



THE ASCENDANCY ADVISOR

**7 Ways to Stand
Out from Your
Competitors
in 2017**

**Marketing Statistics
That Are Affecting
Your Local Business
Right Now**



**Navigating the Generation Gap with
SOCIAL MEDIA
MARKETING**

**8 KILLER MARKETING
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IN 2017**

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The new year is upon us and there's never been a better time to assess 2017 and consider what your marketing strategy should be. Digital marketing is running neck and neck with traditional advertising in terms of spending, and for many small business owners, it makes sense to allocate the lion's share of their marketing budget to online strategies. With that in mind, here are 10 killer marketing trends to embrace in 2017.

Welcome To The ASCENDANCY ADVISOR

Thanks for checking out our 1st issue of the Ascendancy Advisor, your online marketing resource guide for small business. Each month we will be covering topics that resonate with local businesses just like yours.

Our goal is simple. We want to enable you to do big things online, and it all starts by breaking down the complexities of marketing your business online.

It doesn't matter if you're just starting out, or an established business owner in your local community, you can always benefit from increasing your brand's visibility online.

To Your Success,

Tracey Barnes
Managing Director

THIS ISSUE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

Ascendancy I.M. is the leading small business marketing service for more than seven years. We help small businesses connect with more customers online.

If you want to build your business, you need to market, it's that simple. But you can lose thousands of dollars if you don't know what you are doing. So we urge you to take action with some of the strategies we recommend.

We offer affordable solutions and can deliver results. We hope you enjoy this issue of the Ascendancy Advisor and feel free to reach out to us anytime.

7 Ways to Stand Out from Your Competitors in 2017



There's no denying that the competition is fierce in the world of online marketing. There are millions of websites and advertisers vying for the attention of consumers, and at times, it can feel impossible. How do you make yourself heard when you're just one voice in a crowd that covers the whole planet?

Fortunately, there are some things you can do to differentiate yourself from the competition and make sure that your voice is the one that stands out.

Find Your Voice



One of the reasons that content can fade into the background is that it sounds the same as everything else. If your content mimics other influencers in your industry, then it might be impossible for your followers to distinguish you from your competitors.

Instead of being bland, try being different. What kind of tone can you use that will engage your followers and set you apart from the other people in your niche? If your customers are mostly Millennials, consider adopting a casual tone that uses slang and conversational language.

Even if you're in a conservative industry, you can find a way to be different. Think about who your customers are and what tone they are most likely to respond to, and then use it consistently in all of your communication and advertising.

Be Controversial



It can be difficult to take a chance and say something that people might disagree with – but it can also be an opportunity to draw attention to yourself.

Is there a big trend in your industry that you disagree with? Do you like challenging conventional wisdom? Look for some things that are relevant to your audience and then try to shake their perceptions by offering an opposing or surprising view on it. You might even consider playing devil's advocate to get attention.

If all you ever do is follow along with the crowd, the chances are good that you'll fade into it. On the other hand, the person who dares to be different is likely to be the one who gets noticed.





Do What Your Competitors Don't Do 💡

Are you following your competitors on social media and checking out their websites and blogs on a regular basis? If you're not, you should be.

It doesn't matter how many competitors you have. The chances are excellent that they are all missing something – something that you can provide to your customers as a way of differentiating yourself. The only way to know what they're missing is to examine what they're doing and how they're doing it. Then identify the holes in what they're offering and step in to fill them.

This doesn't mean that you have to offer a product that nobody else offers. What it does mean, though, is that you have to understand your customers and what they need. If the majority of your competitors offer content with a formal tone, you might be able to offer your followers a friendlier alternative.

Use Micro-Influencers 💡

As social media algorithms systematically destroy organic reach, companies are looking for ways to make sure that their content gets seen by their target audience. One effective way to do that is to connect with micro-influencers and get them to share your content.

A micro-influencer is anybody who has authority or reach with your customers. They don't have to be in your industry to be an effective influencer. For example, if you know that the majority of your customers are interested in a particular athlete, you might be able to get that person to share your content for a price.

