



Adobe Creative Cloud for teams

8 marketing trends to energize your brand and refocus your team.





Stand out from the crowd.

When Twitter snapped up Instagram Vine in 2012, the looping-video app seemed like the next big thing in social media circles. Vine celebrities' posts were getting not millions, but billions of views. In 2013, [GlobalWebIndex](#) listed Vine as the fastest growing app in the world. A [Mashable/Statista](#) report showed that more than 40 million users were registered on the app in 2014.

However, by 2016, Vine use [had declined](#). The app's top 1 percent of users were moving on: Fewer than half of them posted a video that year. Twitter tried to sell, and when that failed, it shut down Vine.

Opinions differ on what sunk the app, but the narrative comes down to this: When it debuted, Vine was the most creative social media app available. But its creative team [didn't add new features](#) quickly enough or keep pace with trends. Staying relevant to existing users while attracting new ones demands vigilance, determination—and imagination.

As a creative leader today, you no doubt understand the challenges of getting a product or service noticed and retaining loyal customers. Standing out in the crowd means producing something fresh and surprising and getting it in front of people or businesses wherever they are, while they're there. Your advantage is that, with so many more advertising channels available than in the past, your messages have a much greater chance of being seen.

But that advantage can be its own type of challenge. Social media, podcasts, videos, TV channels, websites, emails, text messaging, satellite radio, apps, and more provide you with a mind-boggling array of not only opportunities to reach customers, but also choices. And those choices can feel overwhelming, even exhausting—especially given that, in the digital age, trends come and go at a head-snapping pace.

Take social media: From Facebook to Twitter to Snapchat to TikTok and all the flash-in-the-pan social media sites in between, keeping up with what's new and in demand can cost a lot and occupy so much time and energy that there's little left for long-term strategizing.

It doesn't have to be this way. Successful companies know that to thrive in today's creative marketplace, the most important quality is *focus*. Know what forms of outreach work best for your industry, business type, and budget, and focus your efforts on them.

To help, we've created a list of the top eight marketing trends that are critical for success today for businesses of every size. Even a creative team of one can pull off these campaigns with panache, no matter how limited the budget: All you need is a sense of adventure and imagination, and a willingness to let the ideas flow. Then, with your eight essential marketing initiatives in place—and getting lots of attention—you can turn your focus to your long-term goals: building your company's brand and boosting its bottom line.

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Here are the top eight trends.

1

Trend #1: Virtual and hybrid events.

Everyone seems to be doing webinars. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down live conferences and sent online meeting platforms (literally) zooming, and suddenly we've got webinars around the clock on pretty much every topic imaginable, including, "How to put on a webinar."

The good news for small and medium businesses is that video requires less skill and costs less time and money to produce than ever before.

The bad news is that "webinar fatigue" is a real thing. Working from home means that people are staring at screens pretty much all day, every day: doing their work, browsing the internet, attending virtual meetings, and now, attending virtual conferences.

Face-to-face contact with peers and prospects used to be the fun part of live conferences, along with interactive exhibits, music and light shows, food, and even games. Without these features to keep your virtual event stimulating, you might find virtual attendees nodding off—or dropping off. Or, next time, not even signing up.

To capture and hold people's attention in our webinar-fatigued world, you *must* be creative. You need to come up with new ways to surprise participants—ways to wake them up and shake them up.

Techniques for enticing webinar attendance and increasing engagement include:

- **Dare to be different.** If variety is the spice of life, surprise is the spice of the (typically) hum-drum webinar. Rather than fill your screens with talking heads and wordy slideshows, use your creativity to dream up [innovative ways](#) to keep attendees engaged. B2B marketing company Circa jazzed up its Reboot 2020 virtual event with a panel on engaging remote workers—presented in an unusual format. Panelists cooked in their kitchens, in the style of the Food network show *Chopped* while discussing the topic. At panel's end, viewers voted on the winner: a great way to keep audiences engaged until the very last minute.

- **Innovate with new technologies.** [One company](#) reportedly distributed VR glasses to its remote workers so they could attend a virtual holiday party during the pandemic. Try thinking outside the screen to design memorable experiences.
- **Entertain them.** Live conferences often have entertainment—live music during the reception, perhaps, or demonstrations of some sort, or a “mix and mingle” happy hour. Why should virtual or hybrid affairs be any different? Break up what might otherwise be a steady stream of presentations and discussions with some stand-up comedy, an animated short, or a VR happy hour.
- **Invite interaction.** Live chats (with a moderator), breakout rooms, event apps, dedicated networking spaces, live Q&A, team-building activities, contests in which viewers vote for the winner: these are just a few examples of activities your event might include to keep participants on the edge of their seats.

Also, if your conference is a hybrid event, make sure not to focus on in-person attendees at the expense of your virtual audience. Every person counts—and online participants may be more likely to make purchasing recommendations and decisions than the higher-level business leaders you’ve invited to your live event.

