# greenlight

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# 2020
# PREDICTIONS

# HOW ADVANCED DATA ANALYTICS WILL CONTINUE TO STREAMLINE DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY

**Andreas Pouros**

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I don't think it controversial to suggest that talk of data analytics, over the last two decades, has far exceeded the examples of its successful implementation. I'm not talking about basic Google Analytics, but of programmes and technology that really delve deep into improving insights and targeting, dramatically impacting commercial decision making.

Perhaps the best example is the billions of pounds historically flushed down the toilet by big businesses trying to nail "attribution". Technology not being quite ready or fit for purpose is the obvious reason for some of these failures, but new ways of looking and measuring things can also create conflicts between traditional job roles and functions, particularly in those businesses that really need data's role to be elevated.

However, I do believe that things are rapidly changing, as perspective has dramatically shifted. "Attribution" programmes, as with most attempts at "doing data", were historically centred around channel; be it email, affiliates, paid search or SEO. The new wave is centred around the customer. Channel becomes less important through that lens and, as businesses become more customer-centric, their internal structures slowly follow

suit and their use of data and technology becomes a driver as opposed to just the side show. This is why you hear about "transformation" programmes, teams and steering groups. They exist because sometimes you can't change the shape of a business fast enough so you build a "new house" that you hope one day will annex everything else. This customer centricity is the biggest reason why marketing technology now comprises 23% of marketing budgets[1], and as decision makers start to take notice of results, this is only set to increase.

Looking to 2020, there'll be three main, interrelated trends that will spearhead this acceleration to customer centricity – the integration of customer data platforms (CDP) and data management platforms (DMP), AI for marketing, and attribution (the sequel).

## Integrating CDP and DMP

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Both customer data platforms and data management platforms collate customer data. But, by combining the two, you can create a much more accurate picture of the customer from data across all channels and touchpoints.

DMPs merge datasets originating from first, second and third-party channels to target customers in ad networks. A CDP combines all first-party data from CRMs, websites, email marketing, ads, and POS systems to build specific customer profiles. Currently, no system exists where the two integrate. Ideally, DMP data would exist as another channel to the CDP, creating a richer dataset to base and construct a profile around. By amalgamating the two systems, there'd be a library of comprehensive customer profiles, from which clear, focused actions would arise for marketers.

## AI for marketing

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Artificial intelligence (AI) equips organisations with the ability to automate data-heavy processes, perform tasks and respond to input from users by providing intelligent insight on the next best course of action. Consequentially, time and money are saved on repetitive tasks that would otherwise occupy a great deal of human productivity.

Although cost reduction is where AI is really delivering, it can also offer enhanced customer experience and personalisation. Although not currently widely used, AI algorithms are now allowing chatbots to become more precise in the responses they deliver, and progressively more conversational in tone. In the online ad space, AI can categorise and segment an audience base by considering the history of the user, what they've liked and viewed and what other users have found popular, and then provides automatically personalised product recommendations.

AI is no longer viewed with ambiguity in terms of being a leading innovative technology and delivering results. In short, the hype is very real, and with regards to its use in marketing, we should expect to see a diversification of the capabilities that AI possesses.

## Multi-touch attribution

The development of advanced data analytics made possible by CDP and DMP plus AI will, in turn, enable marketers to evaluate their strategies more effectively and will lead to more successful modes of marketing attribution, such as multi-touch attribution.

Attribution should be thought of as a flow chart, where the starting point is a customer's first interaction with a brand online, and the end result is a purchase. Traditionally, marketers place emphasis on "last touch"

or "first touch" attribution and, by doing so, disregard all the other functions and how they've influenced the purchase decision. Multi-touch attribution analyses the effectiveness of every interaction in the flow chart, and supplies marketers with the data. This gives them full visibility into which specific marketing and advertising efforts are having an impact at specific stages of the buyer journey, providing crucial context for general assessment of the channels leading to a sale and for decisions surrounding social engagement, digital campaigns, brand engagement and website optimisation.

Throughout the next year, I expect to see more marketers looking to use the multi-touch model of attribution in order to measure their campaigns with greater accuracy, allowing them to focus their budget with more confidence.

Trends in the coming decade will be structured around data; how we collect it, store it, analyse it, and what actions we take in light of it. Through various systems we now know more about our customers' behaviour than ever before. Technological innovations in the digital marketing space in 2020 will only increase this knowledge and help to streamline the marketing campaigns of the future.

1.  https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/news/global_martech_budgets_are_growing_rapidly/41078

# CLIENT SERVICES PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

## THE FUTURE OF RETAIL IS INTEGRATED

**Bea Patman**
Client Partner

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Some years ago, Google posited that retailers should stop fixating on where a transaction took place (whether online or in-store) and concentrate simply on the fact that a transaction happened. The message didn't really land at the time, what with the pressure of commercial KPIs on newly staffed-up digital teams and freshly minted eCommerce systems driving a race for online conversions. But then the high street began to slump, and brands started to realise that the power of a website to drive customers into brick-and-mortar stores was just as important as its ability to generate revenue online.

Now the relationship between the two is evolving further, and savvy retailers are wising up to the conversion-boosting power of a seamlessly integrated digital and physical shopping experience. Missguided is a perfect example of this, managing the unlikely feat of successfully turning a purely online business into one with physical stores, at a time when many retailers are shuttering their high street shops. Its flagship Bluewater store is furnished with slick floor-to-ceiling digital displays, allowing it to showcase its products in the

dynamic digital format favoured by its young, female demographic and ensuring that outfits previously researched online are immediately identifiable in store. Shoppers are also encouraged to interact with the #babesofmissguided hashtag to demonstrate their new wares, and do so in droves, thereby populating social media with a continuous flow of invaluable user-generated content and saving the brand untold outlay on digital content production and social spend.

At the opposite end of the retail spectrum is Ralph Lauren, which has installed interactive mirrors in its New York flagship store. As well as enabling shoppers to adjust the fitting room lighting and request different sizes, it also enriches the offline shopping experience with the ability to browse other items in-store, allowing the brand to boost basket value in a way that was previously only possible online. Shoppers can also input their email addresses so that they can be contacted if, say, their size comes back into stock or they want to wait until payday to complete their transaction. This kind of interaction facilitates laser-focused retargeting

and customer engagement, serving to feed offline experiences into the brand's online ecosystem.

Online retail has changed our shopping behaviour irreversibly, increasing the expectations we place on personalisation, communication, and visual merchandising. By working to meet these expectations in-store, as well as online, these pioneering brands are securing ever-rarer offline sales and placing some of the heavy lifting for their digital strategies (social content, data capture, and preference insights) into the hands of their customers. It's a clever, self-feeding ecosystem that all retail brands should be considering if they want to thrive in 2020 and beyond.



**Bea Patman**
Client Partner

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# CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS – THE NEXT STEP IN SOCIAL ANALYTICS

Data science has long been able to demonstrate a clear correlation between human behaviour and buying habits. Now, conversational analysis is using artificial intelligence to further enrich our understanding of that connection. An emerging suite of machine learning tools are able to review millions of statements and discussions on social media and sift out clues about what people say and what they go on to buy.

While social listening tools have been able to provide similar insights for some years, conversational analysis is the first method that allows data scientists to read between the lines of what people are saying to glean implicit as well as explicit sentiment. So, for instance, an enthusiastic Facebook update along the lines of

"it's so exciting to finally be able to decorate our own home!" might have previously been identified as an opportunity to target said person with paintbrushes or sofas (if it was identified as a targeting opportunity at all). Conversational analysis could also identify that this is a first-time home buyer who's thrilled about their new place and will definitely want to take good care of it – probably with products like building and contents insurance, for example.

With this tool, advertisers will be able to move beyond an awareness simply of what audiences might want to buy to an understanding of how they feel about it. This, used wisely, will transform the power of messaging.

**Bea Patman**
Client Partner

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# IN-APP GAME ADVERTISING

In-game advertising is a booming corner of the digital marketing world, with brands jumping on the opportunity to grab virtual real estate within the rapidly growing gaming and esports sectors. But while the industry booms, the audience remains fairly niche – overwhelmingly male and overwhelmingly young. This is why the smart money is going towards app game advertising instead. App gamers are an incredibly broad church, with 2.2 billion people of all ages playing on their mobiles worldwide, split almost equally by gender in the majority of markets.

The "Candy Crush-effect" is credited with opening up the app game world back in 2012 (just think about the variety of players you've probably seen on your morning commute over the years), but it's the evolution of mobile devices that has finally made in-app ad space a worthwhile investment. We've reached the point at which the majority of those 2.2 billion gamers are playing with touch-screen handsets, enabling them to interact with ads in a way not previously possible.

The KPIs being reported by the narrow range of brands already investing heavily here (mainly customer packaged goods brands) are impressive, but it seems that the majority of advertisers are still being held back by inaccurately perceived barriers to entry – imagined costs and complexity. In 2020, we're likely to see these misconceptions debunked, opening up this huge audience pool to a new wave of adopters.
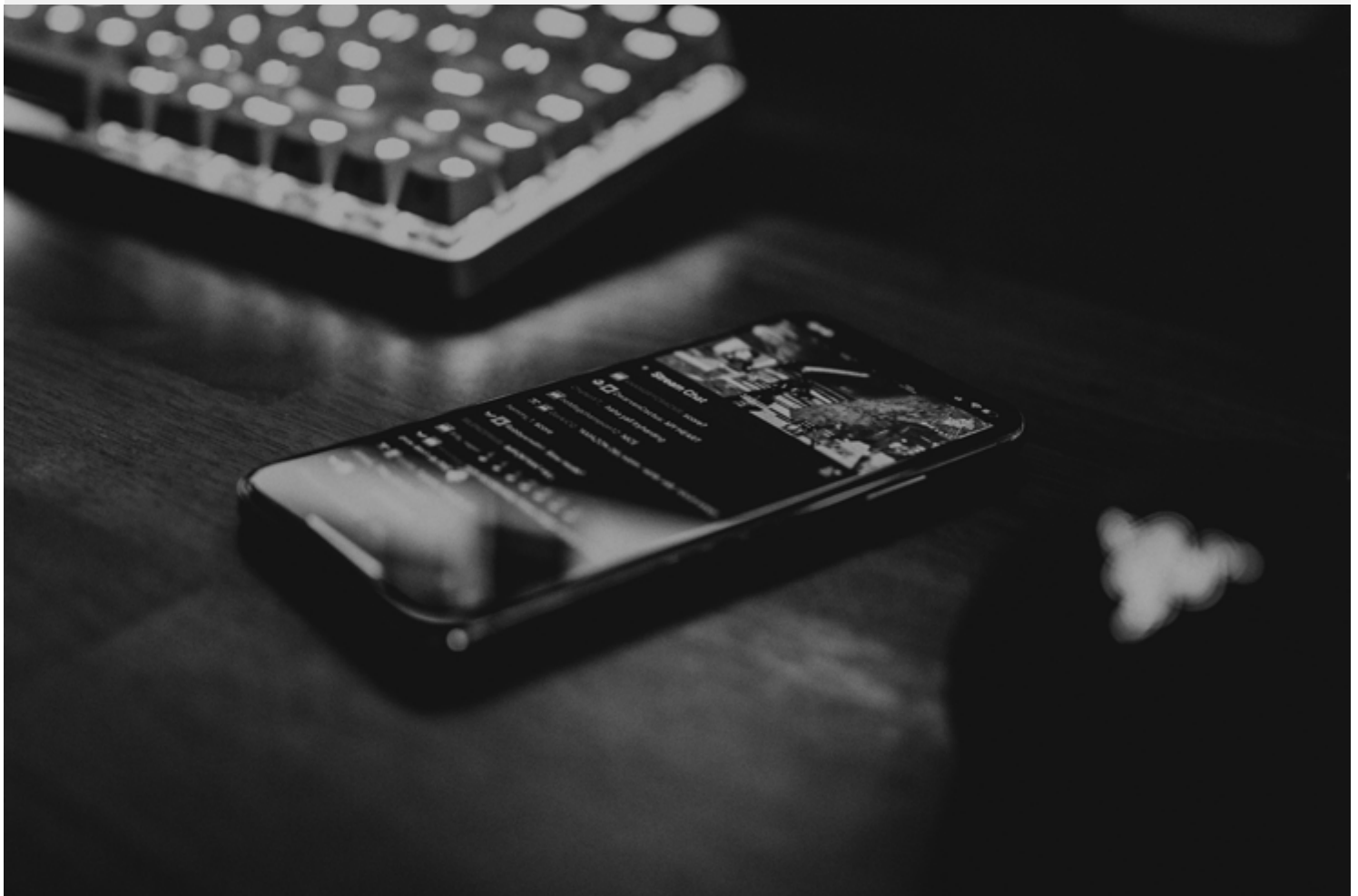
**Freddie Hudson**

Senior Account Executive

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## NOFOLLOW LINKS ARE SET TO CHANGE

Back in September, the well-known Google link attribute "rel=nofollow" was augmented with two new fellow attributes, "rel=sponsored" and "rel=ugc" (which must be paired with one of the others). These arrive with some fairly large potential ramifications for how content is signposted on the web.

Historically, Google has said that nofollow links made no impact on rank and were ignored by its bots, as the use-case was for linking to poor quality sites. But all this is set to change from 1st March 2020, when all three link types may be used by Google for crawling, indexing, and even ranking, although the extent is as yet unknown.

