and services via mobile devices, up 32.2% year-over-year.<sup>6</sup> And while this still only accounts for a quarter of all eCommerce purchases, retailers have taken notice and are investing dollars into their mobile strategies.

### MOBILE WEB VS. APPS

Want to make a purchase from your favorite online retailer? Chances are, there's an app for that. In fact, it seems there's an app for everything. Today, both the Apple app store and the Google Play store each have more than two million apps, with more than 1,000 being added each day. Does the attention around developing apps mean that it's the best way to push mobile purchases? Maybe not.

Mobile browser traffic is actually twice that of mobile app traffic, according to a recent Morgan Stanley report.<sup>7</sup> In fact, only 20-30% of a retailer's mobile sales comes from their app. And while apps are important, most smartphone users spend the majority of their time (80%) in their five favorite apps.

Assuming a user will install an app for each retailer they interact with is unrealistic, so make sure your mobile experience is top notch.

THE 2015 HOLIDAY SEASON SAW A

# 45%

INCREASE IN MOBILE TRAFFIC AND AN

# 82%

INCREASE IN REVENUE

# 90%

APPROXIMATE PERCENTAGE OF  
**CONSUMERS WHO  
USE THEIR SMARTPHONES  
WHILE SHOPPING IN STORE**



## OPTIMIZE MOBILE CHECK-OUT

Mobile shopping cart conversion rates are 70 percent lower than desktop,<sup>9</sup> but that could be attributed to poor mobile user experiences. It's a fact that we use mobile devices differently in our purchase process. The key to increasing mobile conversion is to find out what your customers are looking for when using mobile, identify those pages, and optimize them using an adaptive design.

Responsive design is not the same as adaptive design. In responsive design, your website recognizes the device being used and adapts the content to fit the screen size at a better resolution. On the other hand, a mobile-adaptive site is created and coded solely to present specific content to the mobile user viewing it.

There's huge potential here. The 2015 holiday season saw a 45% increase in mobile traffic and an 82% increase in revenue.<sup>9</sup> Set yourself up for mobile commerce success, and optimize your most important pages. Most content management system (CMS) tools now offer the option of a mobile-optimized experience, so when selecting your next platform, be aware of your options to make the most of mobile.

## BRINGING MOBILE MOMENTS IN STORE

Approximately 90% of consumers use their smartphones while shopping in store. They use their phones to find price comparisons (61%), product information (46%), and to access social media (43%).<sup>10</sup>

Whether it's an app that helps your customers navigate your store, or a beacon that pushes discounts and promotions, find a way to engage with visitors in their buying journey.

## TAKEAWAYS

- / Apps can be great, but make sure you have an excellent mobile web experience first.**
- / Responsive ≠ Optimized. Optimize your most-visited mobile pages.**
- / Create mobile moments to meet your customer on their shopping journey.**



# TREND 3

## SOCIAL SHOPPING BEHAVIOR INCREASES, IMPACTING eCOMMERCE EXPECTATIONS

Shopping has always been a social experience. With the continuing growth of both mobile and social networks, it's a natural transition to make eCommerce more social.

### SOCIAL COMMERCE

Though social networks have long served as a way to research products and seek reviews, buyers had to link to a third-party website to actually complete a purchase. With social commerce, the entire buying process takes place within the social network, creating a seamless purchasing experience. This was first pioneered by Pinterest, which added buyable pins back in 2015, and Facebook has made a recent push with its "Shop Now" stores.

More than half of consumers who follow brands on social media sites say they do so to view products.<sup>11</sup> But while eCommerce growth from social shopping is exceeding overall growth of eCommerce by 10%,<sup>12</sup> many shoppers still defer to third-party websites such as Amazon to actually complete their purchase.



### SOCIAL B2B BUYERS

More than 55% of B2B buyers use social media during their purchasing decisions, specifically to research product and vendor information.<sup>13</sup> These buyers use these channels to look for thought leadership and consumer education, but also to engage with their peers about buying decisions, which 75% of buyers report doing.<sup>14</sup>

Know who your buyers are and on which social channels to find them, then provide information that can help them in their purchasing decision.

