

Mini eBook Series

Your Essential 2017 Digital Content Lighthouse

Looking Back and Moving Forward for Bigger,
Better, and Smarter Marketing Content



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YOUR ESSENTIAL 2017 DIGITAL CONTENT LIGHTHOUSE

INTRODUCTION

A lot can happen in a year. From personal triumphs to historical landmarks, looking back can reveal just how far we have come – and how far we have to go. The marketing industry is no exception, and 2016 proved to be a year of big change and emerging trends. With the ever-growing importance of new technology and dominance of content-driven marketing plans, it is not surprising that many companies saw the way they reach audiences develop and adapt over the past 12 months.

The New Year promises even more growth and development. More tailored and targeted options for marketers and increasing control for consumers, means that 2017 will be a year filled with new roadblocks, more efficient tools, and an even smarter and more engaged audience. How can your company capitalize on these trends before they become part of history? How can you stay ahead of the pack while remaining true to the brand and content you have created in 2016?

The content marketing experts at MintCopy Inc. have gathered a retrospective recap and some forward-thinking predictions in this mini eBook, **“Your Essential 2017 Digital Content Lighthouse”**, to help channel your efforts for bigger, better, and smarter marketing content in the New Year and the future. Shining a light on where we have been and illuminating the possibilities yet to come, this quick guide provides the essential tips you need for a cutting edge, effective, and current marketing strategy that is strategically anchored – without getting stuck.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Remaining current, staying relevant, and taking stock of where you have been and where the industry is going are important to stay afloat in today’s saturated digital content landscape. Without losing sight of your unique stance, staying in tune with best practices can give your company an edge and help you place energy, time, and budget where it will extend the furthest and make the biggest splash.

This mini eBook will review the biggest trends of the year, highlight those sailing toward us for 2017, and take a look even further into the distance at industry predictions for what is still to come:

1. **Looking Back – A Year in Review**

This chapter reviews the course marketing has taken over the past 12 months and focuses on understanding how those trends will continue to shape efforts and audience reactions going forward.

- a. **Optimizing – Go with the Current:** Prioritize optimizing your website and your mobile experience to keep your users happy and engaged.
- b. **Get Found – Beyond 'X Marks the Spot':** Stay up-to-date with the year's SEO changes and strategies.
- c. **Row Together – Stay Social:** Tips to streamline your brand's social activity for a more cohesive and impactful social presence that turns likes into leads.

2. **Looking Out – Charting a Path Forward**

No matter where the past year's trends left you, the advancements and focuses of the New Year promise will inspire without remaining out of reach.

- a. **Emotion – Float, Don't Drown:** Start looking at the bigger picture and the full spectre of the human experience when it comes to your digital content. Focus on feeling and emote before you sell; and you just might be surprised by the results.
- b. **Efficiency – Steer with the Wind:** Avoid battling against your own marketing efforts. Be strategic, use the free and widely available tools, and catch audiences where and when they are receptive to your message.

3. **Looking Beyond the Horizon – Innovations of the Future**

Consider future changes and lenses that are sure to define the content creation process and reception from audiences. It is never too early to start planning and positioning your company to remain buoyant, no matter what changes come to pass.

- a. **Personalization – From Initial Greeting to Final Departure:** Technology, data, and personal tastes will come together for the ultimate customization in digital content. Start by getting to know your audiences now, so you can target them more easily in the future.
- b. **Lifestyle – Sailors, Pirates, and Everyone In-Between:** Whether your brand is loose and edgy or buttoned up and conservative, getting to know yourself will help you tackle the expectations of consumers in years to come. Get ready for high demands of brand transparency and short content that conveys a lot about who you are and what you are selling (beyond your product and service).

Find out more about how to make digital content trends work in your favour, across industries and audiences, in the chapters below.

CHAPTER 1: LOOKING BACK – A YEAR IN REVIEW

It was an interesting year; filled with triumphs and failings, challenges and improvements. One thing is for certain for everyone: there were a lot of lessons learned when it comes to digital content.

Digital marketers had plenty of evolutions to encounter and master. Most were focused on improving the experience of consumers, but much advancement also sought to make the work of marketers more streamlined, simple, time-sensitive and cost-effective. Here are some of our favourite changes to digital content in 2016, and how their lessons can carry you through to a successful, fresh calendar year.

OPTIMIZING – GO WITH THE CURRENT

Marketers around the world were told time and time again by SEO professionals, user experience (UX) designers, and customers, that one of the easiest ways to improve their efforts and move the needle on conversion rates was a simple, attainable task: cleaning up their website!

