

MARKETING

Conversational customer connections will transform marketing

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Brands will focus on talking directly to consumers. Image credit: Gucci

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK Marketing is poised for a conversational evolution, forcing brands to boost their capabilities at interacting directly with consumers.

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A Forrester analyst speaking at the researcher's Consumer Marketing Forum on April 5 noted that just as mobile transformed marketing, conversational tactics are set to disrupt the brand-consumer relationship in the near future. While brands already employ tactics such as chat and social media, the level of sophistication and consistency of one-to-one interactions is set to grow.

"There is something about to happen that is so fundamentally transformative just the way mobile was transformative," said James McQuivey, vice president and principal analyst at **Forrester**. "And the thing about this is, it's not about a single device.

"It's about the way that entire [tech] stack is enhancing something that we actually are born capable of," he said.

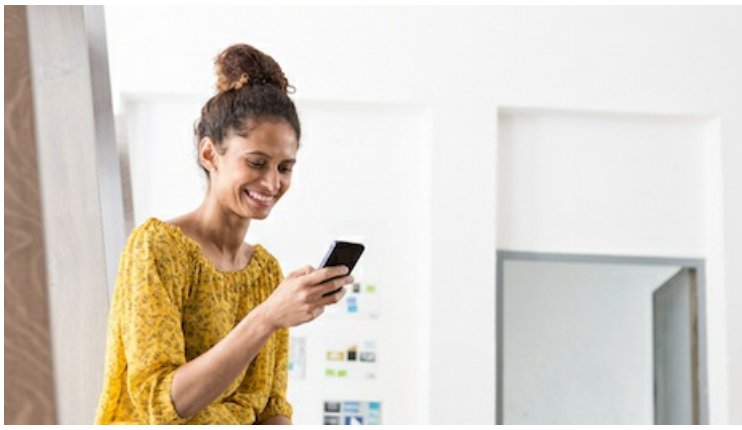
Connected consumer

Marketers are constantly having to evolve to an ever increasing array of technologies. Just as they pick and choose what software and services go into their technology stack, so are consumers, putting brands in a constant race with their shoppers.

However, what differentiates consumers' selection processes from those of brands is their level of confidence in their choices. This empowered feeling can make them more apt to blame a brand than their own technology if a Web site or another digital experience fails to deliver.

2006 was dubbed the year of mobile. While the evolution did not happen immediately, consumers eventually shifted towards using mobile as a primary channel to accomplish tasks.

Brands that did not adapt ahead of this evolution were left having to catch up.



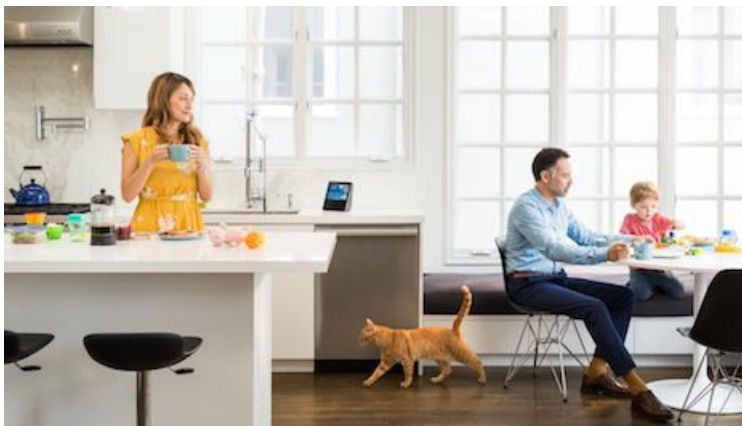
Mobile has changed marketing. Image credit: Pinterest

A similar change is set to come about in conversational marketing, as it turns into a main driver in consumers' lives, necessitating preparedness.

Mr. McQuivey said that where marketers are with conversational tactics is comparable to the applications developed for the iPhone in 2009, leaving plenty of room for growth.

Whereas in 2000, customer communications may have revolved around a toll-free phone number or limited email, today more platforms have emerged to facilitate one-to-one conversations, such as Facebook and WeChat.

Additionally, by 2020 there will be 3.5 billion smartphone owners. The voice-assisted Amazon's Echo and the Google Home are also gaining ground, with 47 million households in the United States projected to own the devices by 2020.



Voice assistants are gaining ground. Image credit: Amazon

Conversational marketing incorporates the entire technology stack. As capabilities grow, brands will be able to offer interactions such as powerful Web chat, data and artificially intelligent tools.

In talks

Brands are already seeking one-to-one communications with consumers.

For instance, global aviation firm VistaJet is looking to usher in bookings from China's digitally savvy consumers through a conversational commerce endeavor with a potential to tap a large audience.

WeChat, Chinese consumers' predominant platform in communicating with brands and retailers, houses a VistaJet sales platform. The aviation firm is hoping to increase bookings with convenience by tapping into an already established user behavior ([see story](#)).

Luxury conglomerate Mot Hennessy Louis Vuitton's multi-brand ecommerce platform similarly launched with 21st century customer service.

Shoppers who browse 24 Sèvres' selection from the ecommerce store's iOS application have access to stylists in Paris via video conference, while consumers also have access to help via a Facebook messenger bot. Officially launched on June 6, this ecommerce destination arrived as digital luxury sales are growing faster than the overall market ([see story](#)).

With voice assistants on the rise, beauty marketer Este Lauder embraced this new trend by collaborating with Google on personalized voice-activated tool for Google Home.

Through the new tool, called the Este Lauder Nighttime Expert application, customers can get personalized beauty tips and recommendations, curated by the brand, delivered to them just by asking their Google Home device. Beauty is a sector that can make great use of voice assistant technology due to customers often using both hands and looking in the mirror while applying cosmetics ([see story](#)).

However, while the current conversations started by brands tend to be infrequent, unemotional or focused on transactions, this will need to change along with consumer expectations.

"Know how customer is evolving," Mr. McQuivey said. "Keep your eyes on them, because they're the thing that is changing.

"They're changing the conversation they're capable of having with you, and you need to change the conversation you're capable of having with them [to a] continuous, emotion-rich customer conversation that intelligently coordinates their lives."

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