Attracting big-time celebrity influencers can be costly, so instead, focus on people who have a following but aren't likely to charge an arm and a leg to share your content. If the things you share also happen to be relevant to their fans, then they're probably a good match for you and you can leverage their popularity into increased reach for your content.

Have a Social Mission

When it comes to engaging Millennials, having a social mission can really help set you apart from your competitors. Young people want the brands they follow to care about the world and make a difference.

There are a few ways you can incorporate this suggestion into your marketing. For example, you might:

- » Pair up with a local charity to host an event, then create an event page on Facebook and share information about it with your followers.
- » Create a product that ties into a particular charity or cause, such as the breast cancer awareness pink ribbons that flood the marketplace every October.
- » Donate a percentage of your profits to a cause that resonates with your customers. For example, if you sell clothing you might decide to donate money (or clothing for that matter) to a local homeless shelter.

This type of outreach can cement customers' view of you as a company that cares about something beyond profit – and that can help you turn people into brand ambassadors.

Use Humor to Connect with Your Followers

We all love to have a good laugh, and your customers are just as likely to be influenced by humor as anybody else. The mistake that a lot of marketers make is treating their content with kid gloves, assuming that it has to be serious to have an impact.

If you loosen up a bit, you can surprise your followers and get them to think about you in a new way. You can even be a little irreverent if it fits your brand. One good example of the use of humor in marketing comes from the company Hello Flo. They sell female hygiene products, and they made a huge splash a couple of years ago with two humorous videos highlighting their products: Camp Gyno and First Moon Party. The latter got over 38 million views on YouTube because it made people laugh.





Embrace New Technology



In some industries, marketers can be slow to use new technology as it is released. Companies who were quick to embrace mobile marketing, for example, have a leg up on companies who are just catching up now.

It can be tricky to catch trends before they become popular, but don't be afraid to experiment. If you're not using things like live video or geofencing, now is the time to try something new – particularly if your competitors aren't doing so.

You don't have to jump on every new marketing tool that comes out, but it's a good idea to add new things to your marketing mix and find ways to shake things up. If something doesn't work, you can ditch it and move on to the next thing – but at least you'll have tried. And if what you try ends up catching on, you'll be one step ahead of your competitors.

The key with all of these techniques is to remember that you have things to offer that your competitors don't. Use these methods to make sure that your target audience sees how special you are—and the results (and profits) will follow.



Navigating the Generation Gap with Social Media Marketing

You're probably using social media to reach your customers online, but are you being smart about it? The truth is that not all social media users are created equal. The social media sites you use – and how you use them – can have a huge impact on the ROI (and profits) you see as a result.

In fact...

There are big differences in the ways that people use social media, and many of those differences are generational. It turns out that when it comes to using social media effectively, age matters.

Social Media by the Numbers



Let's start by looking at some demographic information for the most popular social media platforms. What you'll notice is that the age of your customers dictates, in large part, where you'll be able to reach them. All statistics come from the Pew Research Center.

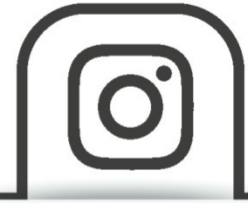
- » Nearly eight in ten American adults use Facebook, and it is by far the largest social media site. While users cover a wide range of ages, the highest percentages are in the 18-29 range, with 88%. The numbers decreased with age, but a still-impressive 62% of adults over the age of 65 use Facebook.
- » 32% of all online adults, and 28% of Americans, use Instagram. Here, the demographics skew much younger than Facebook. In fact, 59% of Instagram users are under the age of 30.

- » Pinterest is nearly as popular as Instagram, with 31% of all adults using the site. However, here the demographics skew heavily female, and are evenly spaced among all age groups. Pinterest users also tend to be more affluent than users of other social media sites.
- » 87% of Millennials and 85% of Baby Boomers have a Facebook account.
- » The two social media sites with the highest daily engagement are Facebook with 76%, and Instagram with 51%.

The social media sites you choose for your business should be dictated by who your customers are. If you hope to engage with Millennials and Generation Z, Instagram is the clear winner. For older women, Pinterest is a must.