### TAKEAWAYS

- / **Consumers are already hitting social media to find out about products, and they're increasingly able to purchase them there as well.**
- / **Social media is a key influencer for B2B buyers, so include tactics for sharing thought leadership on the channels where you find your buyers.**
- / **Incorporate your brand into the social channels that reach your consumers.**



## TREND 4

# THE INTERNET OF THINGS GROWS, REQUIRING AN IoT STRATEGY

These objects are not only an extension of ourselves, but may one day act as independent customers.

### WEARABLES AT WORK

Gartner, Inc. forecasts that 274.6 million wearable electronic devices will be sold worldwide in 2016, growing to 322.69 in 2017.<sup>16</sup> These devices are commonly used in fitness to track steps, monitor heart rate, and gather other data. But in the B2B world, this technology has the potential to increase communication and improve efficiency and productivity.

A Salesforce Research report shows that 79% of wearable tech adopters in the B2B space agree that wearables are or will be strategic to their company's future success, with 76% reporting improvements in business performance since deploying wearables in the enterprise.<sup>17</sup> In what capacity will wearables be used? To track location of service techs in the field, or provide the quickest response time for nearby customer issues? Or perhaps in fleet management, to monitor the health or fatigue of drivers and send hands-free alerts? Where an individual may still view a wearable as a "nice to have," the value of using them in B2B markets is clear, and signals a bright future.



ACCORDING TO GARTNER,  
**20.8B**  
CONNECTED THINGS WILL BE  
IN USE WORLDWIDE BY 2020<sup>15</sup>

## THINGS AS CUSTOMERS

The Internet of Things (IoT) becomes the Internet of Commerce when these connected devices are able to shop for us. As it is today, objects can only alert us to when they need something (e.g. “service engine soon.”) This is what Gartner has called “things as announcers.” But when those same objects have the ability to purchase what they need without input from us, those objects become customers.

We have seen the first steps into this “interface-free shopping” with Google Home, Amazon’s Echo and dash buttons, and HP’s Instant Ink. In the future, we could see even more independent “things” that have the ability to not only recognize a need, but negotiate the best price for the product. As Gartner analyst Don Scheibenreif points out, “The technologies involved in these scenarios already exist today. The connective tissue – the systems, processes and technology providers – that will tie the ecosystems together for thing-based CRM will not take long to develop.”<sup>18</sup>

## TAKEAWAYS

- / **Wearables provide an opportunity in B2B markets to gather data from employees to increase efficiencies.**
- / **Are your processes and customer service prepared for when a customer is ... a thing?**
- / **Be prepared to take advantage of the data and insights you can capture from an IoT strategy.**

## EMERGING BUSINESS MODEL

# B2B2C

2017 will see more of the B2B2C business model. In this model, B2B companies have an opportunity to sell directly to the end consumer, and build those relationships. This requires B2B sellers to ultimately focus on the end consumer and know how to communicate and solve their problems, while at the same time, not losing focus on outcomes for their clients.



## TREND 5

# LOYALTY PROGRAMS GO MOBILE AND CONTINUE TO DRIVE RETENTION

Selling to an existing customer is much easier – and more cost effective – than selling to a new one. So be sure you keep them coming back for more. 82% of companies agree that retention is cheaper than acquisition.<sup>19</sup>

A customer loyalty program shows your customers that you value them for making a purchase from you, leaving them with a more positive customer experience. And it shows for you in sales. More than 45% of consumers say the opportunity to earn rewards is a primary driver for purchasing from a brand, according to a new study from Maritz Motivation Solutions.<sup>20</sup>

### LOYALTY IS GREATER THAN CONVENIENCE FOR MOBILE

Mobile payments began as an added convenience for buyers, but what's even more valuable to them is a strong loyalty program. Consider the success of Starbucks. While many mobile payment

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THAT RETENTION  
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THAN ACQUISITION



programs are struggling for adoption, My Starbucks Rewards grew 8% in Q2 of 2016, with its more than 12 million members.<sup>21</sup> And how did they do it? They kept it simple, kept it mobile, and did their research to find out what their customers really wanted.