It seems there are a few possible routes this could go down. In one example, publishers such as Wikipedia may change its linking strategy from "=nofollow" to "=nofollow, ugc". It seems fair that this content might be more valuable than a straight nofollow link, so sites linked to from Wikipedia may see their ranks improve.

There's always an element of the unknown with Google Updates, but the introduction of a new link type adds another layer of complexity – how will the SEO community learn to manipulate them, and what will Google do to prevent this?

One thing is certain: change is coming, and we'll all have to wait until March to see the full impact.

**David Tillett**

Client Partner

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## 2020: THE YEAR OF GAMING

Without a doubt, gaming is already huge, and it continues to impress its dominance as the largest revenue driving form of entertainment across the globe. By the end of 2019, the gaming market will be worth circa $150 billion, compared to the film industry's worth of $140 billion. And 2020 is already looking likely to further this gap, with new console releases from Sony and Microsoft and a slew of new game launches planned.

It's no surprise then that both Google and Apple, two tech and media powerhouses, are now making their own waves across the gaming world, with the recent launch of Apple Arcade and the very soon to launch Google Stadia.

Google has stated that Stadia will adopt a subscription-based "games service" model, which has already been widely tried and tested by the likes of Microsoft, Sony, and EA. However, you can't help but feel that it will be yearning to monetise console gaming through advertising, similar to many hugely popular "free to download" mobile games. Indeed, Google itself has only been able to grow at the rate it has over the past two decades through the commercialisation of its search and YouTube properties. But, as a media form, the interactive nature of gaming is very different to the passive consumption of YouTube content and the necessary technical infrastructure needed to support such a model would be extremely costly. Perhaps Google will need to acquire its own game development house or commission dedicated Stadia games, with advertising baked into the core development, for such a system to work. No matter the outcome though, for an advertiser, the prospect of being able to log into Google Ads and target such a huge audience, across such a creative medium, is incredibly exciting. Layer on all of Google's audience targeting capabilities and it becomes truly mouth-watering.

What we do know is that Google likes to take an iterative approach to its properties, and only time will tell which direction it tries to pull and wrestle gaming away from the tight grip that Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft have on the industry.

**Robbie Ashton**

Senior Account Manager

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## BRANDS WILL NEED TO KEEP ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF PUBLIC OPINION

It's been a tough year for brands and big tech companies alike. Many have faced intense public scrutiny over a wave of issues that the public have taken to heart – privacy, sustainability, and corporate responsibility, to name but a few.

As we go into a new decade, the eyes of the people are wide open. Take Google, for example, could it begin to leak traffic to Ecosia, it's tree-planting, carbon neutral competitor? It's hard to imagine anyone challenging Google's hold on the web, but one thing's for sure: companies have a careful tightrope walk to perform if they wish to end 2020 on the right side of public opinion.

# PAID SEARCH & SHOPPING
# PREDICTIONS
# FOR 2020

Tristan Schädler
Senior Paid Media Analyst

## DECLINING BRAND LOYALTY WILL CHANGE ONLINE PURCHASING BEHAVIOUR

In 2020, the rising decline in brand loyalty will pose more challenges to online marketers as customers become more product-driven and brands play less of a role in their purchases. The sheer volume of choice and information available to the customer in the online space has made purchase decisions more complex and considered. In the past, customers would often stick to their trusted brands, whereas now switching barriers are much lower.

The very nature of online marketing means that access to information has a lot to do with this. It's much easier to evaluate and compare products or services online and to consult reviews and ratings compared to nearly two decades ago. As such, today's customer will build initial brand trust through product information and third-party reviews.

For advertisers, this change in customer behaviour creates challenges, not only with regards to customer retention, but also in terms of new customer acquisition. In this crowded online space, it's more important than ever to communicate a compelling brand message and reach the right customers with the right message at the right touchpoint within their purchasing journey. If the goal is for brands to stay at the fore of their target customer's mind, from the awareness and consideration stage down to the final purchasing stage, they need to use elaborate prospecting and retargeting methods - all while making the brand and shopping experience as seamless as possible.

**Will Brittain**

Paid Social Analyst

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# WORD OF MOUTH MARKETING WILL PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN PAID SOCIAL SHOPPING

If social platforms are to keep up with Google when it comes to shopping capabilities, they'll need to focus on what they can provide that's unique to social platforms. Enter shareability and friend networks...

Driven by influencers, Instagram Shopping[1] enabled social retail to take a huge leap forward in 2019. Rather than just being served shoppable products that have been viewed on a site before, customers are able to get an interactive experience focused on latest trends direct from the brand itself.

One of the few marketing tactics that's more powerful than that is recommendations (aka word of mouth) about a product from a known and trusted source. This adds a major sense of credibility, underlined by a Nielsen report which revealed that 92% of customers trusted word of mouth suggestions more than ads[2]. This is where features like view counts, reviews and network-related calls to action could come in.

Imagine a target customer receiving a dynamic ad on Facebook where, instead of likes and comments, they're told "three friends have also viewed this". They scroll down to the comments section to see a banner that someone in their network rated a product 4.5/5. The next time they're served this ad, they notice that 10 connections (including friends of friends) have bought from that site in the past year. It's these types of interaction, based around social proof, that encourage people to engage with a product, much like they might ask their network for their advice before purchasing something.

GDPR will pose some challenges when it comes to implementing the above for brands based in the EU, however we can expect the US to lead on this front in 2020.

**Christina Ahmed**

Paid Media Performance Director

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# THE RISE OF CUSTOMER-FIRST CAMPAIGN IMPLEMENTATION

Google continually adapts and develops its ad products, with new features and betas regularly being released. However, over the last year or so, it's gradually been moving away from the standard search, display and shopping campaign types. So, what is it moving towards next?

The first clue comes when setting up a new campaign, when a campaign goal now needs to be selected. This follows in the footsteps of social platforms like Facebook, where the advertising objective has always been at the heart of the campaign. For Google, these options range from brand awareness to brand consideration, from traffic to sales, covering the different stages of the customer's journey to purchase.

The second indication of a shift in campaign methodology was the release of Smart Shopping. This new format included functionality to show ads across Gmail, the display network, and YouTube in addition to within the search results. This is geared towards reaching customers who are interested in certain products via multiple platforms.

Another new product released was local campaigns which, again, are a campaign type that can run across different platforms such as Google Maps, search, YouTube and Google Display Network (GDN). This campaign type is focused on bridging the gap between online and offline, addressing the rising need for digital and in-store integration for the customer.

Finally, there's been the release of discovery campaigns which run across the Google discover feed, YouTube home feed, and Gmail. This new visual ad format is aimed at reaching the customers who are ready to discover new products and brands.

These new features bring us to an ad setup with campaigns structured around customer needs as opposed to product categories or keyword types. As we go into 2020, it's likely that Google will continue to develop its customer-first approach to product development, overhauling the traditional campaign setup and encouraging advertisers to put audience needs first when planning digital advertising, with a more automated, cross-channel strategy.
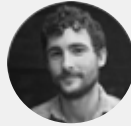
**Mark Byrne**

Paid Media Performance Director

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## CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS AROUND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES WILL DRIVE PURPOSE-DRIVEN MARKETING

It's no longer about just the product, it's about the purpose. We've seen brands react to customers' expectations of hyper convenience ("same day shipping" queries have grown by 44% in two years[3]) as well as hyper personalisation (8/10 consumers want brands to get to know them[4]). A key emerging customer trend is that people are no longer buying into brands based on price or product alone, brands must also align with their beliefs. Customers want brands to have a point of view on what they care about, so they're not only buying into a product but also a lifestyle. Purpose-driven marketing will be on the minds of many CMOs, looking to emulate the success Cadbury's[5] and Burger King[6] had in 2019.

## SNAPCHAT WILL BECOME A CONTENDER AS A PERFORMANCE DRIVER

Following a challenging 2018 due to a diminishing user base, a poorly received redesign, and being publicly spurned by a Jenner[7], Snapchat refocused its offering and came back swinging in 2019. With 12 million daily active users in the UK and counting, a focus on innovative video offerings (augmented reality and lenses) and an increasingly robust catalogue of performance ad units, we'll see advertisers seek to leverage effective performance available in the less competitive auctions. Snapchat's approach to privacy and its comparatively clean record will also win it more fans in 2020, helping it become a bigger challenger for paid media ad spend.

## PAID MEDIA WILL PLAY A ROLE IN INCREASED CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITY

2019 has undoubtedly been a tough year for retailers, with July 2019 being the worst July reported for the UK high street since records began 25 years ago[8]. There are a variety of reasons for the economy generally slowing down – China's trade war with the US, Japan and Italy's debt crisis and, last but not least, Brexit. This will push UK retailers to set their sights further afield into new markets; this will be aided by an increasingly global audience, who are more than willing to be influenced outside of their own borders. One example that illustrates this is that "Christmas fashion" searches are rising faster than "Diwali fashion" in India. Of course, still dwarfed by "Diwali fashion", it's just an indication of an increased global appetite. The flexibility and quick pace at which paid media can run international activity will see it play a central role as brands dip their toes in new waters next year.

**Ian Oh**

Paid Media Manager

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# DIGITAL MARKETING FOR THE HIGH STREET?

In 2019, digital marketing had a moment in physical retail stores. Google was the first to get the ball rolling thanks to its local campaigns and local inventory ads functionality, which both enabled retailers to increase store footfall via digital marketing tactics. In 2020, we'll start seeing brands explore this further by drilling deeper into individual store data to give digital marketers and retailers the ability to focus on specific stores.

Many retailers are embracing in-store technology to merge the online and offline experience. Some encourage customers to order products via point of sale devices in-store, which can then be collected or delivered to their homes. To add to this, we will start seeing social, search, and display ads tailored to stores or locations using geofencing, which will see customers receive timely, relevant adds when they're in a particular location or store thanks to user location data.

**A possible shopper scenario could be:**

*Frankie and Harry are looking to purchase a product online but want to see the physical product before making their final choice. Over lunch on their local high street, Harry sees a Google ad while browsing on his mobile phone. The ad is for the product they wanted to buy and includes an in-store special offer only. They head in-store, but the product isn't available in their preferred colour. A store assistant helps them make the purchase on an in-store device, which includes home delivery.*

Getting to a place where the above scenario is seamless will be possible, and doesn't require huge leaps and bounds in technology. Using tools like Store Sales Direct from Google, advertisers can track purchases made in-store and link them to the ad click on Google Ads. As such, bringing digital marketing to the high street is the next step in bringing online and offline full circle.

**Shiblu Ahmed**
Paid Media Performance Director

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## TIKTOK: THE SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM THAT'S PRIMED TO BE THE 'NEXT BIG THING'

TikTok, or Douyin as it's known in China, is a short-form video app which launched in early 2017 by Chinese developers ByteDance. Having generated rapid growth in Asia, with over 500 million monthly active users as of June 2018, ByteDance made the decision to merge the platform with video app, Musical.Ly, which it had acquired for nearly $1bn earlier in December 2017[9]. This provided instant exposure to markets outside of Asia as Musical.Ly had built a strong user base amongst teenagers across Europe and Americas.

### "It's just another Vine or Instagram"

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At a glance, the app bears all the hallmarks of the much beloved Vine, may it rest in peace ... or continue to live on in YouTube compilations. However, TikTok users are not limited to six seconds and cannot repost content that's not their own. Instead, they can create videos up to 60 seconds and are encouraged to create their own content as sharing TikTok's can only be done through private message or a link. Users can use someone else's video to duet with, appearing as a split screen and showing the

viewers their reaction to the originators video. A major difference to Instagram, and other platforms alike, is that TikTok's feed uses machine learning to populate a "for you feed", understanding what content you engage with and like, rather than declared interests, as is the case with Instagram for instance.

### Why TikTok could be the "next best thing"

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**1) Strong reach amongst millennials and Gen Z**

While Facebook and YouTube continue to battle it out for the seat at the head of the table, the younger internet users of today are prone to trying new emerging platforms in the quest to seek out the "next big thing". With 41% of TikTok users aged between 16 and 24[10], it's no wonder the platform is one of the most downloaded apps in the world (and in line to become that "next big thing" too). This younger age demographic, coupled with the platform's encouragement of user generated content (UGC) and providing the necessary tools within the app to be creative, has led to a virality that's unrivalled by every previous social media platform.

**2) Potential to drive huge organic reach**

With micro-celebs – and established global celebs for that matter – yet to saturate the platform, there's massive potential for both creators and brands to drive huge organic reach. While TikTok is growing rapidly, expanding into new markets, it's also gaining traction among older users too, with the number of adults using the platform growing by 5.5 times in 18 months[11]. With the platform opting for a similar feed style to that of Instagram Stories in terms of how intimate it feels, and users currently spending just under an hour on average within the app, there's never been a better time to start the conversation.

**3) Putting the fun back into social media**

As social media shifts focus away from having the ability to connect with friends and family to simply becoming the new go-to for entertainment, TikTok's super user-friendly, raw, and fun platform will be in prime position to capitalise on this shift. TikTok users don't care much for the perfect shot or the best filter, instead the community enjoys authenticity and creativity, which is appealing to a lot of the established influencers on other platforms, with many already switching over (or are in the process of doing so). The ability to merge content with music automatically creates more powerful virality than other mechanisms such as hashtags, playing on emotional and visual stimuli at the same time.

