

The social media battlefield

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The rapid development of existing technologies and networks and the constant emergence of new ones enable online marketers to reach the target audience with new content types, while online communication is becoming more complex. Though nothing is for sure as regards the future, an analysis of current trends can help us predict what the future of (social media) marketing will look like.

Stats don't lie

According to a 2016 Social Media Marketing Industry Report, 90% of marketers believe social media is important to their business. Eighty-nine percent of marketers stated that social media generates more exposure for their businesses and increased traffic is the second major benefit. The other reasons for using social networks are the development of a loyal fanbase and gaining marketplace intelligence. Facebook is the most important platform for 65% of B2C marketers, while 40% of B2B marketers consider LinkedIn the leading network. Based on the data, it can be concluded that social media is a key tool for marketers. What are the current trends?

Instagram vs. Snapchat

According to eMarketer, 51.8% of social media users will use Instagram by 2017. Naturally, B2C marketers are more likely (63%) to increase their activities on this platform than B2B marketers (48%). To further add to its

potential, Instagram is constantly introducing new features to add to its 400 million users:

- "Business profiles" to be recognized as a business, access insights and promotions within the app
- "Stories" to show a user's photos and videos uploaded in the last 24 hours
- "Event Channels" to collect videos from live events and offer multiple perspectives

Apart from making the network more attractive, new Instagram tools are challenging Snapchat. The first stats suggest no noticeable decline in Snapchat usage since InstaStories were introduced, though the tool has only been available for a few weeks. Clearly, Snapchat is on the rise. Sixteen percent of marketers plan to increase their Snapchat activities and 28% want to learn more about the network.

Snapchat has more than 150 million daily active users, and is also adding new features. It

seems to be moving towards search and recently purchased Vurb, a recommendation app that gives tips for places to visit, things to see, direct bookings and content recommendations. All these features may soon be available in the app. Recently, Snapchat also acquired Seene, a 3D selfie app; Snapchat is also believed to be developing smart glasses.

Live streaming

More than 16 million videos were uploaded to Facebook in July 2016, and they generated over 232 billion views. With such popularity, it is no surprise that Facebook is promoting its powerful new player – live videos. According to Facebook data, they are watched three times longer than other video types.

Facebook Live is still working on new features – e.g. two-person broadcasts that will allow joint broadcasting and screen sharing. Along with other recently introduced features (full-screen streams, streams up

to four hours with the archived version, testing of offline-viewing) this development opens up new possibilities for marketers. Facebook has recently announced the testing of mid-roll video ads inside live streams from the top publishers.

TV/live-stream integration

Facebook has announced that CNBC's Street Signs will go live via Facebook Live. The network is also negotiating with media companies and celebrities to produce exclusive live content, which it is paying more than \$50 million for. Live streams may also be broadcast on TV, as Facebook is said to be testing streaming videos to TVs via Google Chromecast and AirPlay.

The battle is intensifying with Twitter and its live streaming app, Periscope. Broadcasts can now be embedded anywhere on the web, and highlights replayed. Twitter has also announced a live streaming partnership with Bloomberg. The deal allows marketers to purchase pre-roll ads before videos; in-stream ads may also soon be reality. The network has also been running a trial live sports coverage.

Pre-eminent position

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat are all trying to improve the available features and maximize user experience. Facebook and Twitter will be battling to become the leading live streaming platform and this is one of the main trends users and marketers will be keeping an eye on. The fight between Facebook's Instagram and Snapchat will be center stage over the next few months. And marketing efforts will center on benefiting from these networks as much as possible.

The current trends suggest that it is becoming ever more difficult to keep up with the pace of online communication. The biggest advantage of working with a certified agency is direct access to all the new features and beta versions, and the certainty of working with leading specialists.