## LOOKING BEYOND DISCOUNTS

“Loyalty [that is] owned and ruled by points and discounts is dead,” says Emily Collins at Forrester Research. “Long live elevated loyalty strategies that focus on creating great relationships with customers through things like recognition, relevancy, emotion, and engagement.” In other words, brands and retailers are building loyal customers the way real people are building loyal relationships with each other through all kinds of interactions – digital among them.

The true measure of loyalty is not how many points your customers have racked up, but how often they come back and how excited they are to share that experience with others. The connected consumer is highly informed, in control of their shopping experience, and can turn on a dime. Appealing to the consumer at all points along their journey is fundamental to building the right customer experiences and engender true loyalty.

## B2B LOYALTY PROGRAMS

Just as individuals value a loyalty program, businesses – and the individuals behind them – like to feel the love, too.

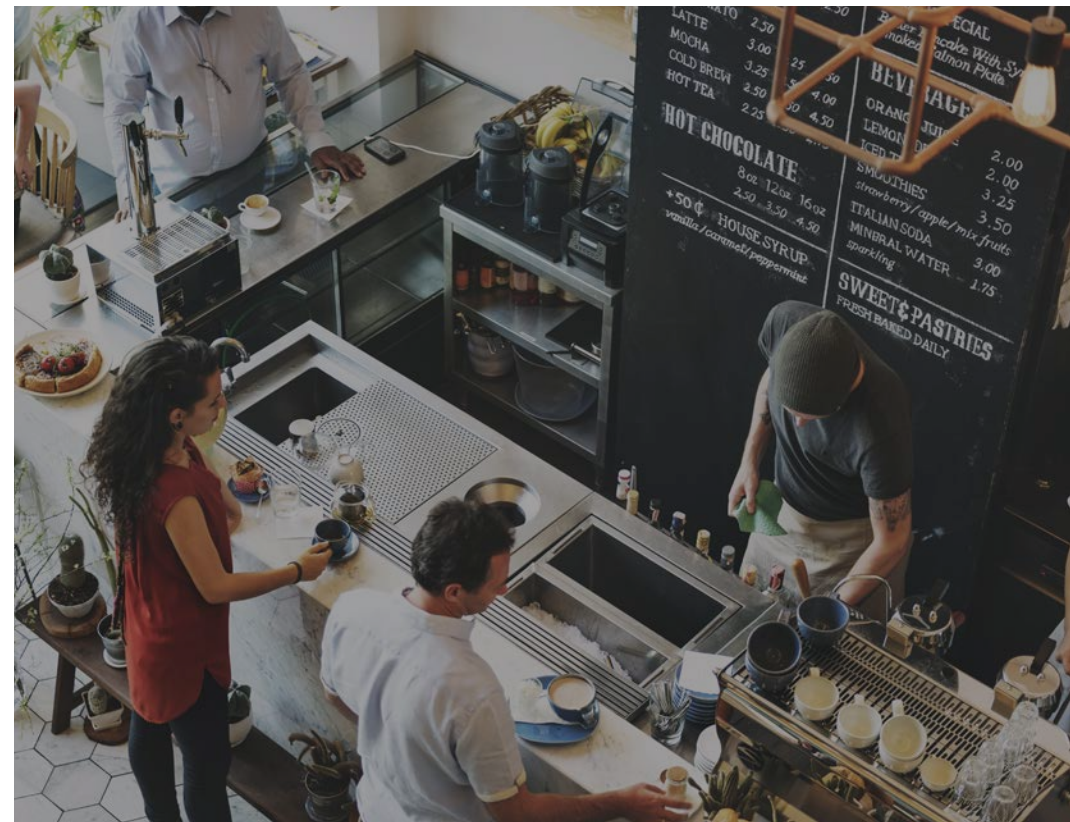
According to Forrester, B2B companies should adapt B2C loyalty tactics to reward, recognize, and engage customers. This doesn't necessarily mean a points system or offering discounts, which could make B2B companies hesitate at the idea. Instead, through a B2B loyalty program, you can look to adopt three core tenets valued by

B2C marketers, which have “nothing to do with discounting, and everything to do with building a flexible, customer-obsessed loyalty strategy.”<sup>9</sup> What might this look like?

