



**2018**  
**START**

# Digital Marketing in 2018: What to Watch For, What to Watch Out For

(un)  
common  
logic

**Paid Search**

**SEO**

**Conversion Rate  
Optimization**

# Digital Marketing in 2018: The Five Biggest Forces

None of these phenomena are completely new; they're all the products of continuing evolution in data, technology, and marketing. In many cases, these factors combine to produce further developments, which is only natural, as marketing becomes more integrated and holistic.



## A SEAMLESS MARKETING EXPERIENCE FOCUSED ON CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

As marketing channels continue to proliferate, the need for a consistent brand presence across all channels and stages of the buying cycle becomes increasingly clear. That presence must be appropriate as well, focused on what customers need, want, and expect when they choose to interact with a brand.

Today's digital ecosystem offers brands a chance to be present in just about every part of a customer's daily life, through mobile/desktop, on-site, in-app, social, video, voice/Internet of Things, messaging, and other channels. The challenge for brands will be to coordinate when, where, and how they connect with customers, and to ensure the right balance of interaction to nurture positive relationships with them.

Achieving that coordination will require breaking through the silos within marketing departments: every discipline (SEO, paid search, video, apps) will need to share planning, messaging, activities, and especially data with each other. We believe the cultural shifts necessary to tear down silos will be a major concern for CMOs this year.



## INCREASING PERSONALIZATION

The volume of available customer data lets brands personalize their messages, offers, even experiences for different customers. This can be a time- and labor-intensive process, so personalization at scale remains out of reach.

However, brands can still increase the level of personalization they offer customers without sacrificing efficiency. Email is the perfect channel for initial personalization efforts, such as subject lines. Data analysis tools can provide insights on how to segment campaigns; while it's not the same as personalization, it's a good start.

Fortunately, customers tend to respond well to personalization:

- ◇ 65% of consumers are more likely to buy from retailers that know their purchase history
- ◇ 58% of consumers are more likely to buy when they get recommendations based on their preferences or past purchases
- ◇ 65% are more likely to buy from retailers who provide them with personalized promotions relevant to them

Top 5 Forces in Digital  
Marketing for 2018



A seamless  
customer  
experience



Personalization



AI, machine  
learning,  
deep learning



Data privacy,  
security,  
transparency



Mobile. Still.



## AI, MACHINE LEARNING, AND DEEP LEARNING

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning have gotten a lot of buzz—so much that the terms have been used interchangeably in some cases. But they’re two distinct concepts.

As Google’s Marvin Chow explains it, “**Artificial intelligence** is the study of how to make machines intelligent or capable of solving problems as well as people can.” It’s a fairly broad category, encompassing everything from Deep Blue, the chess-playing computer of the ’90s, to self-driving cars.

**Machine learning** is an application of AI that allows systems to “learn” based on experience rather than explicit programming. Machine learning has been revolutionizing search results, ad bidding, customer service, and many other aspects of marketing for a couple of years now, maturing into a new subset: deep learning.

**Deep learning** is the closest approximation of human thinking yet, using sophisticated neural networks to develop predictive capabilities based on millions of data points. Given how much marketing data is unused, deep learning could be the technology that can process all that data into recognizable patterns, giving marketers a fuller picture of their customers.



## DATA PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND TRANSPARENCY

If your company does business in the European Union nations, you’re probably aware of the General Data Protection Regulation, which goes into effect on May 25 of this year. However, even if you operate outside the EU, your company will still probably be affected by the GDPR.

Because fines for violating the GPDR can go up to \$24M or 4% of global annual revenue, *whichever is greater*, you’ll want to stay on the right side of the regulation. The most expensive penalties are related to data breaches, and are only levied after a process of notifications and warnings, but this should give you a sense of how serious the European Union is about this law.

In particular, make sure your email service provider (ESP) already complies with GDPR standards for protecting the data of people on your email list. In their excellent guide to the GDPR, MailChimp advises:

Basically, if you are collecting, managing, using or storing any personal data of EU citizens, you are processing EU personal data within the meaning prescribed by the GDPR. This means, for example, that if any of your MailChimp lists contains the email address, name, or other personal data of any EU citizen, then you are processing EU personal data under the GDPR.