It'll be interesting to see how quickly and extensively ByteDance decides to monetise the platform. Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) is already testing ad formats such as in-camera (video and image) searches with the options to browse and purchase products, such as clothing, directly within the app. If growth among its younger age demographic continues at the same rate as it is now, advertisers would be silly to ignore the platform, especially if they're looking to implement more upper and mid-funnel strategies and build deeper, more engaged relationships with their customers. Time will tell how successful TikTok will be, however, with the number of monthly active users already surpassing what Vine ever achieved, there's certainly more to come from this sleeping giant.

## BRINGING THE HIGH STREET INTO OUR HOMES

It feels like every year we have a couple of recurring or similar trends which never quite materialise or get off the ground to start with. A part of that is the context in which the trend was written within, and the actual real-world implementations which manifested thereafter. One such example is artificial intelligence (AI), where every year there seems to be some mention of it making a big impact or that 'the machines are going to replace humans indefinitely'. However, look deeper into some of the product developments over the last couple of years and you can see the impact AI and cognitive computing is having when it comes to enhancing digital platforms and their features. Another trend which seems to crop up regularly is "full funnel" or "omnichannel" marketing. While we've seen major and necessary improvements in omnichannel retail, we still have areas of focus which need improving, such as attribution modelling, smart beacons (in-store vs online), cardless purchases, etc. While those will continue to be a focus and will likely improve with time, for 2020, I wanted to focus on one exciting trend which will be driving online retail and continuing to bring the high street closer to the fingertips of the user (and in the comfort of their own home).

## The use of augmented reality (AR)

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Sometimes confused with virtual reality (VR), the main difference being that AR 'adds' digital elements to your field of vision, usually through a camera or smartphone, whereas VR creates a whole new reality by digitally covering your field of vision, usually through a sophisticated headset.

While not an entirely new technology, and a trend which falls perfectly into the category of recurring and regurgitated, it's only recently that we've actually started to see the real-world applications of such technology, especially within digital media.

Toyota recently launched a new immersive AR feature that allows users to experience 10 of its cars, placing the vehicles in any field of vision and exploring them at any angle[12]. What's more significant is that it was able to do this without requiring users to download an app – usually a sticking point for users tired of having to download apps only to be disappointed thereafter.

Toyota is not the only car manufacturer to have looked to such technology to drive user engagement. A couple of years ago, Volvo started a collaboration with Microsoft to utilise its HoloLens technology to pioneer a new way to explore its cars and services, bringing the company and its benefits to life[13]. HoloLens is an example of mixed reality (MR) which merges the real and virtual worlds to produce new environments and visualisations.

Companies like Amazon and IKEA have turned to AR not only to stay ahead of the competition and continue to drive sales growth but, more fundamentally, to explore ways to reduce the number of returns they see from online shoppers. Why should that be of such a concern, especially with retail ecommerce set to hit $5bn in value by 2021[14]? Well, it's also estimated that at least 30% of all purchased items online are returned[15]. The applications of AR could further advance the customer experience, helping them to fully understand and experience what they're buying. For retailers, this could mean they keep a higher percentage of their sales and reduce their return rate.

As both the technology to support AR and its applications develop and improve concurrently, so too will the confidence needed for customers to purchase what they can't see, feel, or test physically and in person. The markers are already being set and 2020 will see some very exciting and innovative applications of AR and MR. While the bricks and mortar stores on the high street will always have a place, it could be how they adopt and incorporate such features that will decide who survives and who doesn't.

**Dan Walker**

Paid Media Manager

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## DIGITAL MARKETERS WILL BECOME INTERPRETERS BETWEEN BUSINESSES AND PERFORMANCE-DRIVEN AUTOMATION

According to a recent report, 61% of marketers rated, on a scale of 1-10, the transparency and control of machine learning capabilities at 5 or lower[16]. While this isn't exactly surprising considering the "black box" solutions that are gaining traction, such as Google's Smart Shopping campaigns, it also signals a shift in terms of where marketers will need to focus their efforts.

The sophistication of machine learning and bidding automation is progressing at an astounding rate, and the performance benefits are increasingly outweighing the trade-offs around the lack of transparency and reactive control for all but a shrinking number of exceptions. While it's clear that hands-on targeting optimisation is continuing to occupy less and less of a typical PPC marketer's remit, the question is where will this time be reallocated?

I expect a significant shift in strategic focus towards how bid automation is informed. In terms of the quality of data being sourced, how that data is manipulated before being fed into bid automation solutions, as well as in terms of the reliability of the systems that track that data.

## Data quality

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While bid automation is incredibly effective at pursuing single quantitative goals like return on ad spend (ROAS) or cost per action (CPA), a business' aims are rarely that one-dimensional. Often there are secondary KPIs and thresholds that end up being neglected as a result of automation. A bid strategy might allocate increasing amounts of spend towards remarketing in the pursuit of a revenue target, only for the advertiser to find out that new customer acquisition has dropped off massively as a result. Low value products might be pushed too hard by a bid strategy with a target ROAS rather than on a metric that takes margin into account.

Advertisers often address these issues by setting up separate tactic-based bid strategies, but this kind of siloing is always detrimental to machine learning due to smaller volumes of leverageable data and fewer options in terms of strategically optimal spend allocation. As a result, we're going to see advertisers find creative means of enriching the data that their automation relies on in order to allow for individual strategies to be applied to wider targeting sets. In turn, this will encourage bid strategies with more leverageable data as well as opportunities for trade-offs.

For example, instead of applying siloed bid strategies separately to remarketing and prospecting targets, why not upweight the value of new customer conversions?
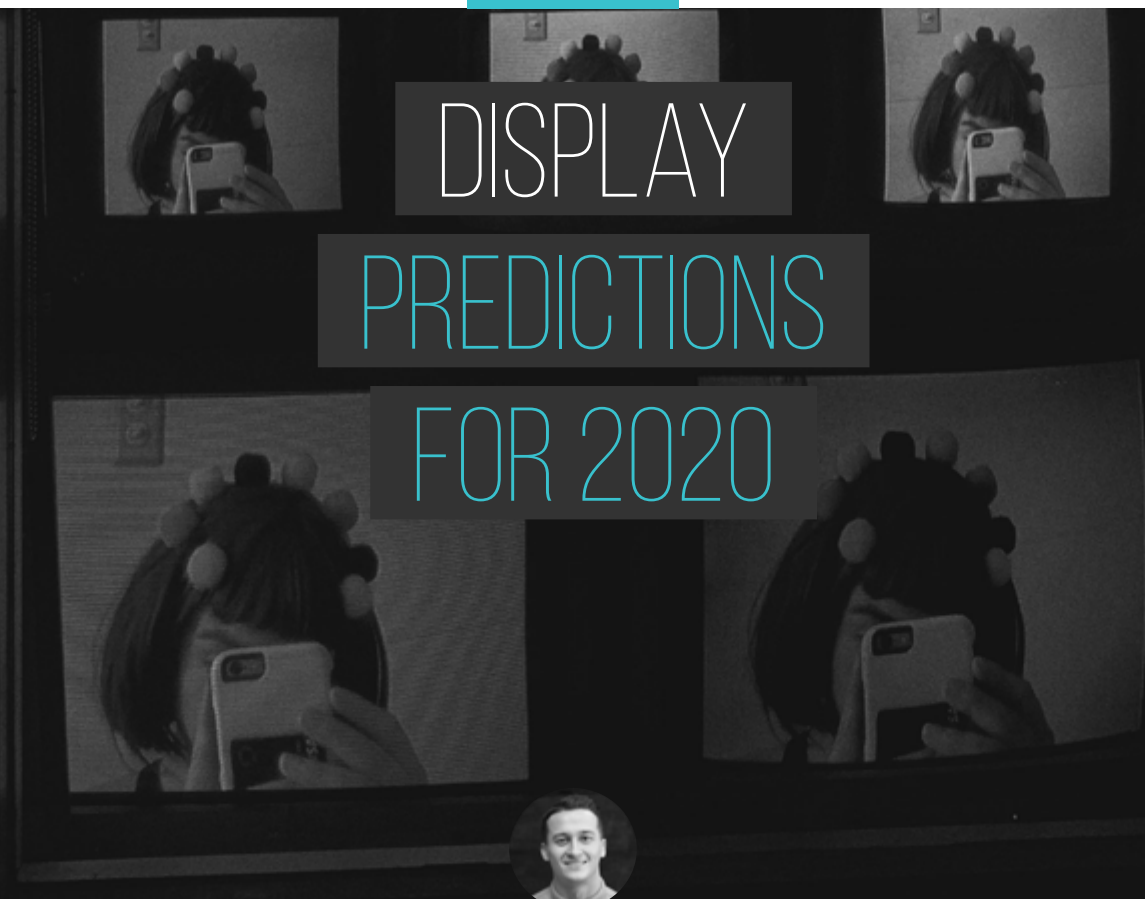
Similarly, for high margin and low margin products, why not track margin-based revenue? What about upweighting the value of sales that match the characteristics of purchases that have historically led to high lifetime value based on existing CRM data?

## Tracking reliability

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Let's say, a business sees that conversion tracking has stopped firing under certain conditions and it ultimately takes two weeks to diagnose and fix. It's easy to explain this to a PPC specialist and, likewise, it's easy for the specialist to immediately change their approach to cautiously setting bids based on historic data that they know to be accurate.

Bid strategies, on the other hand, aren't nearly as equipped to run this type of damage control. As a result, advertisers that rely on bid automation must choose between a potentially severe misallocation of spend, pausing activity entirely, or enduring the operational disruption of switching back to manually managed targeting until the problem is resolved. Ultimately, the relatively severe disruptions in performance and workload for advertisers who rely heavily on automation is going to drive an increased demand on ad ops teams to ensure tracking set ups are as stable and future-proof as possible.

1.  https://help.instagram.com/191462054687226

2.  https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2012/consumer-trust-in-online-social-and-mobile-advertising-grows/

3.  Google Luxury Next event, Dublin, 28-29th May 2019

4.  Google Luxury Next event, Dublin, 28-29th May 2019

5.  https://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/donate-your-words/

6.  https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/opinion/fernando_machado_engage_the_hearts_minds_and_stomachs/2977

7.  https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-22/snap-royalty-kylie-jenner-erased-a-billion-dollars-in-one-tweet

8.  https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/news/article-7323321/High-street-stores-suffer-worst-July-record-shoppers-disengaged.html

9.  https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-bytedance-musically/chinas-bytedance-scrubs-musical-ly-brand-in-favor-of-tiktok-idUKKBN1KN0BW

10. https://blog.globalwebindex.com/trends/tiktok-music-social-media/

11. https://www.marketingcharts.com/digital/social-media-108342

12. https://futurumresearch.com/toyotas-immersive-ar-experience/

13. https://www.volvocars.com/uk/about/humanmade/projects/hololens

14. https://www.statista.com/statistics/379046/worldwide-retail-e-commerce-sales/

15. https://www.invespcro.com/blog/ecommerce-product-return-rate-statistics/

16. https://www.hanapinmarketing.com/state-of-ppc-2019-2020/

# DISPLAY PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

Callen Johnson

Programmatic Trading Manager

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## ADDRESSABLE TV WILL BREAK INTO THE MAINSTREAM

Last year we predicted that we would begin to see big movement around programmatic TV, with an influx of notable mergers and acquisitions in 2018 within the addressable TV space. The evolution of traditional linear TV ad buying has very much continued to transform, with a digital ad buying ecosystem fast emerging. Advanced TV has now become an umbrella term[1] for the likes of connected TV, OTT (over the top) advertising, and addressable TV/VOD – all of which provides advertisers with innovative ways to serve targeted television content to end users.

According to Nielsen, addressable TV is predicted to reach $4.7 billion in 2020[2]. While this is still a drop in the ocean compared to the current $70.8 billion spent on traditional TV, spend has increased by 260% year-on-year. This growth is being led by major players such as Comcast Corp and AT&T in the US, and by Sky AdSmart, ITV and All4 in the UK, along with smaller streaming services and apps including Pluto TV, Kodi, and Roku.