- / A deep understanding of customer needs and motivations.
- / Consistent customer interactions across organizational silos.
- / An adaptive strategy that accounts for the changing customer and market landscape.

## TAKEAWAYS

- / Show your customers you care. Invest in a strong loyalty program.
- / Look beyond discounts and towards engagement for a loyalty program that resonates with consumers.
- / Bring B2C-like loyalty programs to your B2B business.



## TREND 6

# BRANDS ADAPT TO NEW SEARCH EXPECTATIONS

Whether you're B2C or B2B, your customers take a journey when making a purchase. Today, this journey often involves the use of search engines. There are more than 2.3 million searches performed every second on Google alone.<sup>22</sup> As search capabilities evolve, staying ahead of these changes ensures you stay in front of your customers.

### IMPACT OF VOICE SEARCH

The rise of the voice-enabled search function has created "conversational shopping," a buzzword introduced by Behshad Behzadi, Google's Director of Search, at the SMX West's Event in 2016.

While voice search isn't new, it's now picking up steam as error rates decrease and convenience increases. The 2014 Google Mobile Voice Study found that especially teenagers have adapted to voice search. Already 55% of teenagers owning a smartphone use voice search several times a day, while only 41% of adults use voice search at least once a day.<sup>23</sup>

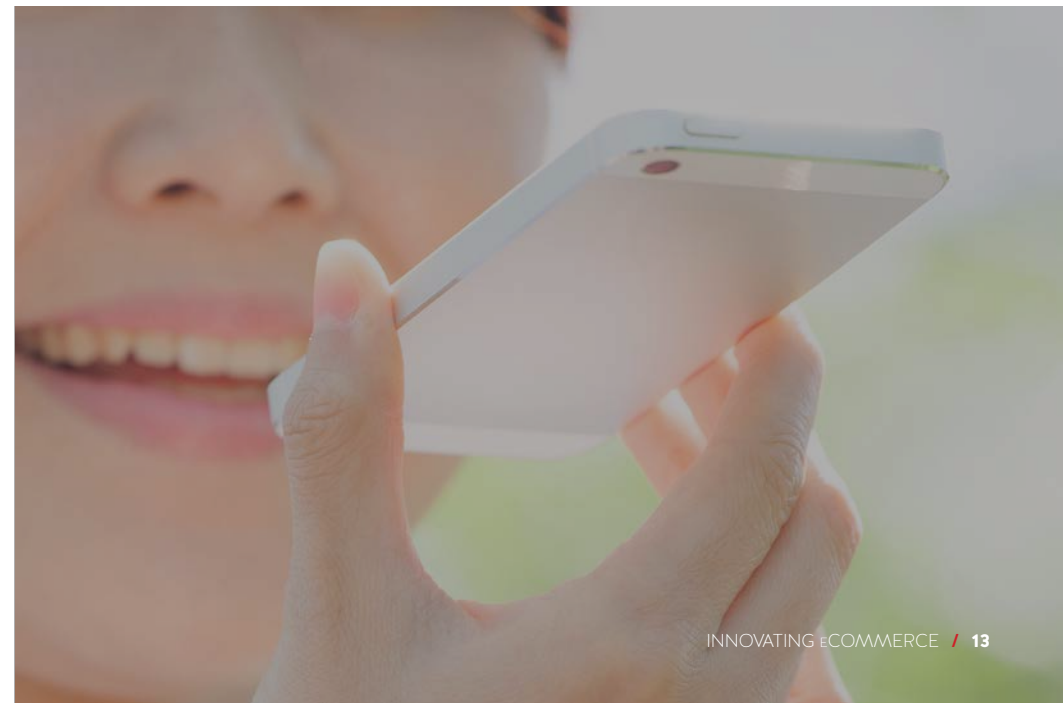
So how do voice searches differ from written searches? Research from Microsoft revealed that users are more likely to search for longer queries in spoken searches vs. written ones.<sup>24</sup> Google Webmaster Trends Analyst John Mueller also said that many voice searches are done in longer-form sentences, although that's truer for older generations than younger generations, who tend to speak in short, to-the-point keywords.<sup>25</sup>

# 55%

OF TEENAGERS OWNING A  
**SMARTPHONE USE VOICE SEARCH**  
SEVERAL TIMES A DAY, WHILE ONLY

# 41%

**OF ADULTS USE IT**  
AT LEAST ONCE A DAY



How can you plan for these different types of searches? Add more natural phrasing for long-tail searches to your search engine marketing campaigns and review your content strategy to ensure that it reflects these new “natural language” searches.