We think two of the most interesting developments of 2018 will be how the GDPR affects automation and machine learning in marketing, and how those technologies adapt not only to respond to the GDPR but to assist in its purpose of bolstering privacy and transparency in personal data. Look for more content resources on the GDPR from us in the next few months.

Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.



## MOBILE. STILL.

Mobile's got a full decade on the other four forces. But its impact and importance continue to shift, as it's gone from a separate marketing channel to the central hub of marketing for many industries and segments. As TUNE's John Koetsier says, "Mobile isn't a channel; it's an ecosystem within which all the digital channels increasingly live."

Marketers continue to invest more in mobile; as Digiday reports, "Mobile advertising will account for 63% of online spend and 26% of total media spend by 2019—more than all traditional media, except TV, combined." We expect brands will also increase investment in strategy, consideration, and optimization regarding customers' mobile experiences.

# Paid Search in 2018

## WILL GOOGLE CHROME START BLOCKING ADS?



Google Chrome will introduce a built-in ad-blocking feature on Feb. 15. While this might sound dire, it's not the end of paid search advertising.



Search advertising is Google's main income source, so they want to preserve it.

They also want to supersede third-party ad blockers, most of which block all paid search ads. So by including this ad-blocking feature, they hope to mitigate losses caused by third-party ad blockers.

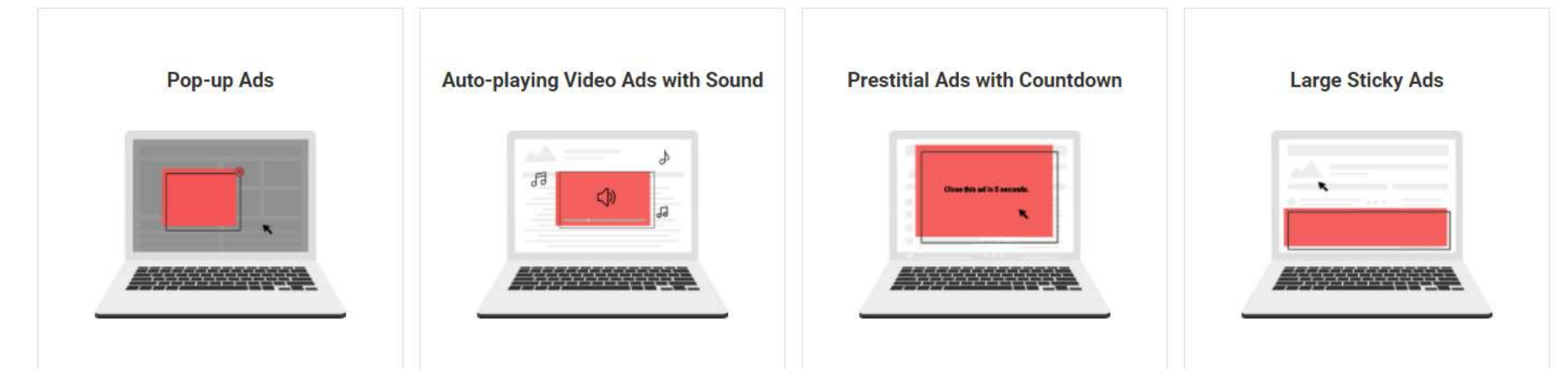
Furthermore, this technology isn't so much ad-blocking as it is ad-filtering. Google is a founding member of the Coalition for Better Ads, an industry initiative aimed at curtailing obnoxious ad practices. Thus, Chrome will block all ads following practices deemed "unacceptable" by the Coalition.

Given that all these practices are very annoying and have been proven to frustrate and alienate users, the Coalition's standards seem quite reasonable. What might not be quite as reasonable is Google's zero-tolerance policy, as reported by Ars Technica:

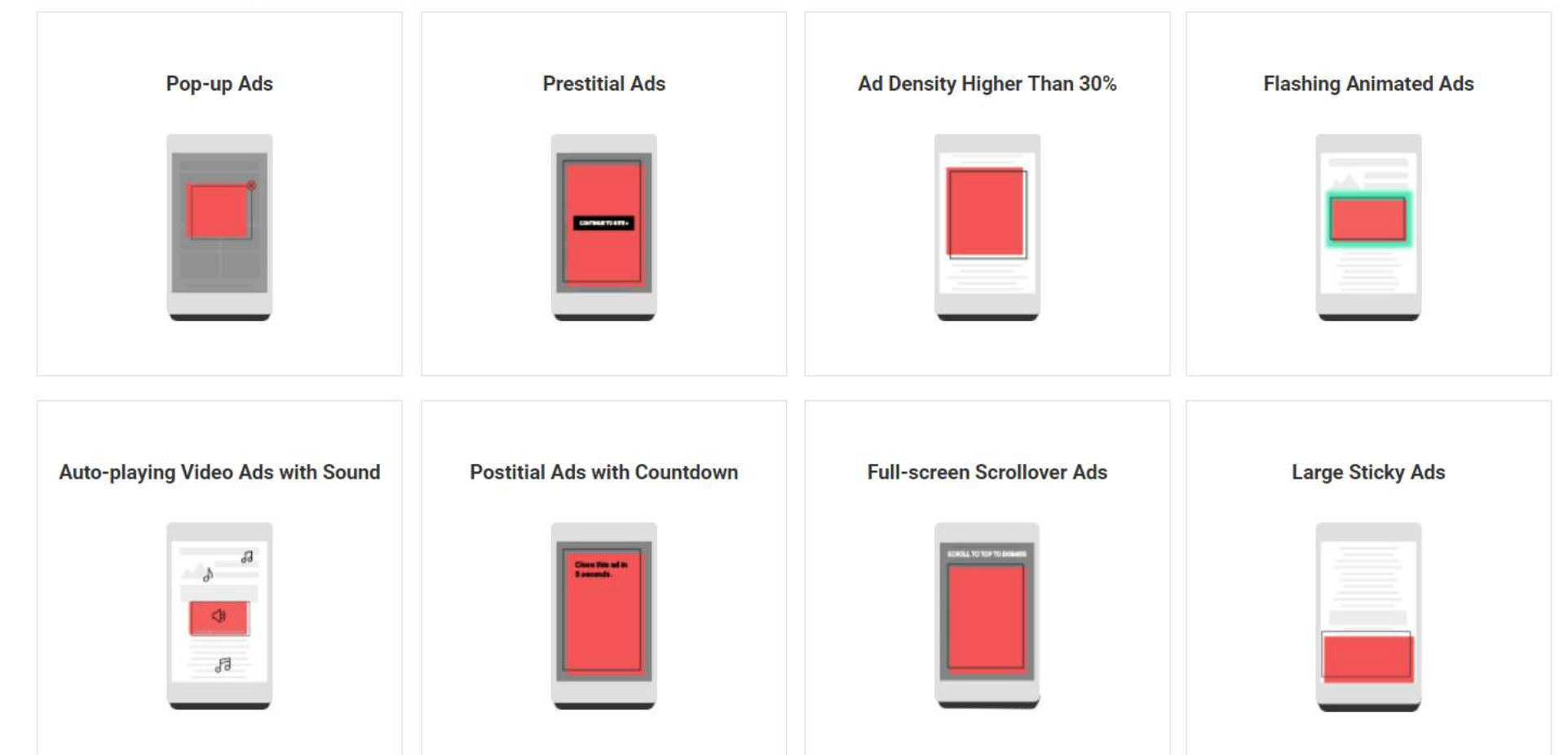
"If a site runs a single ad that runs afoul of Google's requirements, it will have all of its ads blocked, even the non-offending ones. Google's 'Ad Experience Report' site will allow for reporting and reviewing of unacceptable ads. Once reported, Web developers have 30 days to clean up a site or face ad-blocking from Chrome."

### UNACCEPTABLE AD PRACTICES:

#### Desktop Web Experiences



#### Mobile Web Experiences



Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.

## AD PRACTICES THAT GOOGLE CHROME WILL BLOCK STARTING FEB. 15

- ◇ Pop-ups
- ◇ Prestitial ads with countdown: ads that stay open for a number of seconds before allowing the user to view the content
- ◇ **On mobile**, all prestitial ads are unacceptable, even if the user can close them immediately
- ◇ Auto-playing video ads with sound
- ◇ “Large sticky ads”
- ◇ **Mobile only**—Ads that take up more than 30% of screen space
- ◇ **Mobile only**—Flashing automated ads
- ◇ **Mobile only**—Poststitial ads with countdown: these ads make the user wait a number of seconds before accessing the next page
- ◇ **Mobile only**—Full-screen scrollover ads

## PERSONALIZATION POTENTIAL



Making personalized offers in real time is now within reach for many brands. As big data, AI, and machine learning develop, marketers will have more chances to learn about what their customers want and need, and when they need it.