In the UK, Sky AdSmart currently dominates, covering 27% of UK households. This is predicted to grow to 40% penetration by 2020 and through the likes of Now TV and YouView, is expected to increase to 60% by 2022[3]. In a recent five-year study completed by Sky, addressable TV reduces channel switching by 48% and increases ad recall by 49%[4]. As such, marketers are starting to take note of the potential impact and engagement it offers. A new report by the Video Advertising Bureau has reported that 62% of marketers using addressable TV have noted it as a valuable part of their media mix and that they have plans to increase spend, while 71% of these buyers have only been using addressable TV for less than one year[5]. With an influx of inventory, advanced TV options, and many marketers only just testing this form of video delivery, addressable TV is very much poised to break into the mainstream.
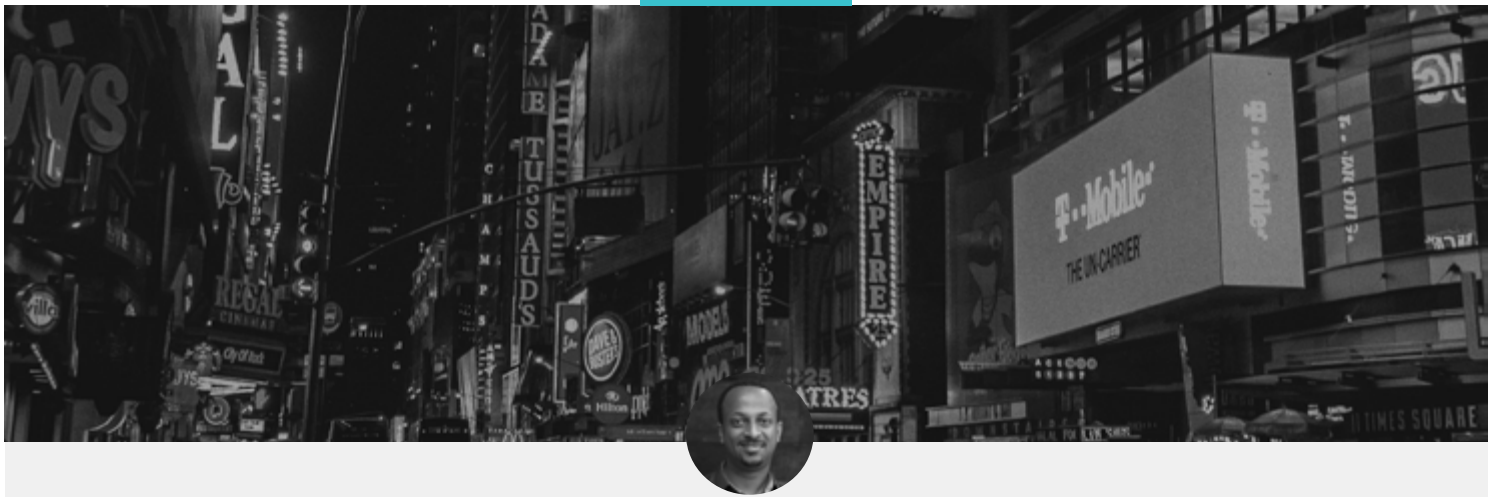
**Fahmi Mohammed**

Head of Display

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## EVOLVING AGENCY-CLIENT PARTNERSHIPS

The past 24 months were abuzz about the trend of clients moving towards in-housing their media strategy, planning, and buying operations[6]. But this isn't going to be another article that's going to beat the same drum about the risks and challenges of in-housing. We actually think it's a sign that brands are evolving in their thinking of how to approach partnerships in their digital supply chain. Most brands have started scrutinising the value added by different players in the chain, thereby maximising potential where possible and driving growth aligned to their internal business goals.

Often, we've seen conflicting, if not competing, KPIs between business goals and marketing goals when briefed by brands. What this meant was both parties were working towards a compounded failure, where the agency will look for opportunities to increase its billings irrespective of whether they aligned with the clients' business goals or not – resulting in clients who are increasingly being frustrated by the mismatch in vision and interest.

This phenomenon forced clients to find models that were closely aligned to their business goals whereby the agency-client relationship transitions to become more of a co-dependent partnership. We've seen a surge in clients and brands looking to work with us who have high growth ambitions and who need the expertise and commercial model to help them achieve their goals. We've been engaged with non-standard commercial models where we take on all risks related to media, resource, and technology in return for compensation based on performance. The performance model is not a new one, but there's been more demand for it in the past 12 months due to various micro and macro factors.

We foresee similar commercial models governing agency-client relationships in 2020, where both parties will have a vested interest in growing the opportunity for mutual benefit. Let's face it, there's a finite number of "specialists" in the same talent pool that would be tapped into by both clients and agencies. This is driving up hiring costs for both sides. Hence smart partnerships are where both parties work asynchronously, with aligned synergies working towards a common goal.

1. https://www.iab.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/IAB_Advanced_TV_Targeting_2018-11.pdf
2. https://www.mediapost.com/publications/article/335553/addressable-tv-breaking-through-predicted-to-hit.html
3. https://edit.co.uk/blog/everything-you-need-to-know-about-addressable-tv/
4. https://www.thedrum.com/news/2019/08/15/addressable-tv-halves-channel-switching-and-improves-ad-recall-claims-sky
5. https://www.broadcastingcable.com/news/spending-on-addressable-tv-ads-to-hit-3-3b-by-2020
6. https://www.thedrum.com/opinion/2019/10/24/the-big-move-how-agency-housing-solutions-are-transforming-brands

# DATA SCIENCE & AUDIENCE INSIGHTS PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

**Wojciech Bednarz**

Data & Insights Senior Strategy Manager

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## SWIFT WILL CHANGE THE FACE OF DATA SCIENCE IN 2020

2020 will be the year we see further democratisation of machine learning tools and a lower point of entry for their usage. This will make this area of data science even more commonplace not only among top tech companies, but also small and medium-sized businesses across various verticals.

However, one aspect which is potentially underrated when looking at the big trends, in terms of the future of data science, is around language frameworks used to make the everyday data science tasks possible. Today, there are two major frameworks, R or Python (or in more pragmatic data science circles, both!). One is praised for having the most beautifully designed data wrangling syntax and plotting libraries, the other for its expressiveness and having the best deep learning libraries available today. However, both suffer from being relatively slow as they're higher level languages.

One additional disadvantage of R and Python is that neither were built with mobile devices in mind. And, if the last ten years are anything to go by, mobile, wearables, and IoT (internet of things) devices will only further advance their presence. What should data scientists do in that case?

There is a new saviour on the horizon – Swift. When you think about Swift, you usually think about the Apple app ecosystem and hours spent playing Candy Crush on your commute. Swift was developed by Apple to make it easier to build apps and, by default, grow its app ecosystem and increase customer retention. Swift was built with mobile devices in mind from the start; it natively supports apps for iPhones, iWatches, and iPads so developers can immediately develop apps for those devices. Combining mobile devices and the latest developments in machine learning, Swift creates a potent and promising mixture.

The concept of using machine learning on mobiles is nothing new, of course; we often hear about how Apple or Google are bringing AI to mobile devices, for example with the introduction of Face ID algorithms that unlock your phone.

What's different though is the fact that both Apple and Google have worked together to bring one of the most iconic deep learning frameworks, TensorFlow, to Swift. Also, their approach in doing so was different from the get-go; it wasn't about building a wrapper in Swift for TensorFlow, it was all about making it the "first class citizen", as they called it, meaning that deep learning algorithms would become commonplace when working on new apps. This is an interesting paradigm shift for

data science. An additional advantage of Swift is that it's not only limited to the iOS ecosystem anymore and was "open sourced" to work on Linux. There are also efforts to bring it to Windows environments, making Swift potentially a very interesting alternative to both R and Python – especially as we can easily call all the native libraries from Python into Swift effortlessly.

If I were to bet on changes for the year ahead, it'd be that 1) more advanced mobile technologies are on the horizon and 2) the apps that we use will become more powerful than ever. So, assuming a language which was built with these predictions in mind will get more traction in the data science circles in next few years is a fairly safe bet.

**Joshua Hudson**
**Junior Data Scientist**

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## ACHIEVING ONE-TO-ONE MARKETING WITH AI

According to recent studies, 60% of content marketers identify personalisation as one of the key challenges to their organisation[1], while companies that have fully invested in all types of personalisation are predicted to outsell those who have not by 20%[2]. Customer segmentation has long been used to tailor marketing strategies to target each group of customers differently. One-to-one marketing takes this a step further, applying these concepts to the individual level, with each customer getting their own unique experience.

The problem with one-to-one marketing is its scalability; it would be impossible to manually develop an individual strategy for thousands of customers

simultaneously. Artificial intelligence (AI), however, could use the ever-growing amount of data on each user, learn the most effective way to target said user, and take the appropriate action. AI is already being implemented within various channels. For example, Google Ads offers automated bidding, which uses AI to produce an optimum strategy to maximise impressions, clicks or other metrics. Currently, these applications tend to be channel-specific, but 2020 could see the emergence of more omnichannel platforms. This would allow for a more comprehensive and truly personalised experience for each customer, delivering the content most relevant to them, via their preferred channel.

**George German**
**Junior Data Scientist**

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# AUTOMATION IN DIGITAL MARKETING

## The (anticlimactic) rise of big data

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Once the hottest topics in the marketing world, big data, has become a meaningless buzzword, serving as white noise to most in the industry. It once promised marketers untold increases in ROI but, as of yet, hasn't quite lived up to the hype. On its own it might be "so last year", but through developments in deep learning and the boom of data science, a new paradigm in digital marketing has developed - predictive marketing. Predictive marketing has already been branded with the potential to improve and streamline every aspect of the marketing pipeline. It's still about extracting insights from huge amounts of data in order to predict future outcomes, but with greater efficiency and higher levels of automation.

## What is predictive marketing?

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Digging below the surface of these hysterical claims, predictive marketing is a technique which determines the probability that a marketing strategy will succeed based on previous outcomes. However, this process not only uses historical data to probe for the right marketing strategy, it can develop and improve its marketing decisions in a continuous (sometimes iterative) process. This dynamic form of "learning" is what really sets it apart from previous techniques, giving predictive marketing the potential to automate parts of the marketing pipeline, saving copious amount of time.

The dynamic learning process which underpins every prediction stem from the subset of machine learning is called deep reinforcement learning. Both deep reinforcement learning and predictive marketing are in their infancy, with less than 25% of marketers using any form of predictive models, meaning the upcoming year could herald a race to master this new technology .

## Reinforcement learning

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The concept of reinforcement learning was born out of advancements in AI, animal psychology, and control theory. At its heart, it involves an autonomous agent, like a person, dog, or deep neural network attempting to navigate an uncertain environment with the goal of maximising a reward. Each action taken in the environment is associated with either a reward (if the action is beneficial) or a punishment (if the action is detrimental), so the agent learns which actions are worthwhile repeating in a particular scenario. A similar process to how you train your pets. In the case of marketing strategies, you can design a deep reinforcement model to use any KPI as the metric to maximise, therefore giving a marketer the ability to tailor the automated strategy to the business needs. Combining deep learning techniques with powerful computing infrastructure and greater accessibility to cloud technologies, in-house AI systems can be easily implemented. So, could machine-learning fuelled automation be the MarTech trend of 2020?

1.  *https://offers.adobe.com/en/na/marketing/landings/_46316_real_time_marketing_insights_study.html*

2.  *https://www.gartner.com/en/marketing/insights/articles/walk-a-fine-line-with-personal-mobile-offers*

# greenlight

# Greenlight Sector Reports

After a hiatus period to rebuild and improve how we collected and sorted search data, the much-loved Greenlight sector reports are back!

Our sector reports are designed to showcase which brands are performing best within the searchscape, highlighting performance changes and giving a clear overview of integrated, organic, and paid search visibility month-by-month.

## *Available sector reports:*

**LEGAL**

**BEAUTY**

**ENERGY**

**TOOLS & COMPONENTS**

**BANKING**

**MONEY TRANSFER**

## DOWNLOAD THEM HERE:

greenlightdigital.com/blog/sector-reports

If you'd like to know more about our sector reports, drop us a line at marketing@greenlightdigital.com

# CREATIVE PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

**Matt Garbutt**

Creative Director

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## 2020 — THE YEAR OF TAKING A RISK (IN TWO PARTS)

## PART 1

### Comfort in discomfort

As we enter a new decade, we have a huge fight on our hands in adland. We're battling fear. People are scared of putting themselves and their brand out there, our comfort zone's too snuggly.

So, what can save us?

Two things: Bravery and creativity.

When you combine them, incredible things happen.

There's barely been a time when creative bravery has been more important. Of around a thousand ads that we see in metro centres every day, 89% are clean forgotten, 7% are remembered negatively and just 4% are remembered for the right reasons[1].

To put it another way, 89% of advertising spend goes straight down the toilet.

How do we stop that? The answer's simple. Take a risk.

You hired your agency because they showed their experience and instinct to get you noticed above your competition. *So, please* trust them when they show you the research and data that informed their creative journey. Trust them when they come back with a funny, witty, sexy, silly or plain dangerous idea. It's the thing that gives your brand a better chance of being remembered. If it makes you a bit uncomfortable, it means you're onto something.

Brave creative work is your unfair advantage. Use it. Please don't join the 89%.

## PART 2

### Bigger battles that creativity can solve

The fight for creative independence isn't just confined to adland. Creative bravery's helping to solve some of the much bigger battles of our time.

There's talk of widescale gloom in people, even desperation at the overwhelming scale of what we face. The B-word (Br*xit). Populism threatening democracy. The death of the high street and a looming economic downturn. The climate emergency .

Creative bravery solves these problems too.

Wherever there's change, there's opportunity.

And we're a nation of creative opportunists. We'll be alright in the end, because creative minds will bring great ideas to haul us through in the worlds of business, the arts, science, technology, and all the rest.

We'll see more new and bold brands playing David to Goliath. Dollar Shave Club versus Gillette. Naked Wines versus the global wine trade cabal. These are companies that have focused on a single, clear, and therefore memorable, idea: to give consumers great service and a quality product. And they've made great success of it.

Why pay for expensive razors or buy expensive plonk when you can have better brought to your front door?

But, what of the high street? Well, this one's a team effort. It's not Amazon's fault that the high street's dying, or Uber's that black cabs are on the wane. Want to know why the high street's dying? It's us choosing to shop at Amazon (we're all guilty of it).

Want to change things? A small act of your bravery combined with someone else's creativity will help – just take a walk out of the house to buy something from one of the many small shops that are popping up all over the place in defiance of the trend.

And finally, to mother Earth. Yes, the news is terrifying. But there are many creative things happening in a bid to avoid catastrophe. Look at The Ocean Clean Up[3], it's designed and developed systems that aim to clean up 90% of the plastic in our waters. Other people are taking recycled plastic to make bricks to build houses. And a young girl from Sweden started a global climate movement by striking from school every Friday and protesting at the door of the Swedish parliament.