## LEVERAGE LOCAL SEARCH

While looking ahead to be proactive about new searches, remember to cover your bases with more traditional, local searches. If you manage an eCommerce site, you may not have a strong local strategy, since you’re focusing and operating on a national level. But looking local can help you differentiate and target a smaller and more relevant group of potential buyers, and can increase foot traffic into your physical store. To do that, you have to let Google know where you are and what you are offering.

Local searches lead 50% of mobile visitors to visit stores within a day.<sup>26</sup> Make sure you have local pages (with your address, name, etc.) listed with Google, Yahoo and Bing. With Google’s “Pigeon” update, local SEO has gained prominence, forcing businesses to focus on a local strategy. Make sure your site content has location-specific keywords and personalize content based on your target audiences’ location to stay ahead of competitors.

## TAKEAWAYS

- / People need to find your business, using the way they talk – and not just type.**
- / Even for eCommerce sites, local search pays off.**





# TREND 7

## DATA IS DRIVING PERSONALIZATION

While connected content and commerce systems can provide the tools to engage customers, your brands must also have access to the customer insights that will allow you to decide where and how to optimize your existing digital strategy. Generic segmentation and persona-based marketing have been the standard tactics for the past few years, but the bar has been raised.

Today's customers require a higher level of personalization and engagement in order to secure their loyalty. These personalized

experiences can only be delivered via customer insights that are based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative sources. This knowledge is not just used for targeted marketing; it can also be leveraged to anticipate customer needs and provide the right interaction at the right time on the right channel.

Marketers and industry business leaders named both advanced analytics and personalization as two of their top three priorities for next year.

### REAL-TIME ANALYTICS

Using real-time analytics on your website can help you not only identify issues, but it can also allow you to experiment with different content, layouts, and offerings to provide the most ROI.

Are you interested in moving some elements around on your home page? Set up A/B testing to see if the new layout increases or decreases purchases. Real-time analytics are also what makes it possible to serve up recommendations based on a user's current activity on the site ("You may also be interested in..."), or arrange news stories on a home page based on what's most popular at that moment.

Artificial intelligence (AI) can also play in the real-time analytics game. The goal is that it will one day make content and layout decisions like the ones above, autonomously, without any human interaction. In its "Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning in Big Data and IoT" study, Mind Commerce estimates that the predictive analytics market will reach \$18.5 billion by 2021.<sup>27</sup>

### TAKEAWAY

**/ To avoid costly mistakes in layout and content changes, use real-time analytics and A/B testing to personalize your content.**



/ CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

# A WINNING RECIPE FOR EMAIL MARKETING



Christie Cookie Company needed a more effective way to connect via email with its various customer groups. We helped them understand the importance of audience segmentation and personalization, and identified distinct customer segments, each in need of its own unique message to incite the desired action.

We showed how certain site visitors reacted, made purchases, opened emails, and converted. By implementing recommendations for customer segmentation strategies, Christie Cookie's revenue increased 26% year-over-year. In addition to recommendations for customer segmentation strategies for its email marketing efforts, we gave Christie Cookie's email designs an updated look and feel that better convey their distinctive brand equity.

The newly designed emails outperformed previous campaigns, delivering program revenue that was up 86% over the previous year.