From structure to content, creating a more streamlined, organized, and logical website has been identified as a smart marketing move.¹

Why the focus on a lean and clean website?

- **SEO:** Google rewards websites that are easy to browse through and navigate. Dead links, redundant content, padding, and outdated information make your website a pain for people, and unreliable. Search engines are quick to catch on. If you have been ignoring your website structure and organization while trying to improve SEO, you may be only coming up against yourself.²
- **User Experience:** Those UX designers have grown in popularity in the past few years for a reason. Customers are now becoming 'users' and a company's primary interaction often occurs through an interface that is not their final product. For that reason, the website is a crucial touchpoint that needs to be easy to understand, simple to read, and painless to navigate.³
- **Evolution:** You may have set up your website years ago and left it alone since then. While it may run okay, the fact is that the Internet of today is much different than the application and realities of days gone by. The multi-screen reality needs to be considered for your website to perform, and long-form content needs to be made more attractive to wandering eyes, drifting thoughts, and short attention spans.

People are spending more and more time browsing on their mobile devices. Even if they are on a laptop, desktop, or watching television, they are likely exploring related content or other interests on their phone. The rise of the phablet made this even more accessible and digital content needs to keep up if it is going to elicit joy rather than frustration from users.

Don't forget about mobile:

- Responsive design: If your website is difficult or impossible to engage with on a mobile browser, you can wave goodbye to tons of potential customers, leads, and fans. Don't ignore this critical entry point to grow your audience and increase your brand's reach.⁴
- Specialized content: Minimize loading times and maximize impact with content that is created for the person on the go. Lagging videos, illegible fonts, and finicky menus that don't respond well to touch technology are sure to drive people away.⁵
- Tailor your writing for a mobile viewer: Easy to read, easy to understand, brief and evocative copy is critical for mobile-ready moments that are quick and satisfying. Keep subject lines appealing and lead with value; always keeping the end-user in mind. If you are too focused on communicating about your product, you are probably missing the mark writing for your audience.⁶

Keeping mobile optimization at the top (or near the top) of your strategy is not only wise, it is necessary. Trends will continue to go in a mobile direction, as more and more people rely on their handheld devices to perform tasks that were once reserved for a desktop or laptop.

GET FOUND – BEYOND 'X' MARKS THE SPOT

SEO remained a top priority, new initiative, and strong focus for marketers across industries. More than 6,500,000,000 searches are made daily⁷. That is a lot of potential for people to find your product, service, or web pages through a search engine, so getting on the top of those results is important. You may have the best product on the market, but if your treasure is hidden, you can't blame customers for not knowing about what you have to offer.

Go Local

This hot trend extends beyond shopping, vacations, and food. People want to support local businesses and search local services. If you are not concentrating on local SEO, you could be missing out on a lot of traffic, revenue, and digital leads.⁸

- Adapt with Google: Get your business listed on Google to be listed more readily and increase visibility for your company.
- Use keywords sparingly: Focusing on the order and concentration of keywords is not the most effective way to get your business recognized. High-quality, relevant content that actually serves your audience, with a few optimized search terms naturally integrated throughout, is the real way to win over search results and get clicked.⁹

Take the time for careful consideration before sinking endless hours, effort, and resources into producing an app. Only certain business structures warrant it; so be thoughtful before focusing too heavily on seeing your logo in the App Store.

ROW TOGETHER – STAY SOCIAL

This marketing trend has shown no signs of losing steam or slowing down, despite another tumultuous year for brands that are still figuring things out along the way. Missteps were aplenty in 2016, but so were the victories. There were rocky waves and smooth sailing, depending on the industry, but many takeaways from the victors and those who had to do some damage control. With many small brands finding their audience and established companies reconnecting with an active, young crowd, there were surprises and disappointments on corporate social profiles this year.

Keep these key focus areas in mind for a strong social presence:

- **Be Active:** Posting is important. Nothing elicits suspicion more than a company's profile that has been set up but remains inactive. Tailor your posts and frequency to the platform. Nobody wants their entire feed on Instagram to be taken over by a single company, but users on Twitter may forget you exist if you fail to post regularly. Be consistent, be fresh, and above all else, be active.¹⁰
 - **Work on Reputation:** All it takes is one off-colour post to end up a pariah, trending BuzzFeed article, or blacklisted company. Not every misstep has to be so dramatic or garner that much attention, but no matter the magnitude, you won't be able to go back from a post in poor taste. Establish clear, concise, and consistent guidelines that inform everyone posting from your account. Cover everything from imagery to captioning and language and interactions. How do you respond to criticism? Who are the key influencers you would like to engage with? Depending on your product, brand, and industry, you can outline what topics and current events are 'fair game' and those that you don't or will not touch. You do not have to be the first to comment on every topic—unless you are a news organization, and you shouldn't be expected to buy your audience. Focus on your niche, establish your voice, and build a reputation as a stable and unique brand.
 - **Use Rankings:** Social media profiles can increase your search ranking. They are a useful way for customers and Google to determine what your company offers and connect with you in a more organic, human, and approachable way. Beyond your website, these profiles can be an important way for the right consumers to discover and interact with your brand. Ensure that these profiles come up first when people search for your company and keep social media top of mind for another successful year.
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The great thing about the trends of 2016? They show no signs of turning into forgotten fads! The efforts your marketing team and agencies have put forward will continue to pay off in the New Year. These new skills will ensure your company continues to grow, engage, and develop into a fully formed, multi-touch point experience for new and old customers.

CHAPTER 2: LOOKING OUT – CHARTING A PATH FORWARD

Not quite there yet? The next chapter will allow you to position yourself to further develop these strategies while taking advantage of the tools and trends coming ashore in 2017¹¹. Fill in any gaps left in the previous year as you continue to look ahead and anticipate what your competitors and customers will be looking for as they continue to engage more closely and frequently with top brands.

EMOTION – FLOAT, DON'T DROWN

Dive deeper and let your message sink in with potential customers and existing clients by appealing to their emotions. Forget fear and play to your strengths, creating a positive association with your company's content.

Avoid “drowning” with these formats and techniques for more emotive digital content in the New Year:

- **Step Back, Ask Questions:** A little perspective can make a big difference in the outcomes your content achieves. Ask where the source of inspiration comes from to create your content, and determine if you are addressing your teammates or people who really want and need your products. Look outward as you change inward efforts and behaviour for more SEO-friendly, human-focused content.¹²
- **Live Streaming:** With launches this year that range from Livestream on Facebook, to Instagram Stories and Live, and Snapchat Stories, there are multiple avenues for companies to show the world what happens behind the scenes. Most are using the opportunity to broadcast events, create more transparent processes, and share daily happenings. Audiences are able to gain more insight and feel more connected to companies than ever before. 2017 promises to push this relationship further with more experimentation, broader application, and more and more companies using these new opportunities.¹³
- **Storytelling:** You need a team with the necessary skills to craft a message that goes beyond information and marketing. More and more brands will focus on narrative creation in their advertising as they work towards a more organic, less *salesy* approach to generating content.¹⁴

EFFICIENCY – STEER WITH THE WIND

One great thing about the continuous development and evolution of digital content? More and more knowledge, tools, and resources are available to make your efforts less strenuous and more impactful.

You can now create your own wind with the strength and trajectory you want. What once would take days of research or months of trial and error can now be accomplished with quick reference to numerous online resources and implementation through simplified, customized tools.

Be Strategic with SEO

Finding yourself on Google shouldn't become a stressful situation. It will be a constant focus for your company but using the latest techniques, staying up-to-date with changing algorithms, and working with experienced professionals will help you to get there without dedicating endless hours back-linking or focusing on unnecessary efforts.

- **Rich Results:** Notice how Google now offers answers to your search queries, right on the search results page? Get your business there and build your influence as a reliable source of information, qualified source of expertise, and producer of enticing, relevant content.¹⁵
- **Stay Current:** Still sinking efforts into keyword stuffing or dedicating a large chunk of your budget to buying links? It is time to get up-to-date with the latest SEO trends and keep paying attention to how Google rankings work. Adjusting your SEO copywriting is easier if you know what will garner the best and fastest results for your company.¹⁶

Go for Native Advertising

Sinking tons of cash and resources into platforms where your brand's message will be covered by ad blockers or generally perceived as a nuisance is not necessarily the best move. Companies will get wise to this in the New Year and instead focus on native advertising.

- **Enhance, Don't Disrupt:** Following natural user paths, logical progressions, and value for the audience will be the focus of these ads. That means stronger content that is fully-formed, outside-the-box, and more informative than persuasive will take hold and continue to separate strong content marketers from old-school advertisers.¹⁷
- **Flaunt Your Expertise:** White papers, reports, research initiatives, and personal experiences will be shared by more and more brands that are hoping to establish themselves as more than service providers and product-manufacturers. Value-adding, specialized experts will take centre stage in the New Year as more content is designed to make companies a source for information and knowledge online.