The strongest messages are the simplest ones.

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1.  *https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/marketing-age-outrage/1430904*
2.  *We recently became the first carbon neutral agency in the UK, and are doubling down on our environmental efforts to fight against climate crisis wherever we can.*
3.  *https://theoceancleanup.com/*

**Cat Pearson**

Lead Designer

# THE BATTLE FOR BETTER ACCESSIBILITY

**Will digital accessibility flourish in spite of the political challenges of 2020?**

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As we enter our third year (yes, third!) of Brexit negotiations, and of reading news headlines filled with political bickering, backstop proposals and no-deal repercussions, we have grown more and more apathetic to the changes that Brexit may have in store for us.

In these times of political uncertainty, I can't help but wonder what lies in store for the next generation growing up in Britain and how Brexit will impact the web - particularly in terms of accessibility and inclusivity for all. Will UK standards regress with looser accessibility regulations and fewer legal implications? Or will the UK stride ahead, free from the slow-moving bureaucracy of Brussels?

Fortunately, the nature of the web is that in many ways it transcends borders. We work as part of an international community, with fluid debate and conversation flowing easily between our international peers. As creators and coders we are primarily guided by the excellent international accessibility standards set out by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) with the latest standard being WCAG 2.1. W3C is an initiative founded and led by Tim Berners Lee, and as such accessibility is an important cornerstone underpinning the very structure of the web. While AA accessibility or higher can at times be an effort to comply to flawlessly, there is a strong business case to do so. 15% of the world's population have some form of disability, with a total of 11 million disabled currently living in the UK. Britain's disabled people are estimated[1] to spend £80 billion per year. It's a no-brainer that good accessibility online will enhance your brand, drive innovation, and extend your market reach.

## What is the current accessibility legislation?

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Brexit threatens to affect digital accessibility most in terms of what is required and enforced by law. Most of our UK web accessibility laws come from European law, both in terms of human rights and coding standards. The current framework on accessibility includes:

- The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights[2], a human rights law which bans discrimination against people with disabilities and requires them to be fully integrated into society

- The Equality Act 2010[3], a human rights law which implements the four EU Equal Treatment Directives

- The Human Rights Act 1998[4], which incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights

- The Public Sector Accessibility Directive 2018[5], a web accessibility law which took effect in September and pertains to public sector web sites and apps, which implements Directive 2016/2102

- The proposed European Accessibility Act[6], a draft regulation addressing the accessibility standards of products and services, which may or may not be finalised in time to enter the UK legislative process before Brexit day

Historically speaking the UK has been a key player in pushing accessibility laws forward within Europe. As of 2018, the majority of UK public sector bodies are legally obliged to meet the international WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility standard and publish an accessibility statement. This has been a major step forward, particularly given that according to studies at the time[7] 4 in 10 local council homepages failed basic accessibility tests.

## What 2020 holds? The European Accessibility Act

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The next big leap forward for accessibility law is the long-awaited European Accessibility Act, which proposes big enhancements to existing legal requirements. This act will legally oblige all online products and services including online shopping, banking applications and ticketing systems to meet similar accessibility standards. Due to its major implications for industry, the European Accessibility Act has been slow to progress and is now entering its fourth year of negotiations.

One key sticking point for the European Accessibility Act is the potential challenges and costs it poses for smaller businesses. As many of us will know, web accessibility compliance can at times require lengthy compliance review and procedures, which can be time-consuming and costly. Some businesses argue that these procedures would threaten their profit margins. It's worth noting that even within the 2018 public sector regulations there are exemptions for smaller institutions, where complying to these laws would cause "disproportionate
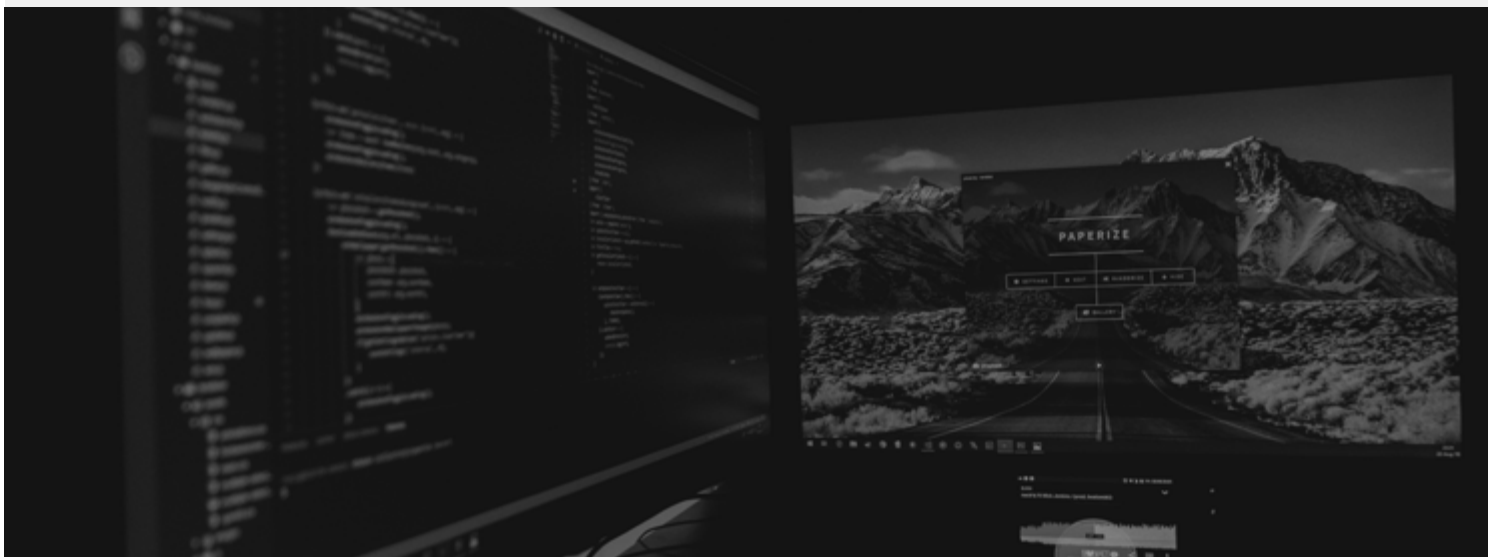
burden" relative to their size and scale. Disappointingly, while normally the UK is at the forefront of pushing accessibility laws forward, it has recently started to support[8] a much weaker, diluted version of the EAA which would avoid potentially increased costs for businesses. This stance contradicts the commercial benefits that businesses gain through making their products accessible to a 15% wider audience. The Act is now moving into its final phase, but it remains to be seen if it will be passed before March 2020, and if so, whether it would be adopted by a UK government.

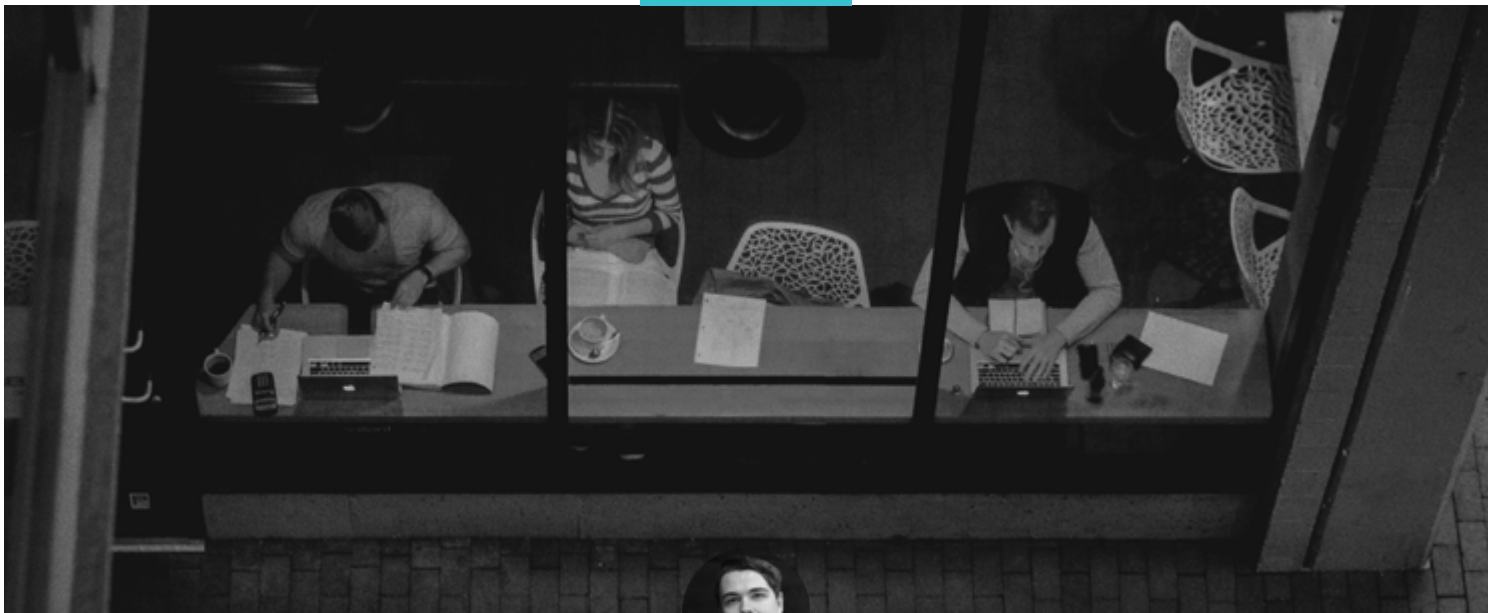## Stay calm and keep creating clean code
—

I believe the future for accessibility in 2020 is bright, regardless of the current political landscape. As digital creators working in a global city, the onus is on us to lead the way forward as part of an international digital community. Beyond accessibility, there is also an inclusivity challenge to be considered for 2020 as EU citizens leave the London workforce to warmer European cities (politics and climates considered!). It is our role as web authors and creatives to ensure that we do not lose the ability to reflect diverse cultures and perspectives within our content, and our role as employers to make our workplaces open and welcoming to all to encourage and grow this diversity.

And, while we wait, the best way to deal with this uncertainty is, of course, to keep developing to WCAG 2.0, keep creating inclusive content, and engage a broad spectrum of communities and abilities in testing and feedback. Accessible and inclusive websites tend to work better for everyone and, regardless of the legal requirements, the benefits will be seen in improved conversions, better search rankings and happier customers.

1.   *https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/hr/edi/disability/facts/*

2.   *https://ec.europa.eu/info/aid-development-cooperation-fundamental-rights/your-rights-eu/eu-charter-fundamental-rights_en*

3.   *https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance*

4.   *https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights/human-rights-act*

5.   *https://webdevlaw.uk/2016/12/05/plain-english-guide-eu-accessibility-directive/*

6.   *https://webdevlaw.uk/2016/12/08/european-accessibility-act/*

7.   *https://www.gov.uk/guidance/accessibility-requirements-for-public-sector-websites-and-apps*

8.   *http://europeanmemoranda.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/files/2018/09/14799-15_Letter_to_Lord_Boswell_(1).pdf*

**Ross Wilson**

Lead Developer

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# THE RISE OF GRAPHQL

RESTful APIs have dominated the way we build and interact with websites since their inception. They came to life in 2000, when renowned computer scientist, Roy Fielding, and his team created them as a standardised way to design application program interfaces (APIs), fundamentally replacing the simple object access protocol (SOAP) procedures that existed before them. For the last twenty years, it's been the only way to design and build APIs across many different types of software. That is, until Facebook brought something new to the table in 2015: GraphQL.

APIs enable one set of code to talk to another set of code. In the same way that if a person wanted to use a site, they would use a graphical user interface, when a computer needs to do the same, it uses an API. Since having one computer talk to another is the basis of the internet, you can see why APIs have been so important over the past twenty years and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. Representational state transfer (RESTful) is a standardised way of building APIs that has simplified how a developer writes code that interacts with another solution; in a nutshell, you make a request and get something in return. For example, if you requested a user named "Ross" from a site, you would get back all the information that the website had for "Ross", such as age, gender and address.

GraphQL is very similar to RESTful in many ways; it's an API that allows one computer to speak to another. The benefits of this over RESTful, however, comes from the immense flexibility it gives a programmer when it comes to making requests. With RESTful, you had to work with whatever you were given, which was defined by the developer working on the API. GraphQL lets the developer who is consuming the API construct the format and values that they want to retrieve, allowing them to write API calls that fit into the structure they require, as opposed to changing the structure of their system to fit in with the API. This is advantageous in many ways: it allows for rapid prototyping of experimental solutions without the need to rewrite sections of APIs or change the structure of existing code bases. It also allows for even more of a separation of concerns, since the developer using the API doesn't need to worry as much about how the API was built, like they do with the RESTful standard.