Choosing Content to Appeal to Your Target Customers



The type of content you share is just as important as where you share it. In fact, picking the right format and sources can make a huge difference in terms of your engagement.

Generation Z- Ages 18 & under

Let's start with the youngest generation, Generation Z. As stated previously, their preferred social media site is Instagram, and the Pew Research Center points out that their average attention span is a mere eight seconds. That means that they're far more likely to respond to visual content than written content.

Some other things to keep in mind about Generation Z are:

- » They prefer real people rather than celebrities or actors in their content.
- » They're quick to embrace new technology, such as VR (virtual reality).
- » They enjoy creating content as much, if not more than, consuming it.

If you want to connect with Generation Z, try encouraging them to share their photographs on Instagram or Facebook, and feature people they'll relate to.

Millennials - Ages 19-34

Millennials are a huge generation with a tremendous amount of purchasing power. Marketing to them represents a challenge, but here are some things you should know.

- » Facebook is their top social media site.
- » The number one thing Millennials crave in marketing is authenticity.
- » As a rule, Millennials place a huge amount of importance on peer reviews and influence. Connecting with micro-influencers can be a very effective way of reaching Millennials.

Social involvement matters to Millennials, so if you can find a way to link your business to a cause it can help you connect with them.





Generation X - Ages 35-54

Generation X shares some similarities with Millennials, and but they tend to be a bit harder to pin down when it comes to their content preferences. Here are some tips to help you connect with Generation X:

- » Members of Generation X are less likely to access the web on mobile devices than Generation Z or Millennials.
- » Their preferred form of online content is blog posts, followed by images, comments, eBooks, and case studies.
- » They are most likely to be online during business hours and between 8:00 pm and midnight.

They are far more likely to use Facebook than any other social media site. If you offer a product or service for sale, then you may want to consider developing a few case studies and sharing them on your blog and Facebook if you want to engage Generation Xers.

Baby Boomers - Ages 55-74

Baby Boomers might have lagged behind later generations when it comes to adopting technology, but they've caught up now. Most baby boomers own mobile devices and use the internet in some

capacity. Here are some things to keep in mind as you market to Baby Boomers:

- » Facebook is by far their most preferred social media site.
- » Baby Boomers research companies online, but they're less likely to want to engage with them online and more likely simply to review basic information before calling or visiting you in person.
- » Many Baby Boomers are strongly driven by savings, and are likely to respond to coupons, sales, and other value-based marketing.
- » Baby Boomers tend to be highly loyal customers. Once they try a brand and like it, they will stick with it through thick and thin. As a result, they can make excellent brand ambassadors.

If you want to reach Baby Boomers, make sure that basic information about your business is easily accessible on your website, social media pages, and local directories. It's also a good idea to reach out to them with special sales and bargains as a way of emphasizing that you value their business. They'll reward you with intense loyalty.

As you can see, there are some significant differences between generations when it comes to marketing. If you take the time to learn about your customers and tailor your content to their preferences, you'll be able to maximize your engagement – and grow your business.



MARKETING STATISTICS

THAT ARE AFFECTING YOUR LOCAL BUSINESS RIGHT NOW

You might have heard the saying, “All politics is local.” It has been said so frequently that it’s almost become a cliché – but the thing about clichés is that they always contain a kernel of truth.

When it comes to promoting and growing a small business, you might say that all marketing is local. As

search algorithms and analytics become increasingly sophisticated, the potential to track and hyper-target your company’s marketing efforts to the people most likely to frequent your business is huge.

With that in mind, here are five local marketing statistics that are affecting your business right now.



CUSTOMERS WANT TO READ YOUR EMAILS ON MOBILE DEVICES

According to SmallBizTrends, 60% of all consumers say that email is their preferred method for receiving information from their favorite companies and brands. That makes email one of the most effective marketing methods around in spite of the fact that it's not really new or trendy.

On a related note, the number of people opening emails on their mobile devices has increased 180% in the past three years, with close to 40% of all internet users now doing it. In fact, by 2018 the estimates are that 80% of all users will read their emails on mobile devices by 2018.