When hosting a hybrid event, **every person counts.** Online participants may be more likely to make purchasing recommendations and decisions than those participating in the live event.

2

Trend #2: Omnichannel marketing—Connecting offline, online, virtual, and real experiences.

Like the marketing conference, omnichannel marketing is an old idea getting a reboot with new technology.

Augmented reality (AR), for instance, is enabling customers to “try before they buy.” Sweden-based furniture chain IKEA created its [IKEA Place app](#) to let people fill their own rooms with virtual furnishings to see how they might appear in reality—more than 2,000 products in three dimensions. Customers enjoy mixing and matching IKEA items using the AR app, and the company says users are less likely to return items.

Amazon has taken a different tack. The online retail giant has opened brick-and-mortar stores—a reversal of the usual order—that are cashless and fully automated. Amazon is also merging online and offline shopping experiences by offering lockers, from which online customers can pick up items and leave them for exchange, and free delivery of groceries to Prime members.

This “seamless” approach to ecommerce, dubbed the “New Retail” by Alibaba founder Jack Ma, has become what customers expect. Marketing can accomplish the same objective, touching customers with progressive and complementary messaging at various points along their shopping and buying journey—in emails, in “push” notifications in-store, on their browser, on websites and on social media.

With 82 percent of customers shopping on their smartphones even while visiting a brick-and-mortar store, brands of all sizes must figure out how to [merge online and offline](#) environments. But for your outreach to be effective, your brand will need to use data to personalize shoppers’ experiences. “One size fits all” doesn’t fit today’s customer, who expects personalization and, yes, a creative approach.

3

Trend #3: AI-powered content.

Long associated with robots, artificial intelligence (AI) has expanded beyond the Roomba to pervade most aspects of our digital experiences, opening up new opportunities for marketers.

When we enter a website and a chat window pops up, that's AI. When Siri and Alexa hook us up with a movie and start it for us on our connected TV, that's AI. And those are only a few of the more common examples.

AI's potential for tailoring and enhancing delivery of your marketing content extends into a mind-boggling [array of options](#), including:

- **Targeting your audience.** Data helps AI identify the best audiences for your campaigns, personalize the messages your brand sends to them, and deliver those messages when people are most receptive—through the channels where they spend the most time.
- **Customizing your messages.** AI-driven software watches customers' actions online and analyzes the data it collects to sharpen its focus on the most likely buyers, matching the most relevant content to the needs of each person or business.
- **Anticipating customers' needs.** As AI's abilities to predict behaviors get more precise, you'll know what customers want and need before they know it—based on past orders, when a subscription-based order will run out, or when parts are in danger of wearing out. Amazon Personalize, which helps sellers to personalize content to buyers by sending them recipes, purchase suggestions, and other content, is one example.
- **Hitting their inboxes with precision.** AI can sort out who should receive your marketing emails, what kind they should get and when, and then keep track of who opens them when, how long they spend with them, whether they click on offers, and other data to optimize your email campaigns.
- **Increasing brand engagement.** Visitors to your website can get AI-generated recommendations for content that's relevant to them, inviting them to visit you more frequently and for longer periods of time.
- **Going social.** AI-driven social media algorithms such as Facebook Lookalike Audiences tell you which users likely are interested in your brand, and can send your ads to those prospects.

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Trend #4: Using data privacy to build trust.

In today's marketing and business world, collecting users' data without getting their informed consent is a bad strategy—and may also be illegal, depending on where and with whom your company does business. But even without regulations to guide you, gaining consumers' trust is key to using their data to provide them with the personalized content they demand.

In fact, in a [McKinsey study](#), 87 percent of consumers said they would not do business with any organization whose security practices concerned them, and 71 percent said a business that gave away their data without their consent would lose their business.

Government regulators are listening. Laws such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation and the California Consumer Privacy Act give people the right to control who collects their data, how it gets used, and when it's deleted from company databases. In this new world, gaining consumers' trust that your business is compliant is critical to keeping their business. Letting them know that you will use, share, store, and delete their data according to their wishes—and how you will protect it from unauthorized use—is the most important step your brand can take to improve your marketing programs.

To gain consumer trust, your company must go beyond compliance by creating the most private and secure data program you can, and then letting consumers know that you've done so, and how. You'll need to make sure everyone in your supply chain does the same, and tell customers that, too.

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5

Trend #5: Social commerce.

Social media use exploded during the pandemic—not only in terms of scrolling and commenting, but for shopping, too. In the United States alone, the number of so-called “social commerce” buyers [increased by one-quarter](#) between 2019 and 2020, to 80.1 million, and the number is expected to grow another 12.9 percent in 2021 to 90.4 million.