It's not hard to see why so many people are interested in adopting GraphQL as the new way of working with APIs, and with Shopify, Twitter, and GitHub all using it in production, I believe we will see much wider adoption in 2020. GraphQL could soon be the API tool of choice and eventually overtake the current RESTful approach, just as RESTful replaced the SOAP calls of the past.
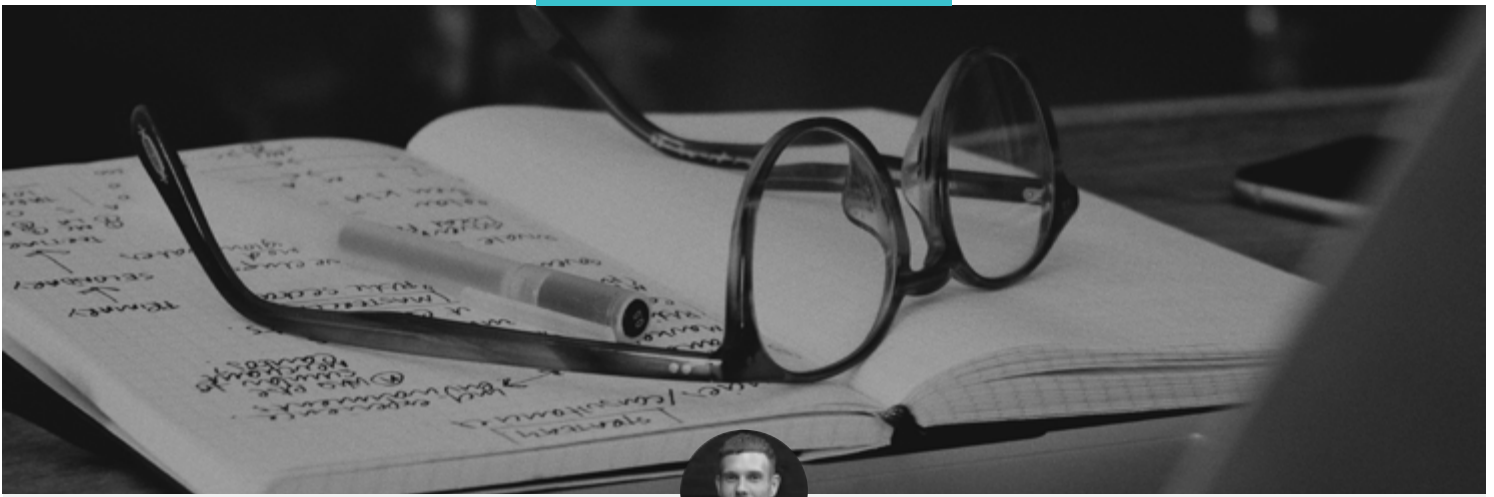
**Matt Rider**

CRO & UX Specialist

—

# WHY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN CRO IS AN INDISPENSABLE TOOL

Conversion rate optimisation (CRO) has been lauded as the glue that binds solid user experience practices with results, however, many have been slow to adopt it as a practice.

Typically, this is because it's difficult to find a solution that suits all users equally. However, CRO is all about experimenting with different executions in order to find the ones that work best for a website's target user base. And, when there's a focus on segmentation and personalised content, it's able to achieve this at a more granular level.

Being customer-centric is hugely important. If targeting a more diverse user base with products or services that are relevant to some more than others, then layering the site and being more tailored with digital executions is the way to go. For 2020, it's essential to focus on the power of qualitative research in CRO in order to deliver the most impact.

## Qualitative vs. quantitative

The field of CRO is most commonly associated with numbers. The most fundamental CRO execution, the trusty A/B test, is usually driven by measuring bounce rate, click-through rate (CTR), and other numerical metrics. But CRO should never be limited to quantitative data alone.

The increased focus on 'big data' transcends all business sectors, however CRO and UX teams need to give equal weighting to qualitative data. This research is required by all businesses in order to make their digital products as intuitive and user-friendly as possible, highlighting insight that you just can't unearth with numerical data.

All too often, CRO and UX teams don't pay attention to qualitative data. It can be trickier to execute, and often comes at a higher cost. But it's essential to really get under the skin of your customers and learn what they actually think, as opposed to just trends in their behaviour.

## The three methods to focus on for qualitative research

### Heuristic analysis

I mentioned at the beginning of my article that it's very easy to fall into the trap of relying on opinion as opposed to research when it comes to CRO and UX. While this is dangerous territory, an expert opinion is obviously still highly valuable. For an expert-based assessment, use an evaluation framework: Relevancy, Clarity, Value, Friction, Distraction.

The findings from a heuristic analysis aren't the be all and end all, but they form pieces of the bigger puzzle. Once you've performed all research elements, you'll be able to see what the other data points to and how it enhances findings from heuristic analysis.

**Site surveys**

On-page surveys, or even exit surveys, are a great way to get more information about customers and their site experience.

On-page surveys target a particular area of the site. You could, for example, ask blog page visitors about other content that they would be interested in.

Exit surveys are useful in squeezing out any extra customer data before they leave your site.

Both are great for gathering smaller gems of qualitative research that, over time, can paint a very vivid and valuable picture.

If more in-depth feedback is required, then it's worth conducting phone interviews, sending out more robust surveys to customers, or (ideally) forking out for a dedicated research panel to push a survey to a specific target demographic.

**Qualitative user testing**

Qualitive user research can be performed in one (or both) of two ways.

One way is to ask a sample base to narrate their experience; during this time, user testing subjects are asked to relay their experience as they navigate the site. By learning their thoughts, their feeling towards the site can be assessed and any obstacles that may create a negative experience can be unearthed.

Another way to gather qualitative data is to provide a sample base with a post-task survey. It's important to deliver this as soon as possible after the task to ensure minimum memory fade.

## How marketers can get buy-in to user testing

It can be difficult to get buy-in for research, particularly for web projects. Research can often delay the launch of a product and can eat into precious budget. But its true value comes from how much money it saves businesses in the long run.

Researching before building a site means that you're making the right decisions early on. Development resources tend to be far more expensive than upfront research.

If you're already spending money on CRO, why not perform more informed tests and develop the arsenal of tools and testing resources to uncover more valuable data?

Once all research has been conducted, the data needs to be analysed, both quantitative and qualitative, findings organised and those that stand out as having the highest possible value should be prioritised for implementation testing.
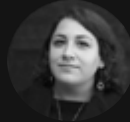
Research and testing should never stop; CRO is an ongoing learning journey that empowers businesses to translate knowledge into revenue.

# SEO PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

**Jamie Faulkner**
Head of SEO
—

**Stefania Romanelli**
SEO Performance Director
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**Lucia Navarro**
Senior SEO Consultant
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**Beatrix Allen**
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**Agata Bowden**
Senior SEO Executive
—

**David Amayo-Morrison**
SEO Executive
—

**Miles Dean**
SEO Executive
—

In the spirit of collaboration, as is our annual tradition, we asked all of the SEO consultancy team to suggest their search marketing predictions for 2020. Here are the trends we think will be most prevalent over the coming year:
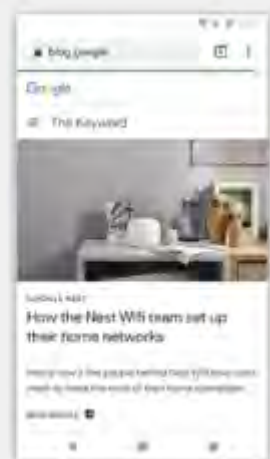
### More BERT

—

Google announced the BERT algorithm update in October 2019. It's the first update in some time where Google has publicly shared details on the changes it's made[1], specifically improvements to its natural language processing. When we looked at the examples that Google shared in its official post, one of our team said, "this feels a lot like Hummingbird" (the update that took place years ago that allowed Google to process complex, conversational queries). We see this update as an extension of, and improvement on, that part of Google's algorithm. It's a sign of its preparations for processing a larger volume of conversational voice queries. This is likely a response to user frustrations around the accuracy of voice search results as, according to a study by HigherVisibility, trust in voice search declined in 2018[2]. The update also allows Google to improve its accuracy for non-English queries and grow its share in other markets.

### Speed, speed, speed

—

In 2018, we saw Google release the mobile PageSpeed update, which demoted the slowest mobile sites in search. And, more recently, PageSpeed performance reports were added to Google Search Console for the first time. With a wealth of real-world data at its fingertips from the Chrome User Experience report, Google will renew its mission to make the web fast in 2020. It's been threatening to label chronically slow sites for some time now, originally with "badges" next to listings in SERPs. With this latest update, Google will tell users about the usual speed of a page as it loads in the browser. Will the name-and-shame approach work?



Message on loading screen for slow sites     Green progress indicator for fast sites

## Featured snippets enhanced

We'll likely see yet more tweaking of featured snippets in 2020. Over the last year we've seen Google test expandable snippets and multiple snippets ranking side-by-side. Next year Google will experiment with providing better continuity between SERPs and the landing page. It's already testing highlighting snippet text on landing pages to make it easier for users to navigate to the information they need. What next? Jump straight to the part of the page where the snippet content lives? Because snippet information can be pulled from anywhere on the page, there's often been a disconnect in this journey.

## A more visual, media-rich SERP

Google's vision for 2020 and beyond featured a more visual SERP and, in fact, a more visual search journey; using features such as Google Lens as a starting point for answering queries or researching a product. We're going to see more progress in Google's efforts here, and a steady rise in imagery, videos, and Insta-style stories on SERPs as the year goes on.

## Mobile experiences

We said in last year's predictions that UX would become more important, but for 2020, the focus will be squarely on mobile UX. The mobile usability issues reported in Google Search Console has long been lacking depth, only reporting on spacing, sizing, and readability issues. We think 2020 is the year when Google will start to provide webmasters with more actionable information on the user experience of their mobile sites.

## Voice search

Voice search has been an ongoing trend for the past three years. Clearly, we're still thinking about it, but is anyone really using it? With no Analytics data on Google voice search available to date, SEOs can't make large strides in their voice search strategies. Not only that, though the smart speaker has grown significantly over the last two years, we're still sceptical that the much-lauded statistic of "50% of all online searches will be voice-based by 2020", will actually come to pass. According to data from Statistsa, only 31% of smartphone users worldwide use voice tech once a week[3]. And we can safely assume that is a tiny fraction of their weekly searches.

1. https://ai.googleblog.com/2018/11/open-sourcing-bert-state-of-art-pre.html
2. https://econsultancy.com/voice-search-study-usage-trust-declining/
3. https://99firms.com/blog/voice-search-statistics/#gref

# CONTENT MARKETING
## PREDICTIONS
## FOR 2020

**Louise McFetridge**
Head of Content & Digital PR

—

Content marketing is ever evolving, so keeping up with the latest marketing trends is crucial. As we get closer and closer to the end of the year, and the turn of a new decade – it's time to start thinking about what the big content trends of 2020 will be.

Across our three key areas – strategy, content, and digital PR – we'll be looking at the wider context for brands, both politically and in terms of social change.

In a now fraught landscape, people are increasingly looking for something or someone to trust or believe in – so authentic, trusted brands can reap the benefits. Natural, conversational language that is human will not only prove to be more engaging but will become increasingly important with developments in voice search. And, finally, data is the all-important component. As long as it's verifiable and contextual.

**Evi Sianna**
Content Strategy Manager
—

# AUTHENTICITY AND STORYTELLING WILL DRIVE BRAND EQUITY

We're about to enter a year where useful, helpful, visual and authentic content will have a more vital role and will have to align with the audience search needs and habits.

## Building an authentic brand

—

With fierce competition in the industry and the amount of content published every second, having purposeful content will be more important than ever before. Content that serves a purpose, supports brand values and fulfils information requests can aid brand building. Content performs best when we prioritise putting audience's information needs first over sales messaging. Customers don't react well to promotional content and the likes, however, what they engage with is storytelling; content that tells stories and engages with the user better as a result of building a relationship and cultivating trust over time. Nike is a good example of a brand that has achieved that and has developed a brand narrative to connect with its audience. This is further underlined by Dawn Colossi, who noted in a Campaign magazine article that Nike has *"an unparalleled pulse on its community, an unwavering commitment to purpose-driven marketing and, most importantly, an incredible understanding of itself. And it has both developed and maintained these three pillars by engaging in near-constant collaboration with its audience"*[1].

## Video content and storytelling will continue to reign

—

Video content was very popular in 2019 and there's no doubt it will continue to be so in 2020, especially with the rise of YouTube popularity, augmented reality (AR), and dynamic imagery. According to a HubSpot survey of more than 3,000 consumers, half of the 25-34-year-old groups and half of the 35-44-year-old groups want to see more video content from brands they support. This comes as no surprise, perhaps, as videos can be more engaging and attention retaining. However, this doesn't mean that by adding video to your strategy you'll immediately excel. Every brand needs to have a strong sense of storytelling that audiences can relate to and resonate with. What does that mean for brands though? In the digitally driven society we live in, brands need to be more human, serve a purpose, and put a face to the name. Every piece of content created needs to have a human touch in order to connect with relevant audiences and engage them. Brand storytelling helps brands become unforgettable through stories that users can relate to because they're authentic and evoke emotions. Therefore, storytelling is no longer a nice to have but a must have.

**Alexandra Oke**
Lead Copywriter

—

# NATURAL LANGUAGE REIGNS SUPREME

It's a fact: language is continuously changing, evolving, and adapting to the needs of its users. Yet, as language bends and shifts with societal change and breakthrough technologies, so too does the way we use it. From the humble hashtag to text and voice search, content based on colloquialisms has well and truly entered the mainstream – and it's here to stay.

## Speaking your language
—

Sure, using conversational language in copy is nothing new. In fact, writing in an informal way has been a proven effective marketing technique since advertising leapt off the printed page and onto our computer screens. However, in an age where content is being searched and consumed through mediums beyond the keyboard, it's more important than ever to learn the language of human.