Keep conducting research into customer use patterns, including where and when they're most likely to use each channel, platform, and device. The more data you have, the better you'll be able to tailor your offers, and the more receptive your customers will be to them.

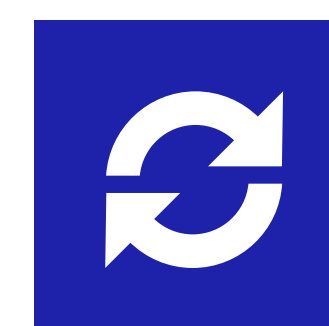


Personalization in a post-GD-PR world will likely face obstacles and require a shift in paid search tactics, but it's the sort of challenge that agencies and martech firms love to take on. If marketers can find a way to individualize



customer experience while respecting their personal information (and avoiding hefty European Union fines), they could enjoy personalization's shorter funnels and higher conversion rates while minimizing risk.

## AD FORMATS



Native advertising continues to grow as consumers appreciate its non-intrusive nature. Native ads are designed to blend in with a site's self-produced content and provide the additional value of quality content. But they shouldn't



blend in too well: native ads must (and, we think, should) have a clear designation that they aren't produced by the site; “sponsored content” is the most common such signal.

Last year, brand spending on native advertising grew by 74%, and native is predicted to dominate mobile advertising in the next year or two. The research firm IHS Markit estimates that more than 63% of mobile display advertising will be native ads by 2020. We advise considering native advertising, especially on mobile, this year.



Like native, video advertising is still on the rise, and it's moving toward mobile. Nielsen reported last year that monthly U.S. video consumption on smartphones jumped 81.5% year-over-year from 151



minutes in 2016 to 274 minutes in 2017. If that rate of growth holds this year, consumers will spend an average of 496 minutes a month watching videos on smartphones. Mobile video clearly has a large audience; the challenge for brands is how to appeal to that audience through video advertising.



**Schema for mobile:** Part of delivering a consistent, high-quality customer experience is having relevant, accurate data in shopping ads across all platforms. 2018 is the perfect time to make sure your shopping ads are displaying on mobile with all the correct schema markup, especially for Similar Items.



Despite search and click volume comparable to or greater than that of desktop, **mobile conversion rates** still hover below desktop CVRs for many segments, to the frustration of paid search marketers. Our team is planning strategies, tactics, and tests to improve the mobile customer experience in ways that encourage conversions.



## PROGRAMMATIC ADVERTISING



**Image rehabilitation** will likely be the greatest challenge for programmatic in 2018. While AI and machine learning allowed real-time bidding to flourish last year, problematic and fraudulent placements made programmatic



a potential liability for many advertisers. This year, programmatic platforms and exchanges must apply machine learning to the data they have to improve the quality of matches made between advertiser, publisher, audience, and offer.



**Preventing fraud and protecting privacy** in programmatic will be another crucial challenge for the year. One potential solution is blockchain, the technology that underpins cryptocurrency such as bitcoin. Blockchain allows the



participants in a programmatic ad buy (agencies, publishers, advertisers) to form a closed group where transactions are recorded in a ledger that all participants can see, but that's encrypted for security.

Unfortunately, blockchain can't be seen as a full-scale solution just yet. At the moment, it simply isn't fast enough to handle the millions of programmatic transactions that happen every second. Also, cryptocurrency carries its own risks from exchange rate fluctuations, which can reduce or even negate ROI.

Another solution to programmatic ad fraud that shows promise is ads.txt, an initiative that grew out of the Interactive Advertising Bureau's Tech Lab. As indicated by its name extension, ads.txt is a text file that greenlights only approved parties: publishers upload an ads.txt file specifying which programmatic platforms are authorized to sell space on their site, and programmatic platforms upload an ads.txt file specifying which publishers' inventory they're authorized to sell. It's a relatively simple, low-tech approach, but until blockchain achieves scalability, ads.txt is a pretty good interim solution.

Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.