Continually check-in with your content marketing strategy and don't be afraid to iterate. Cutting out what is not working is just as important as staying up to date with the latest trends. Another key differentiator that may seem obvious? Have a plan! Companies with a content plan are far more likely to have success, even if that plan changes and evolves throughout the year.¹⁸

CHAPTER 3: LOOKING BEYOND THE HORIZON – INNOVATIONS OF THE FUTURE

Even if you have not yet mastered all the new platforms, ventures, and strategies that were popularized in 2016, or can't imagine tackling everything 2017 promises to put in front of marketers, it is never a bad idea to look forward. Set your sights over the horizon, even if just for a single brainstorming meeting or hour of strategizing. You do not need to immediately act on the long-term trend forecasts in order to successfully integrate them into the philosophies and flexibility of your current content strategy.

PERSONALIZATION – FROM INITIAL GREETING TO FINAL DEPARTURE

People are going to start expecting more from brand experiences, big and small. From initial contact to closing the deal, even small transactions should create a sense of importance and value.

Here are a few ways this trend will emerge in coming years:

- Custom: SEO and targeted content have paved the way for more relevant, tailored, and structured paths to reach the right audiences at the right time. These developments will make the future of marketing even more streamlined and make finding your company's focus and deliberate messaging even more crucial.¹⁹
- Non-human: As we hand more and more aspects of our lives over to our devices, brands will have to target the technology we are using, rather than the humans who use them. Marketing efforts are positioned to become data-driven to the core. Ad-blockers and subscription media networks point towards a future where ads must pass intensive screening processes to even get in front of consumers. That means the marketing process will become even more non-human, while ads need to be even more distinct in addressing a specific target.²⁰

- **Mobile:** That trend we highlighted for 2016? It shows no signs of slowing down or decreasing in relevancy. There are more smart phones than people on the planet, and with the popularity of messaging apps, constant social media access, and ever-evolving apps designed for convenience and mobility, the future will still be experienced through mobile devices. Virtual reality integrations, data tracking, and new ways to interact will all continue to define the next wave of marketing content trends and triumphs.

These can seem like big scary prospects when read together, but really it makes your first step to better marketing simple. Defining your brand can be the first step to tackling last year's trends, this year's advances, and future developments that are coming down the pipeline.

LIFESTYLE: SAILORS, PIRATES, AND EVERYONE IN-BETWEEN

From youth culture to the elite and everyone in between, people will continue to look for brands and companies that align with their view of the world. Whether you prefer to stay neutral as a brand or already have a firm stance on social issues, finding a way to connect your company to a defined lifestyle segment will become increasingly important.

Define yourself for the best chance of connecting:

- **Be Open:** Take emotions one step further with politically engaged, transparent, and no-holds barred branding and communications. People want to connect with companies that support their values, and brands will target their messaging accordingly.²¹
- **Be Concise:** Fingers are pointing to less content and shorter content as the best way to engage your audience. Be conscious and respectful of their time, but note that higher-quality, long-form content has and will continue to perform better for business-to-business marketing.²²

So how can you prepare today for the new technologies and tactics of tomorrow? Stay focused, be distinct, and narrow in on your audience. The faster you figure out your niche and begin speaking to the right people, in the right places, the easier time you will have adapting as changes big and small impact the content marketing landscape.

CONCLUSION

After reviewing trends past, present, and forthcoming, it is important to focus your content efforts where they can have the biggest impact. Instead of trying to catch every wave and ride every trend into the future, focus on the ones that align with your brand, capture your target audience, and support your existing successful strategies.

If you have not already shifted your focus, take the time to make your website a solid, functional, and beautiful piece of your content marketing puzzle. By website, we mean mobile-friendly, user-focused online content that serves to tell your brand story and provide prospects, customers, and clients with all the information they need. Tweak and refine your social strategy and ensure that SEO is top-of-mind for local results and better exposure.

The New Year promises to be a year of feeling, using tried-and-true strategies and technologies, and targeting audiences where they will be receptive to your messaging. Show your best stuff, continually work to build your reputation, and don't be afraid to flip traditional roles and get your audience involved in producing, interacting, and defining your content as you go. Change is good, so don't be afraid to experiment and iterate as the year goes on.

Going forward, you really need to know who you are as a brand and company. What do you stand for? What do you stand against? It will become increasingly important to personalize content and personify your brand, so find brand champions and start distilling those 'big questions' and 'big ideas' into clear, concise, and consistent answers that create the distinctive personality of your brand across digital content.

Lay the groundwork now using lessons from the year gone by, to establish a firm position for the future of your brand's content marketing and digital strategy. It is never too late to set sail and it is never too early to begin planning ahead. Contact the professionals at [MintCopy](#) for help with mapping your [content marketing](#) and finding ways to deliver consistently and conveniently when it comes to SEO, brand voice, and conveying personality.

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