According to research, 50% of all web searches will be conducted by voice by 2020[2]. With Apple's Siri and Google's Alexa becoming a staple in most modern homes, it's not hard to see why. So, how important is it to tailor our copywriting to voice search requirements? And moreover, how is the digital landscape adapting to this more relaxed way of communicating?

## Introducing BERT
—

Reinforcing the idea that natural language will win out in 2020, is the introduction of Google's BERT ; a sophisticated update that enables search to better understand the context of words used in long-tail queries. Essentially, BERT translates 'human speak' in a way that

computers can comprehend – allowing people to use more conversational words that feel instinctive and au naturel.

Rolling out for English language queries in 2019, with plans to expand to other languages in the future, BERT comes to shine when prepositions like "for" and "to" are conducive to the sentence that is searched. For example, in the sentence, "2020 australian traveller to uk need a visa" the use of the word "to" is crucial to fetching the correct information. Prior to the update, search wouldn't have understood the importance of the connecting word and would have likely returned results about UK citizens travelling to Australia. Though a miniscule nuance in language, BERT can now recognise the distinction and serve only relevant results according to the specific search query.

## The importance of conversation
—

Not only does conversational language appeal to the ever-changing landscape of search, it also helps to create an authentic brand persona that connects with real people. Audiences are becoming savvier when it comes to decoding brand messaging, so ensuring your copy is simple, relatable, and transparent is vital for building customer trust.

Understanding the nuances of writing with natural language in mind can enable you to craft more effective headlines and focus on more specific long-tail keywords within your content. And, if you get stuck? Well, as author Elmore Leonard once said, "if it sounds like writing, re-write it". And that's the rule we're sticking by.
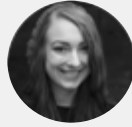
**Jennifer Grey**

Digital PR Manager

—

# IN PR WE TRUST

In 2019, PR developed an image problem. Recent research by Gallup[4] showed that PR was the fourth least trusted profession. Add to that an increasing pressure on journalists to fact-check their pieces and be rigorous about sources to combat fake news, and you have definite storm clouds brewing. So, with a rather grim outlook, what does 2020 hold for digital PR?

## Authenticity is key

—

One thing's for sure: the days of the "hard sell" are over. "Massaging" statistics to make them tell a better story even when they're not strictly true or running campaigns that don't make sense for the brand, are all going to get you marked down as 'unreliable'.

When planning campaigns or more reactive approaches, make sure your ideas chime true to your brand's voice. It's not that all campaigns must be rigidly brand-first but aim for an obvious thematic link between the brand and your output. That means television brands running campaigns on the cultural impact of TV shows rather than dating apps,

encouraging journalists to think of your campaign as an informational resource to up your chances of a link.

Especially when running an SEO-led digital PR campaign you should still be maximising your chances of success by ensuring the news story you're creating is your most important consideration!

## Walk the walk (don't talk the talk)

—

Ever heard of "greenwashing"? A new negative buzzword popping up in popular media since eco-friendliness became fashionable, it exposes products or brands claiming to be environmentally friendly in media or advertising, but not actually backing it up with their practices. Such was its impact in shedding light on PR sleight-of-hand that companies claiming to engage with current issues are facing higher scrutiny.

Simple rule here: if your brand isn't known for its commitment to any issue, partner with someone who is a renowned expert in that field to give credibility to your claims or stay away from the topic altogether.

## Consider advertistics

Since Arwa Mahdawi discussed the practice in the Guardian[5], data from brand-led surveys has been dropping out of vogue with media. While larger surveys are more trustworthy in certain cases, the campaigns fastest to hit their KPIs are now the ones that draw their data stories from a cross-section of verified reports and whitepapers, giving newsworthy stats a verifiable seal of approval.

While building an index out of government whitepapers or creating a campaign based on expert opinion and assets might be the new gold standard, this isn't always possible. Remember that context is key – lighter subjects can be less dangerous for media to be fact-checked for, and are more likely to work in the market, especially when supported with a few more serious supplementary statistics from other brands or trusted sources.

2020 looks set to be the year that previous predictions on the importance of brand authenticity really start to come true. Make sure your campaigns include verifiable data, and that you're playing to your brand's strengths during ideation, and the links will keep coming! Trust me, I'm a PR.

Content marketing has proven to be a marketing technique that works, and it's only getting better and more competitive. Therefore, it's crucial to be smarter and more astute when it comes to content strategy, creation and dissemination. Adapting each year is the best way to stay ahead and on top of the changing tides. Our predictions of what will reign in 2020 should help you to get organised and plan your marketing activities.

1. https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/authenticity-just/1492377
2. https://quoracreative.com/article/voice-search-statistics-trends
3. https://blog.google/products/search/search-language-understanding-bert
4. https://www.prweek.com/article/1595955/gallup-says-pr-industry-bad-reputation-heres-done
5. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/21/how-often-do-americans-change-their-underwear-the-statistics-stink

# COMMERCE PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

**Kevin Murray**

Managing Director, Greenlight Commerce

—

## THE BREXIT FOG WILL CLEAR TO GIVE US 2020 VISION

As this year draws to a close, I have mixed feelings about the fact that half of what I'd predicted last year has actually happened. I wrote about two main themes; the reluctance of retailers to make any major spending decisions on large long-term technology investments, and the prediction that retailers would stop looking to augment their digital offering with new ideas and instead "go back to basics"; making small and incremental changes to what they already have, instead of investing in emerging and often unproven tech.

What we did see in 2019 was that many businesses reduced or deferred any major project spend in IT and digital, mostly due to the uncertainty of Brexit. While I was right about this, I wish I wasn't. I've written in other publications over the years about the cost of doing nothing, and businesses still seem very hesitant to invest and make change without realising that the cost of doing nothing may cost them more.

## Brands will focus on customer experience

Looking forward to 2020, however, I'm optimistic that businesses are going to be fed-up with waiting around and will begin to take control of their own destinies, rather than waiting for the government to effect it. While we will continue to see some deferred or reduced expenditure in IT, consumers will still be spending, and they will demand more of retailers and the experiences they offer before handing over their hard-earned cash. One of the key trends we will see is "Experience Management", a term already coined by Qualtrics (acquired by SAP in 2019). While brands have been able to measure operational experiences for some time, such as how long people spend on a site (dwell time / duration), how much they buy (average order value) and how often they immediately leave (bounce rate), they have not been able to measure how customers "feel". This very important measurement can be used to drive retail spend, by ensuring the core basics of making the customer feel good when interacting with a brand. Getting that right is the most simple of measures that will ensure customers are acquired, they spend, and they return.

## Innovation will play a big part

History has also told us that in difficult times, we'll also see innovation occur in the retail sector. While I've said some brands will need to "go back to basics", others will need to innovate and offer something new or different. Examples include pure-play retailers moving into carefully selected and commercially flexible physical stores (pop-ups or high-street spaces when rents begin to drop). We'll also see advances in automation with some of the repetitive tasks that are done by humans today soon being done by systems, allowing staff to be redeployed to drive targeted actions and get better return on investment. For example, the automatic cataloguing and tagging of product data based upon the product image being supplied. All that time spent cataloguing could be spent on personalising and merchandising, making the customer "feel better".

2020 is going to be a very interesting year. Customer spend at Christmas and New Year, along with government elections and Brexit outcomes, will give many businesses a lot to think about. In any case, I think the Brexit fog will clear and the time for waiting will be over. Those businesses that take action now are the ones who will be here when I come to write my article next year.
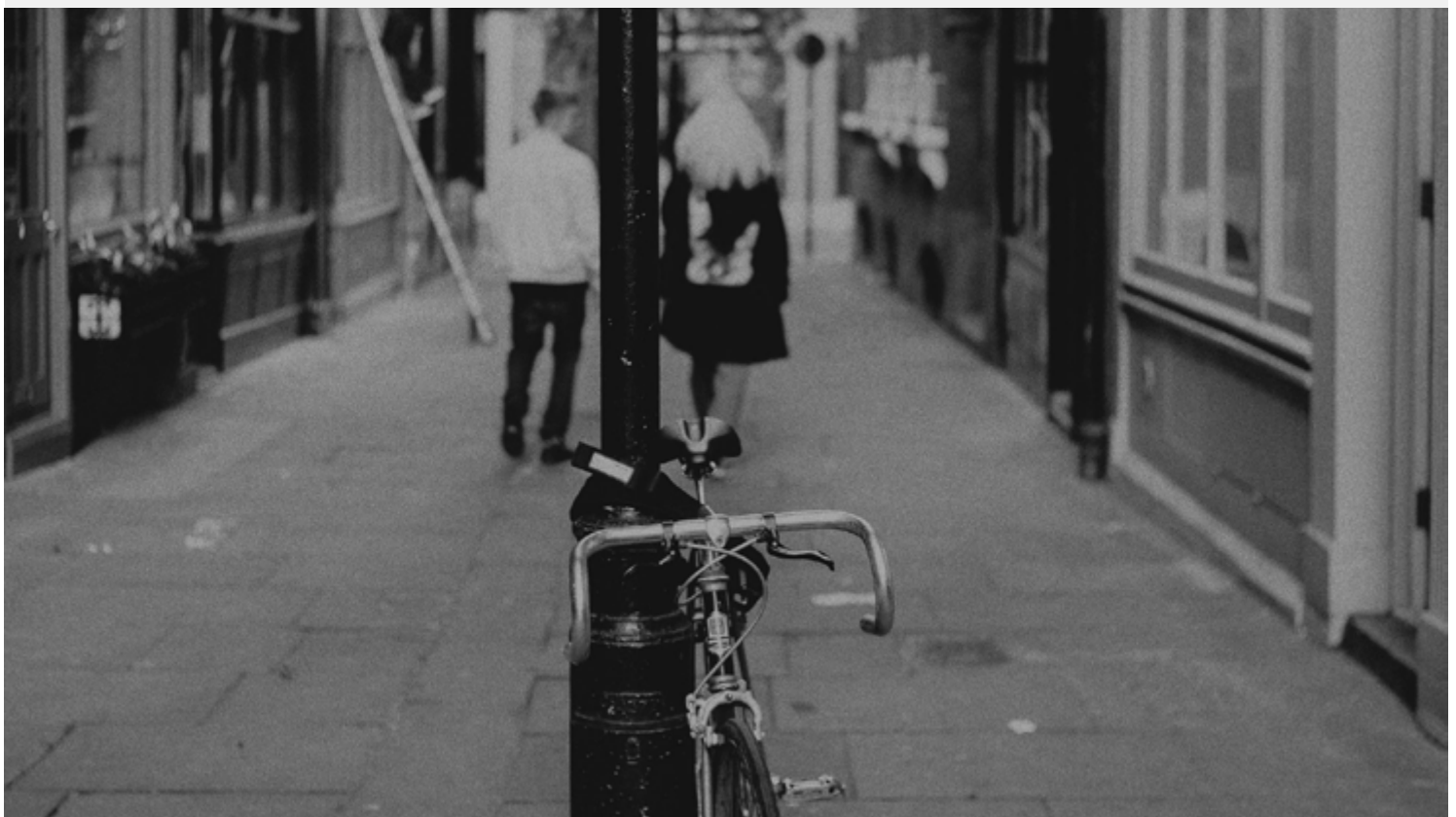
# BIGCOMMERCE PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

**BIG**COMMERCE

**Mark Adams**

VP & GM, Europe, BigCommerce

—

## THE OLD, THE NEW, AND THE RISING (AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT THEM)

In 2019, online eCommerce sales accounted for 14.1% of all retail sales worldwide. This figure is expected to reach 22% in 2023.

As the trend towards online retail continues to rise, many brands will need to revisit their strategy in 2020 to accommodate for this growth. Here are my predictions for where retail will trend in 2020.

## Major CPG brands will turn to D2C

—

Many of the traditional major consumer product goods (CPG) brands will have to revisit their customer acquisition strategies and reinvent their brand to adjust to online customers. The rise of the direct-to-consumer (D2C) movement has paved the way for many micro-brands (like Diageo's Johnnie Walker or even P&G's Gillette), which gives new up-and-comers, like some craft liquor brands and micro CPG's like the Dollar Shave Club, a run for their money.

The balance between brand trust and digitally-native customer behavior is often hard for these incumbent brands to achieve — which is why many turn to their eCommerce experience to lighten the load.

## Every detail in the mobile purchase experience will be optimised

—

The average person picks their phone up 58 times a day[1] and spends an average of three hours and fifteen minutes a day on their device — with many "digitally-native" customers like Gen Z and millennials spending even more time staring at the screen.

Optimising for mobile shouldn't be a new endeavor in the minds of an online retailer. Instead, retailers are now optimising every aspect of the mobile purchasing experience — from the details included on a product page through to the number of steps it takes to complete checkout. One general rule of thumb: the less steps, the better.

## B2B eCommerce will continue to rise

—

B2B sales have traditionally been slow to innovate, but now that more digitally-minded customers are coming into purchase power, the number of online B2B sellers has risen. Now, those who traditionally solicit orders via in-person and over the phone are finding easy ways to transfer their catalogues online.

Global B2B eCommerce transactions are growing at a faster rate than overall online retail sales — and they're expected to reach 9 trillion in 2021[2]. In the new year, watch out for the new ways that B2B retailers reach clients — whether it's by interesting advertising, win-back campaigns, or advancements in technology.

## Expect a personalised content-first approach

—

Gone are the days of boilerplate blog content – in 2020, brands must find a way to make the potential customer feel like they are part of the dialogue; like the content was written just for them.