## TREND 8

# APIs ARE CREATING HEADLESS COMMERCE

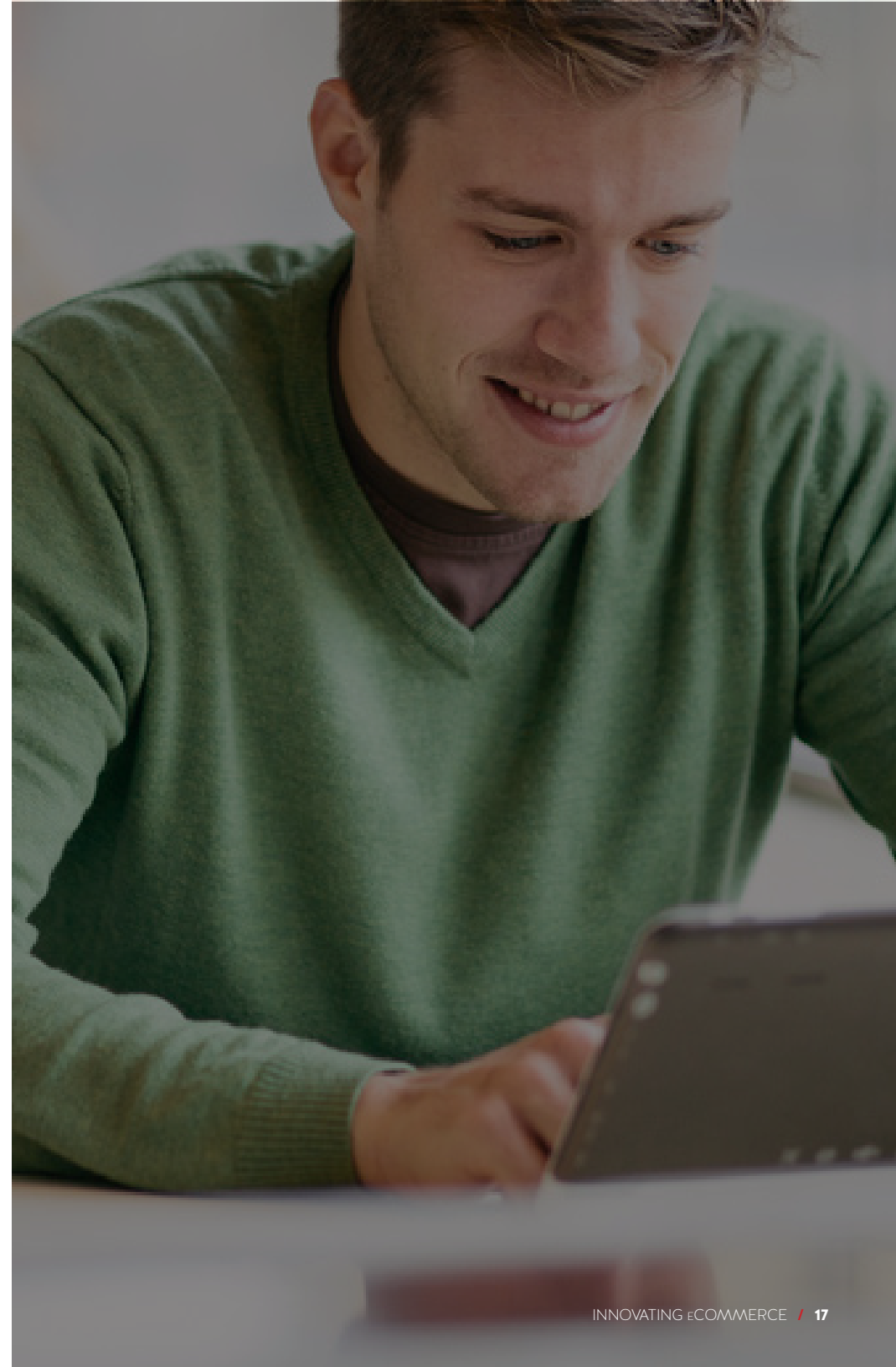
Annual spend on API management will quadruple by the end of the decade, from \$140 million in 2014 to \$660 million in 2020.<sup>28</sup> While these interfaces will be used across the board, we will see more investment in APIs and rest services to create “headless commerce,” where sophisticated content creation and management will drive online marketing and eCommerce sales.

Most eCommerce platforms aren’t able to keep up with the increasing need to leverage content to sell, and most content management systems aren’t able to handle the complexity of commerce. Bringing these two together allows you to realize the highest ROI in your digital commerce endeavors.

While implementation specifics and phases of adopting content and commerce will vary by organization, typically this reflects an incremental evolution. The final stage is a fully converged platform for creating, managing, previewing, and delivering blended content and commerce experiences to any shopper on any site, channel or device, in any language.