# SEO in 2018

Search engines, especially Google, are getting much more technologically advanced, with the slightly ironic goal of more closely approximating human thought and speech patterns. We predict that 2018 will find SEO experts making the most of new technologies to help “teach” search engines about how humans think.

## SEARCH ENGINES UNDERSTAND HUMAN SPEECH ALMOST AS WELL AS HUMANS DO



Natural language is the *lingua franca* of SEO, helped along by voice search’s increasing presence. As of mid-2016, 20% of all searches on Android were made by voice; also in mid-2016, ComScore estimated that by 2020, 50% of all searches will be voice searches. In December 2016, Gartner predicted that by 2020, 30% of all search queries will be made without a screen, through a voice-first device.



Because voice search queries are questions in everyday language, search engines have learned how to parse everyday language for searcher intent. Google reported in May 2017 that its voice recognition software can now understand human speech with 95% accuracy—which is also the human threshold for

speech recognition. In August, Microsoft reported that Bing’s voice recognition error rate was 5.1%, which puts it almost even with Google’s.

The result is a continuation of the years-long SEO shift from bot-oriented optimization to optimizing for humans. Rather than tweaking content to match keywords, content teams should use more natural language (even conversational where appropriate) aligned with searcher intent rather than bot-based best practices. This contributes to a more customer-oriented marketing experience, which will soon be the basis for customer expectations.



**Position zero matters more than ever**, as it’s really the only position in search on voice-first

devices, such as Alexa, Echo, Google Home, and the new Apple Homepod. Voice-first searches tend to return only one result, and whenever possible, they prioritize the content of the device’s provider over all other content. Even in searches on non-voice-first devices, the search engine will prioritize its content over the content of others.

Fortunately, most SEO tools have become more sophisticated to keep pace with the new reality of search. Many can show daily data regarding which sites currently rank for answer boxes and other universal results, allowing marketers to see trends in what search engines deem worthy of position zero and form strategies to capture that position.

Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.

# GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR)



The privacy aspects of the GDPR will definitely have an impact on SEO and site content. Because the GDPR protects the data and privacy of European Union residents, any website that collects user data, including email addresses, from residents of EU nations must be GDPR-compliant. Fortunately, many of these requirements fall under the headings of “good customer experience” and “good data hygiene.”

If your site gathers signups for an email newsletter, you’ll likely fall under the jurisdiction of the GDPR. Marketing best practices already dictate that signup forms explicitly request consent from the user and clearly state what the user’s data will be used for; now’s the perfect time to ensure that all your site’s signups pass muster.

If your site doesn’t explicitly request consent for cookie data, that needs to change between now and May 25. The passively worded “by using this site, you are agreeing to our cookie policy” statement will no longer cut it; users have to deliberately agree to have their cookie data collected, and there must be a way for users to opt out of cookies. One SEO challenge to this directive is that most such

requests are handled by pop-ups, which can harm page load speed.

If you use a third-party analytics platform, be sure it complies with GDPR rules regarding personal and sensitive data. Just about every major analytics package will have GDPR compliance well in place by May, so a simple check should be all that’s required.

We’ll be interested to see if GDPR compliance becomes a ranking factor in Google, as HTTPS has since 2016. Admittedly, HTTPS was a security aspect that Google wanted to promote, while GDPR compliance is literally required by law. However, given that many GDPR requirements align with best practices, GDPR-compliant sites could rise in rankings simply for being high-quality sites.

While the GDPR will likely curtail at least some gathering of cookie data, SEO tools are starting to turn to a richer, completely voluntary data source: clickstream data. Analytics companies collect browsing history data from millions of volunteers and strip out personally identifying information while retaining all cross-device tracking data from anonymous user IDs.

# PERSONALIZED SEARCH



As search becomes more personalized, rankings become more difficult to discern, since every search engine results page (SERP) is now



a custom SERP. A high empirical ranking for a keyword can be reduced or even negated by a searcher’s location, browser history, and previous search data. In fact, the concept of an empirically high rating is starting to dissolve, as there’s no clear indication of which SERP could be considered “true” or “accurate.”

Keyword rankings have been a cornerstone metric for SEO since its inception, but with so many personalization factors at play, the SEO industry will likely need to adapt measurement methods for keyword rankings,

Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.



possibly using AI and machine learning to assess a visitor's likely search history and location. Over time, the metrics themselves will change, as new KPIs for visibility evolve.

