

Mega-trend: Overt customer obsession

 By [David Blyth](#)

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"Content marketing is the industry's hottest topic."

The fundamentals of marketing excellence will never change. Just like the shopkeepers who earned their customers' trust before the age of branding, powerful brands are those that understand and relate to people, listen and respond with high emotional intelligence and generally make the customer feel good about him or herself.

However, the ways in which marketers can do this are changing fast. Here are our top four predictions for marketing in 2015 and beyond - and they're all agreeably alliterative...

1. Content contradiction

Content marketing is the industry's hottest topic these days. Consumer-generated content is everywhere and, as Eric Schmidt pointed out, humanity now produces more information every two days than we did from the dawn of history until 2003. Marketers are getting serious about this content tsunami - producing interesting, useful and entertaining stories and campaigns that consumers want to engage with and share.

But we are approaching the point of sensory overload. Most of us are drowning in emails, we get irritable when things are too long to read or review. We are looking for quick answers, insights and entertainment - not more demands on our time.

In 2015 we will continue to witness the rise of curated content and infographics, but good curation is still a rare skill and even infographics are becoming pervasive and invasive. We will see the increasing use of video. We will also see more people unsubscribing from everything they don't find valuable.

What it means for marketers

- Create better, more punchy content - it's not just about 'more', but about more relevance.
- Serialise your content - smaller, more regular doses.
- Be smart and offer solutions to problems.

2. Overt obsession

You can't create great content without understanding your audience's interests, passions and problems. The second mega-

trend of 2015 will be overt customer obsession. Marketers will need to invest in truly understanding more about their customers and potential customers - through traditional research, but increasingly also through ethnographic research and real-time data from transactions, movements and conversations.

What it means for marketers

- There is a fine line between observation and stalking - respect privacy while hunting for insight.
- Consider forums and panels that reward customers by showing them how their feedback makes tangible changes to products and campaigns - it's not just about financial incentives.
- Customer collaboration can provide great insight that does not feel intrusive.

3. Economical experience

Brand experience is the next wave of change in marketing. What started with global retailers and carefully crafted immersive experiences (think iStore or the models at Abercrombie & Fitch) have now crossed into product and service brands and multimedia experiences. The shift has been stunted by the difficult economic times, but smart marketers are using participation to create memorable and unique experiences. The Magnum pop-up store in Johannesburg, for example, lets customers create their own perfect Magnum - and these kinds of participatory experiences also provide ideas for new product development.

What it means for marketers

- Find efficient ways to create memorable experiences - it doesn't need to cost a fortune to strike a chord with customers.
- Don't redesign the entire customer journey - focus on the right moments for maximum impact.
- Wearable tech is worth watching, but for now, human experiences beat tech in Africa.

4. Functional fortress

Brand purpose and positioning are hugely important, but many brands have tipped too far into the emotional and esoteric space without any connection to reality. In our difficult economic climate, marketers need to ensure that their brands connect emotionally but that they also make rational sense; that they provide value for money. We will see a return to functional proof points that help customers navigate and close the value equation loop. Brands in the food and beverages categories will be first to make the switch, and other categories will follow.

What it means for marketers

- Build resilience into your brands by highlighting your functional proof points.
- Think about how quality intrinsics, such as taste or durability, can be linked to factual information like provenance, chain of custody and awards for quality.
- Be wary of positioning yourself on heart alone.

2015 will remain a tough year for marketers focused on domestic markets, and attention will continue to shift towards regional economic growth in the rest of Africa.

Staying focused on customer needs, ensuring there are strong functional benefits to your products and creating content and experiences that are relevant, simple and attitudinally engaging, will allow marketers to build resilient and powerful brands that weather economic storms and position them for growth on the continent.

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