### TAKEAWAY

**/ Using APIs to converge commerce and content systems will lead to experiential and frictionless commerce.**







## / CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

# THE MERGING OF MARKETING AND COMMERCE

A global manufacturer was using a common eCommerce platform for its various B2C and B2B brands and divisions. The marketing team was using creative tools to create pages and tell stories about the brand and positioning while the eCommerce staff used their own platform page creation tools to sell products, provide detailed product information, and capture payments. However, each of these teams was trying to serve and communicate with the same buyer, creating a disjointed approach from brand positioning through product purchase.

In order to simplify the user experience and provide a seamless transition from brand positioning through product exploration and purchase, we implemented an integrated content management system that brought together all the marketing and eCommerce sites under one unified technology implementation. This allowed for an integrated and consistent brand story and positioning, woven seamlessly throughout the product content and transactional process. Our client is now better able to provide personalized consumer experiences, meet the increasing demands of the marketplace, and ultimately drive sales and customer loyalty.



## TREND 9 CLOUD CAPABILITIES EXPAND

More than 60% of enterprises are on their journey to the cloud, expecting to have at least half of their infrastructure within the cloud by 2018.<sup>29</sup> Relatively speaking, cloud computing is still in its infancy. In its "Digital Transformation Maturity Model Benchmark" released in 2015, IDC found that 65% of organizations were still exploring or developing goals around their interests in digital technologies like cloud. This year alone will mark an 11% shift of budgets away from traditional IT delivery towards various types of cloud computing technologies as a delivery model.<sup>29</sup>

### **MACHINE LEARNING TRANSFORMS CLOUD**

As innovation continues to increase, cloud computing will not only be seen as a way to remove or lessen physical data centers, but also as a way to remove virtual infrastructure and the management of those infrastructures. Eric Schmidt, chairman of Alphabet, Google's parent company, predicts that complex technologies like machine learning will be made simple, so data scientists can focus on cloud data, and developers can enable the data scientists without having to become experts at the underlying machine learning technologies.<sup>30</sup> This will allow companies to shift from performing analytics to deep learning, transforming industries, and business models.

### **COMPETITION IN PUBLIC CLOUD**

Amazon revolutionized the public cloud infrastructure with its offering, Amazon Web Services (AWS), compiling massive amounts of computer power and making it available to pay-as-you-go

customers. Amazon continues to grow and invest money into cloud. During the last-reported quarter at time of this writing, Amazon's revenue from AWS rose by 64% year-over-year to \$2.4 billion.<sup>31</sup> While Amazon continues to grow its market share, several other companies, like Microsoft, Google, and IBM, are hoping to get a piece of the action with their public cloud offerings, and that's changing the eCommerce landscape.

These new cloud offerings allow eCommerce businesses to store data, speed up websites, or better understand large volumes of customer data, all for a much lower price than traditional methods. Microsoft is even giving startups three years of free cloud, among other things, in the hopes of having them as customers in the future. As competition increases, the cost to move to the cloud and the barriers involved in getting there will lessen, providing more opportunity for businesses wanting to make that move.

## TAKEAWAY

- / **As capabilities of cloud transform, be prepared to transform your business model to adapt.**
- / **Take advantage of the competition among public cloud providers, which makes moving to the cloud more affordable for eCommerce business.**

**THESE TOP TRENDS AND OTHERS ARE HELPING TO DRIVE ECOMMERCE IN 2017. TO MEET RISING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS, COMPANIES MUST LOOK AHEAD, PREPARED TO INNOVATE AND INVEST IN NEW TECHNOLOGY.**

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We architect systems of customer delight. We move at the speed-of-culture. We exist to delight our clients, by relentlessly delighting their customers. We are what happens when more than 200 of the most talented digital strategists, design pros, brand shapers, digital marketers, data scientists and creative coders all believe one thing to be true – exceptional customer experiences always translate to positive ROI for our clients.

Perficient Digital blends the strategic imagination of an agency with the deep technical acumen of Perficient's established consultancy to deliver exceptional customer experiences for the world's biggest brands.

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