Some brands, like Thread[3], have introduced custom profiling questionnaires as a way to gather information about a customer while simultaneously showcasing the right products for that customer's use case.
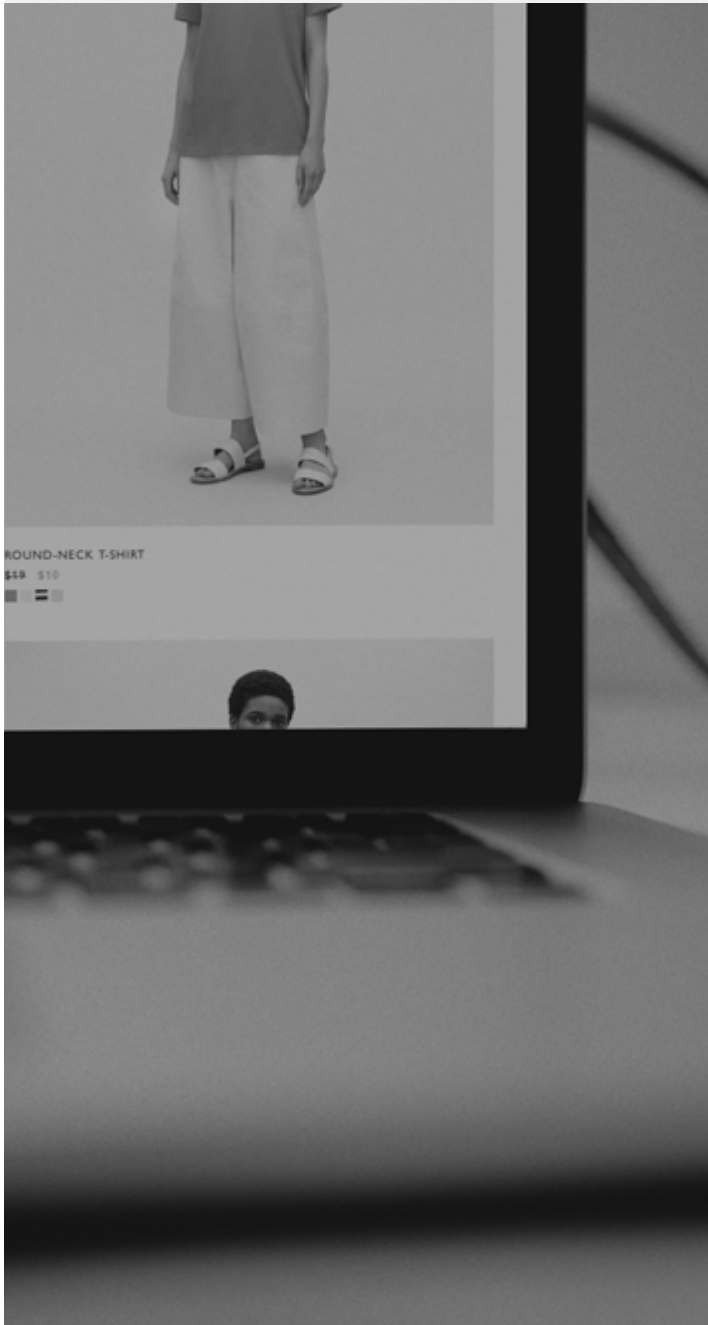
No matter what the tactic is, brands will need to continuously set higher expectations from their content team, as customers will continue to demand more and more from their shopping experience.

## Purchases on social media will become commonplace

—

With the introduction of Instagram Shopping and Instagram Checkout in 2019, brands now have more than just brick-and-mortar and website channels to worry about.

This is especially true for younger, social-savvy populations. Now, Gen Z spends 2-3 times more[4] shopping on social channels than the average customer. Led by the popularity of short-form video content, the attention span of a customer is quickly dwindling while the number of competitors fighting for their screentime continues to rise.
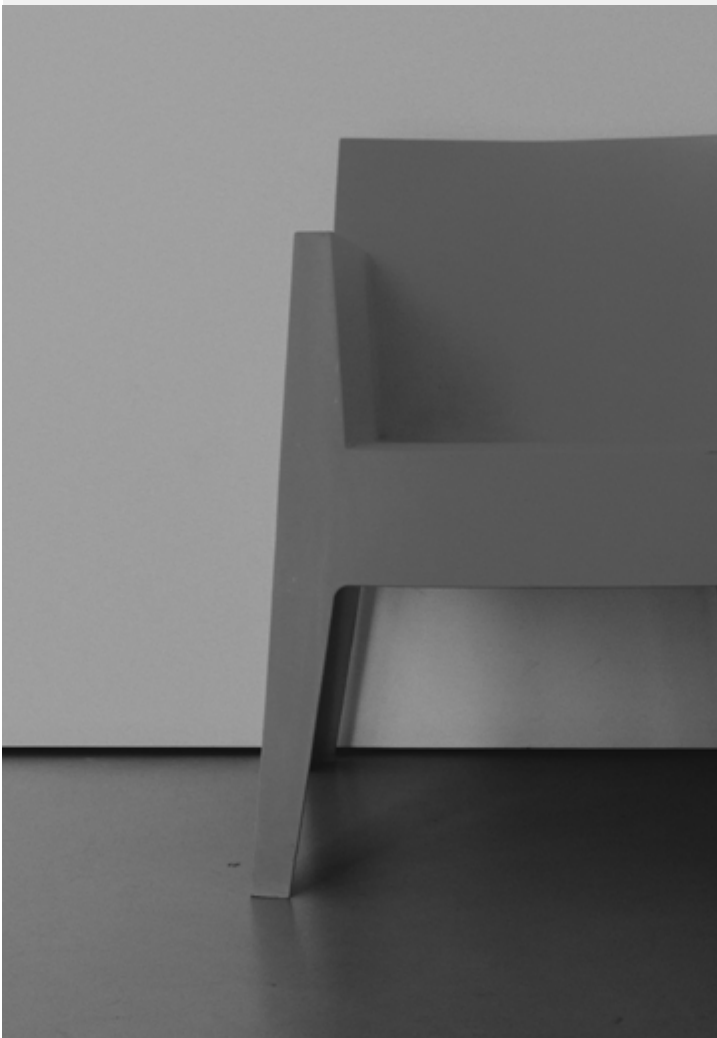
If you're a B2C brand that doesn't enable social buying in 2020, you're already behind.
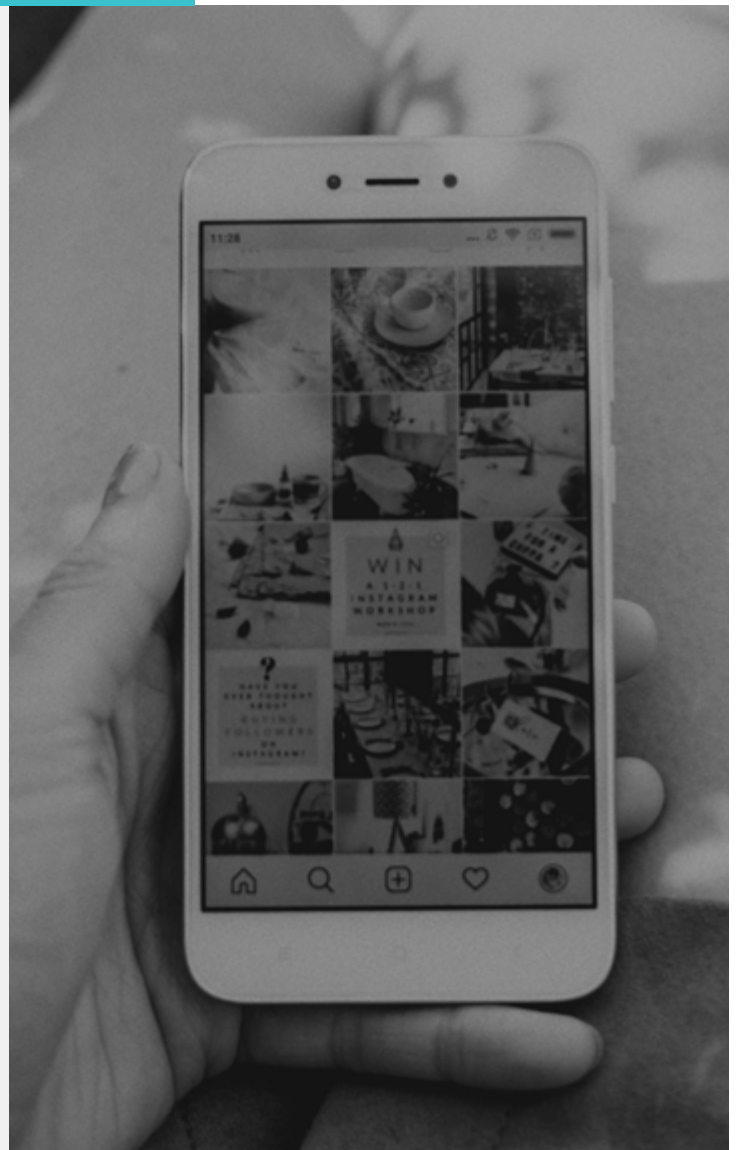
## Conclusion

—

Regardless of your product, your sales channels, or your marketing message – one thing is for certain: customers will continue to expect more and more out of their online buying experience in 2020. Make sure you have the tech stack, staff, and marketing plans you need to meet those customers where they are.

1.  *https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/aug/21/cellphone-screen-time-average-habits*
2.  *https://www.forrester.com/report/Mapping+The+9+Trillion+US+B2B+Online+Commerce+Market/-/E-RES142735*
3.  *https://www.thread.com/*
4.  *https://www.bigcommerce.com/blog/omni-channel-retail/*

# FOUNDIT! PREDICTIONS FOR 2020

**Dean Grimshaw**

Business Development Director, FoundIt!

—

## TECHNOLOGY CAN TAKE US AS FAR AS OUR VISION WILL ALLOW

Innovation is coming at a rapid pace. Especially in eCommerce, an industry filled with brilliant minds and exceptional talent. It doesn't take long for new ground-breaking technologies to become mere commodity products.

Each new development gives birth to entire industries of opportunity. An example of which has been the explosion of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms in recent years. However, the real development I expect to see in 2020 is less about the technology itself and more about how we choose to use it.

### 2020 vision

—

There are seven words which are well-known to stop progress in its tracks: "That's how it has always been done."

In 2020, I believe we'll see a growing movement of professionals that question the basics and look at old problems with fresh eyes. While the tech we now have at our disposal is very powerful, it's only as useful as the answers it has been tasked to find. And for too long we've been using tools to improve the efficiency of out of date processes, without asking whether there was a more effective way of doing things altogether.

### A journey from A to B

—

Historically, retail sites have been organised hierarchically; starting at the homepage and working down to the individual products. If you were to draw the flow out, it may look a bit like a pyramid with the "homepage" at the top and the "product pages" at the foot.

But is this the most appropriate way to look at an online store in today's times? Or is it just how it's always been done? Online shopping journeys have changed significantly. When the top-down structure was first designed, it was common for the vast majority of journeys to start at the homepage. But the increase in acquisition channels, social commerce, and the growth of mobile have opened many new routes into eCommerce sites.

Four out of five product searches now begin online, with visitors seeking out stores based on their interest in a specific item. For this reason, as many as one in three site visits now begin at a product page level. This is very different to entering a site and having a look around as product searches are site agnostic by design. It is the retailer's responsibility to keep visitors engaged once they arrive on the site, because they may not stay for long before continuing their exploration across the web.

With so many journeys bypassing the homepage completely, I believe it's time for eCommerce teams to re-think the top-down architecture. We've heard of headless commerce as a concept for de-coupling the front and back end to make changes more agile. Now it's time to consider the information architecture of eCommerce sites as headless too, with every page needing to be optimised to continue the experience the shopper desires.

## All roads lead to home – but where is home?

Where retailers may have previously directed the flow through the store, shoppers are now taking their own individual routes. Therefore, eCommerce stores are less about how retailers lay them out anymore, but how shoppers choose to navigate them. And if they don't have the experience they desire, they'll look elsewhere.

So, instead of looking at making the old approach we know more efficient, we should look at making things more effective.

To do that, the model needs to be flexible and fluid. A framework that can provide simple navigation on the shopper's terms, which adopts the view that there isn't one definitive way for a store to be navigated.

Such a model would need the freedom to change as the demands of the shopper change and would need to dynamically deliver an experience that's relevant to each user journey. Give this concept some genuine thought, and the possibilities are endless.

## Curiosity leads to the future

To this end, I believe we'll see more creative thinking lead in eCommerce, with teams questioning standard practices and giving quality thought as to why stores are laid out the way they are.

We have access to all the technologies that can help answer these questions, as well as deliver the appropriate solutions. But what is it that we really want? Or should we say, what is it that the customer really wants?

The future belongs to those that stay curious and strive to ask better questions of the technology available. That's the secret to 2020 vision.

**Greenlight** is a multiple award-winning digital and commerce agency that designs, builds, consults, trains and implements transformational strategies across: paid search & Shopping, programmatic display, SEO, content marketing, digital PR, creative, site design & build, analytics, eCommerce systems integration, conversion rate optimisation, user experience, affiliate marketing, and data & audience insights. With the consistent objective of achieving dramatic growth for its clients, Greenlight delivers innovative work for brands such as ghd, Dixons Carphone, Superdry, Furniture Village, and eBay in over 30 countries.

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