In the meantime, SEO teams can take steps to work with these aspects of personalized search:

- ◇ Location – make sure your local SEO is on point, even if you don't interact with customers face to face
- ◇ Browser history – keep publishing interesting, rewarding content so visitors come back often, thus increasing your site's presence in their browser history
- ◇ Semantic connections – you can't guarantee that your visitors will often search for terms similar to yours, but you can maximize your technical SEO, meta content, and markup to help search engines understand what your pages are offering and tie that back to search queries

## EVERYTHING'S COMING UP MOBILE



**Google's mobile-first index** is due to arrive in July, making desktop sites a side show rather than the main attraction. Besides the basics such as responsive (or adaptive) design, no duplicate content, and an interface optimized for mobile visitors, one of your top considerations for the new year should be your site's mobile speed.

- ◇ Page speed has been a significant Google ranking factor for desktop searches for several years, and now that will apply to mobile sites, too. Google recently announced that page speed will be a ranking factor for mobile searches starting in July.
- ◇ If you haven't had your site optimized or at least checked for mobile speed in the past year, doing it now will put you ahead of the mobile-first rollout, so you won't have to make up for lost rankings. The most popular resource for checking load times on desktop and mobile is Google PageSpeed

- ◇ Make sure the same content is rendered on both your mobile and desktop sites. That doesn't mean all the content has to be *visible* on mobile, but Google has to know that the content is there. So if you choose to hide some content for page speed or UX purposes, make sure your team is using SEO features to ensure Google doesn't discount the content or its keywords



If you publish a lot of content or get most of your traffic from mobile, consider **accelerated mobile pages (AMPs)**. Google hosts these pages on its AMP Cache, so it can pre-load the pages it thinks will be most relevant for the user's possible searches; it also hosts them so publisher sites won't have access to user data before the user even makes a query. Later this year, Google will be adjusting their displayed AMP URL to be the URL of the content publisher's site, rather than `google.com/amp/[original URL]`

Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.

# Conversion Rate Optimization in 2018

## ADAPTING TO THE NEW WORLD OF PRIVACY AND TRANSPARENCY



The **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** protects the data and privacy of European Union residents, thus any site that collects personal data from residents of EU member nations must be GDPR-compliant. Personal data as defined by the GDPR includes personal or business email addresses and cookie data.



If your company collects any of this data from EU residents, even if the company has no branches in the EU, the GDPR still applies. It's backed by international law, specifically the effects doctrine, so physical distance doesn't exempt your website.

The GDPR has been in effect since its adoption in April 2016, but it will be enforced starting May 25 of this year. If you're wondering if there's a grace period, the answer is yes, and we're in it right now.

Penalties for violations can go as high as \$24M or 4% of a company's global annual revenue—*whichever is higher*. The most expensive penalties are only levied after notifications and warnings, but this shows how serious the EU is about this law.

If you haven't begun optimizing your landing pages and lead forms for the GDPR, we strongly recommend that you start. Whether you're offering a software demo, content resource, or email subscription, your lead form must meet these guidelines:

- ◇ No pre-checked boxes, as consent can no longer be presumed
- ◇ Users must be told exactly and specifically what they're signing up for in terms of marketing communications: "We'll send our blog digest email to you on the 15th of every month"
- ◇ Each separate offer must have its own consent option. For instance, if a user signs up for a monthly blog digest email, you can't also email them special offers unless they consent to those in a separate option

Pop-up or sidebar forms will change a bit, but will still be completely workable. Just be sure they have:

- ◇ Simple, clear language outlining what users can expect from completing the form
- ◇ No pre-checked boxes
- ◇ A clear sign-up button (rather than a vague "OK") that indicates affirmative consent
- ◇ Link to privacy and data collection policy

Can CRO still be done under these restrictions? Yes, absolutely. In fact, many of the GDPR requirements align with best practices in CRO and marketing in general:

Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.