What that means is that, starting now, you should be optimizing every email you send for mobile users. Nobody wants to have to squint to read your content or scroll horizontally to read a sentence. Local business can benefit from having an email list, but only if they use it in a way that makes sense for their customers.

CUSTOMERS PREFER PERSONALIZED ADVERTISING TO GENERIC ADVERTISING

The next statistic is one that is hardly surprising given the way that digital marketing allows companies to hone in on their target audience's preferences. 71% of all consumers say that they prefer marketing and advertising that has been tailored to their personal preferences. In other words, personalization is a must.

How can you make this statistic work for you? There are a few things to consider. First, you should take some time to analyze the performance of your current content to get an idea of what's working and what's not. Next, conduct a customer survey or two to learn what people want to receive from you. And third, give your customers a way to specify the kind of content they want to receive.

One way to accomplish that last item is to allow your followers to subscribe to targeted emails or newsletters. List segmentation has never been easier, and you're far more likely to get a high return on your investment if you send emails only to those customers who want to receive them.



CUSTOMERS WANT TO CONTACT YOU ON SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SUPPORT

If you've been resisting the idea of integrating your social media accounts with customer service, it's time to stop. Research shows that customers both want and expect to be able to receive customer service on social media. In fact, 32% of consumers expect to get a response to a customer service question within 30 minutes of asking, and fully 40% expect a response within an hour.

The key to meeting customer expectations in this regard is to have a dedicated customer service team to monitor your social media comments and messages. Facebook, for example, rewards businesses who respond quickly to comments and messages by displaying a trust icon on their home page.

If you lack the resources to have 24-hour customer service on social media, then you might consider posting customer service hours and information so people who message you know what to expect. That way, they'll have a realistic idea of when you'll be getting back to them.

ONLINE REVIEWS ARE THE KEY TO ENGAGING MILLENNIALS

How much time and attention do you give to your online reviews and testimonials? If you're not prioritizing them, then you're missing out in a big way when it comes to engaging and attracting Millennials.

An AdWeek study from 2014 found that 93% of all Millennials rely on online consumer reviews, both from their social media contacts and from strangers, when they make purchasing decisions. Here's what you can do to make sure that your reviews are helping and not hurting:

- » Claim your profile on all crowd review sites, including Yelp, Angie's List, and Google My Business.
- » Respond to positive and negative reviews. Remember, every negative review represents an opportunity to demonstrate that you care about your customers.
- » Do what you can to encourage customers to leave reviews. For example, you can link to your business on crowd review sites or post excerpts and links to positive reviews on your site.

The more active and engaged you are with the people who review your business, the better off you'll be.

AUDIENCE RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVE STORYTELLING DRIVE ENGAGEMENT

The two things that are most likely to get people to click on a piece of content that you create or curate are relevance (58%) and effective storytelling (57%).

This statistic is hardly surprising, but a lot of local businesses forget about it when it comes to creating content. The content you post needs to be specifically geared to your target audience's interests and concerns. It doesn't have to be



about your product or service per se, but it should be aimed at the things that drive people to buy from you.

Storytelling has always been an effective means of communication. If you can find a way to turn relevant content into a story, you'll get far higher engagement (and ROI) than you would otherwise.

SOCIAL MEDIA IS CATCHING UP WITH SEARCH ENGINES

In 2016, millions of people turned to social media sites like Facebook and Twitter when they wanted information.

You're probably already using social media as part of your marketing strategy, but you may not realize just how important and influential it has become. The majority of consumers expect to be able to find and follow their favorite brands on social media.

You can increase your engagement by doing things like including images in your ads (more than 75% of an ad's influence on Facebook is determined by the images used) and adding captioning to your videos since many users watch videos with the sound off.

These statistics point to ways that local businesses can increase their influence and maximize the return on their marketing investment in the coming year.

8 Killer Marketing Trends to Grow Your Small Business in 2017

The new year is upon us and there's never been a better time to assess 2016 and consider what your marketing strategy should be. Digital marketing is running neck and neck with traditional advertising in terms of spending, and for many small business owners, it makes sense to allocate the lion's share of their marketing budget to online strategies.

With that in mind, here are 10 killer marketing trends to embrace in 2017.