## ADVANCES IN DATA ANALYSIS TOOLS

- ◇ Under the GDPR, the less personal information you gather, the better. Conveniently, the less personal information you request in your lead form, the less friction between the user and completing the form
- ◇ One of the principles of CRO is “fulfill the promise,” meaning that successful landing pages provide the information that a user is seeking when they click on a link. The GDPR requires marketers to make—and fulfill—additional promises to users, enhancing the sense of trustworthiness
- ◇ It might seem tedious to request consent from a user to collect their data, but the users who do consent have very deliberately affirmed their desire to interact with your company—in a sense, to work together already



**Artificial intelligence and machine learning** can bring scalability and efficiency to CRO this year.

- ◇ AI allows CRO tools to combine multivariate factors into millions of combinations and test them extremely frequently
- ◇ Machine learning allows CRO tools to record user actions, identify patterns, and weigh their significance. For instance, SessionCam has developed a “Customer Struggle” score that uses machine learning to identify which parts of a website frustrate users the most
- ◇ Perhaps most significantly, machine learning will help CRO tools find the optimal balance between “exploring” (testing to see which combinations of factors perform best) and “exploiting” (serving the most successful combinations to visitors to maximize conversions)

Of course, AI and machine learning won’t affect all of CRO. In fact, “offloading” so many data gathering, compiling, and processing tasks to tools will give human experts more time to do what humans do best: analyzing, interpreting, theorizing, creative problem-solving, and throwing the occasional curveball.

Because every action—including inaction—has a value and a cost, more CRO experts are starting to augment the existing PIE (Potential, Importance, Ease) framework with qualitative analysis of how factors like time and incomplete data can affect the prioritization or even consideration of tests.

Machine learning will also help marketers personalize and adjust offers and calls to action, and push content based on context, such as day, time, and location. Device context will be a factor as well: on mobile, attention spans tend to be much shorter than on desktop, which calls for simpler copy, images, and CTAs.



The GDPR will in no way end the process of gathering user data; it will just push marketers and tool developers to find ways to collect and use that data more intelligently and strategically. **Personalization is still very much on the menu for 2018**, and as data gathering and processing evolves and improves, testing will become even more granular, moving beyond A/B and multivariate to account-based and personalized tests.

Top 5 Forces in Digital Marketing for 2018



A seamless customer experience



Personalization



AI, machine learning, deep learning



Data privacy, security, transparency



Mobile. Still.

# 2018 Digital Marketing in Three Checklists

## THE COALITION FOR BETTER ADS' UNACCEPTABLE PRACTICES

- ◇ Pop-ups
- ◇ Prestitial ads with countdown – ads that appear before the content of a page has loaded and stay open for a number of seconds before letting the user view the content
  - ◇ **On mobile**, all prestitial ads are considered unacceptable, even if the user can close them immediately
- ◇ Auto-playing video ads with sound
- ◇ “Large sticky ads”
- ◇ **Mobile only**: Ads that take up more than 30% of screen space
- ◇ **Mobile only**: Flashing automated ads
- ◇ **Mobile only**: Poststitial ads with countdown – like their prestitial counterparts, these ads make the user wait a number of seconds before accessing the next page
- ◇ **Mobile only**: Full-screen scrollover ads

## MAKE PERSONALIZED SEARCH WORK FOR SEO

SEO teams can take steps to work with these aspects of personalized search:

- ◇ Location: make sure your local SEO is on point, even if you don't interact with customers face to face
- ◇ History: keep publishing interesting, rewarding content so visitors come back often, increasing your site's presence in their browser history
- ◇ Semantic connections: you can't guarantee that your visitors will often search for terms similar to yours, but you can maximize your technical SEO, meta content, and markup to help search engines understand what your pages are offering and tie that back to search queries

## GDPR GUIDELINES FOR LEAD FORMS

Whether you're offering a software demo, content resource, or email subscription, your lead form must meet these guidelines:

- ◇ Pre-checked boxes are not allowed, as consent can no longer be presumed
- ◇ Users must be told exactly and specifically what marketing communications they're signing up for: “We'll send our blog digest email to you on the 15th of every month”
- ◇ Each separate offer must have its own consent option. For instance, if a user signs up for a monthly blog digest email, you can't also email them special offers unless they consent to those in a separate option
- ◇ Pop-up or sidebar forms must have:
  - ◇ Simple, clear language outlining what users should expect from filling out the form
  - ◇ No pre-checked boxes
  - ◇ A clear sign-up button (not a vague “OK”) that indicates affirmative consent
- ◇ Link to privacy and data collection policy