Live video had a big year in 2016, and that trend is expected to continue in 2017. Facebook Live attracted celebrities, advertisers, and even individuals with its immediacy.

The key to using live video effectively is to plan ahead and have a strategy for using it. Not every topic or situation lends itself to live video, but some that do include:

- » Live Q & A sessions where you answer questions from the comment section
- » Demonstrations of new products (or unboxing new products)
- » Behind-the-scenes tours of your business or production facility
- » Coverage of live events

If you want to use live video, come up with a schedule and budget (it doesn't have to be expensive) and then make sure your followers know when to expect you.

#1: Live Video



#2: Mobile Everything

2015 was the first year that mobile searches outstripped desktop searches, and research shows that 65% of all online user engagement in 2016 was on mobile devices.

What does that mean in terms of marketing? It means that your website and all of the content on it should be optimized for mobile users. You should also consider implementing mobile buying buttons, mobile payments, and creating a mobile app to engage your customers. Even small things, such as using Facebook's "Call Now" button for your mobile ads, can make a significant difference when it comes to the ROI on your mobile ads.



#3: Influencer Marketing

One of the most frustrating things for content marketers who use social media is the increasingly-sophisticated algorithms that prevent many of their followers from seeing their content – unless they pay to boost it.

If you're looking for a way to get around that issue without paying Facebook or Twitter – the people who are, after all, causing the problem in the first place – you might want to consider influencer marketing. Regardless of what niche you're in, you can contract with authorities, celebrities, and people with large social followings that overlap your target audience. Get them to mention your company or products to their followers, and reach hundreds or even thousands of new users for (potentially) only a fraction of what you might pay to run an ad or boost a post.

#4: Data-Driven Marketing

As marketing grows increasingly sophisticated, it's not surprising that marketers at every level are digging deep into customer research to obtain information to help them fine-tune their marketing campaigns.

Some of the things you can do to mine data include reviewing traditional analytics and conducting customer surveys. The information you gather can help you to personalize your marketing and increase your engagement.





#5: Geo- targeting

Local marketing has always been important, but mobile technology makes it easier than ever to reach your customers where they are – and when they are most likely to need your products or services.

If you want to engage in hyper-local marketing, you should:

- » Verify your NAP listings
- » Make yourself known by appearing at local events
- » Use social media targeting to reach people in your immediate area
- » Consider using geofencing to reach mobile customers when they're near your store

These tactics can help you increase foot traffic and build a loyal following.

#6: Permission Marketing

Research shows that millions of internet users – perhaps as many as 26% -- use ad blocking software when they surf the internet. That means that marketers have a potential problem unless they can find a way to reach those people.

Content marketing is a big part of the solution since it's not likely to be blocked. However, organic reach is down too. One solution may be to target consumers with advertising that they have agreed in advance to receive. For example, podcasts, webcasts, live video, and newsletters are all ways that you can reach out to customers who are willing to look at ads in return for valuable and relevant content.

It might surprise you to see email marketing on this list since this type of marketing is hardly new. However, it is still one of the best and most reliable ways to reach out to your target audience and engage them.

#7: Email Marketing

The key to using email marketing effectively is not to send a series of sales pitches. Nobody who subscribes to your list will stay subscribed for long if all you do is try to sell them something. Instead, focus on delivering interesting, relevant, and actionable content. If you do that, people will look forward to receiving your emails – and they'll be receptive when you do make a sales pitch.

#8: Beacon Technology

This last trend relates to mobile users and local marketing, but it deserves its own place on this list because it has the potential to revolutionize marketing going forward.

Beacon technology is software that uses Bluetooth technology to home in on mobile devices in stores and then use that connection to analyze shopper behavior. Eventually, proponents of the technology imagine that it can be used to send hyper-personalized content to mobile users while they are shopping. It may also be able to help business owners optimize the layout of their stores and the customer experience to increase sales and build loyalty.

Of course, you can also expect that social media marketing will continue to be important in 2017. The key to maximizing the ROI on your marketing campaigns is to analyze the performance of your current marketing, continue with what works, and incorporate new trends as they make sense for your business. If you do that, 2017 can be your best year yet.





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