Globally, the social commerce market is expected to reach [\\$2.9 trillion by 2026](#). That’s a huge audience ripe for the picking—if you use your creativity to stand out among all the other companies vying for attention. A few ideas:

- Create a “shoppable” feed on your social media platform of choice and place it on your website. Visitors to your site—as well as your social media followers—can peruse the feed, click on items of interest, and make purchases then and there. Social media shopping platforms include Facebook Shops, Instagram Shopping, and Pinterest Buyable Pins.
- Host live demos of your products, perhaps with special discounts or giveaways for viewers.
- Make use of “micro influencers,” influencers who specialize in the niche to which your products or services belong. According to Instagram, [87 percent](#) of its users said influencers really did make a difference in their purchases.

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Trend #6: Contextual and behavioral advertising.

With third-party cookies falling out of favor as a way to collect data on customer online behaviors, more businesses are making use of contextual and behavioral advertising.

Contextual advertising aims to capture your target's attention based on where they are at a given moment without any consideration of where they've been. If you sell dog food, your ad might appear when someone searches online for leashes or when someone visits a blog about housebreaking a puppy.

In contrast, behavioral advertising uses data gathered from the consumer's past browsing and shopping to formulate ads designed to appeal to them. Behavioral ads may be used as a stepping stone in the buyer's journey.

"Instead of building an ad that gets you to the site, I want to build an end-to-end experience that's customized to the individual consumer," says Jon Kagan, vice president of search at the marketing agency 9Rooftops, about why he prefers behavioral marketing.

Your best approach may be to do both at the same time:

1. Formulate your ideal buyer's persona.
2. Take that persona on an imaginary "journey" that perhaps begins with a search, social media post, or contextual ad and continues with an email campaign and other marketing techniques—all the way to the sale and beyond. Write that contextual ad to appear at specific times along that journey. A caveat: Your content needs to be as specific to the individual as possible, taking into account what they've searched for and purchased in the recent past, among other factors. Perhaps you'll use AI to personalize your content, and you'll certainly take an omnichannel approach to place your brand before the consumer multiple times.
3. Use a demand-side platform to place your contextual ad on sites your target consumers are likely to visit. The platform will guide you to choose keywords and topics and, combined with the parameters of your target audience, use the data to place your ads.



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Jon Kagan

VP of Search, 9Rooftops

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Trend #7: Multilingual and multicultural marketing.

Ours has always been a multicultural world. Now, though, we're more mobile than ever—literally, as travel and remote work get easier, and figuratively, as the internet makes it possible to be anywhere and everywhere at once. Savvy marketers will pay attention and formulate campaigns aimed at diverse audiences.

Otherwise, says Francesca Casillas, art director at the marketing and advertising company Dailey, you'll be missing out on a potentially huge opportunity—even if your brand is new and your budget is modest. "No matter what size the company, there's room to grow your audience through multicultural marketing," Casillas says.

In fact, younger brands may benefit the most from adopting a multicultural approach, she says. "I think it's even easier to implement it early on because it feels more authentic. You wouldn't want to land on something like a tagline or positioning, and find a few years later that it doesn't resonate with certain markets or, worse, that it alienates them. A brand of any size should be as inclusive and representative as possible."

Being inclusive, however, isn't as simple as creating ads in a different language. Cultural differences extend far beyond the spoken word. Reaching out to diverse populations can mean multilingual messaging or using culture-specific nuances and references, says Casillas.

For instance, among Hispanic populations, bowls of mixed fruit are a popular snack. Casillas worked with Dole Packaged Products to increase its Latinx consumer market with marketing campaigns, mostly on social media, touting Dole as an easy way to include pineapple in a fruit cocktail. The campaigns focused on Hispanic holidays, themes, and lifestyles, including family-themed messages that offered parents ideas for activities they could enjoy with their children, for instance.

If you're worried about getting something wrong or causing offense, Casillas says, bring in people to your team, perhaps even from within your own company, who are familiar with the cultures you want to address. Building diverse teams from the start, in your hiring, will help you know how to reach a more diverse population gracefully.

"A lot of the work is in the research and the strategy, in finding insights and nuances to help you reach your audience in a really authentic way," says Casillas. "Authenticity is the core of success with multicultural marketing."

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Trend #8: Integrated creative tools.

Fragmented tools are the enemy of getting things done. There's a reason it's called "workflow": good work happens in a stream, continually progressing until it's done. Creatives know this. Sustained focus is key to creativity—you need uninterrupted time to brainstorm, to develop ideas, to find new perspectives on problems, to find innovative solutions.

Instead, today's creative leaders are drowning in administrative tasks and reviews, a [recent Forrester and Adobe survey](#) found. Worse, those tasks almost always require time-consuming toggling between apps. Automation can be a time-saver, but not if you're spending time moving data from one solution to another or trying to analyze data in different sets using different parameters and tools.

Seventy-five percent of creative pros surveyed said they'd be more productive if they had better tools—meaning less fragmented solutions that let them plan, manage, review, conduct, test, track, and analyze campaigns end-to-end on a single, integrated path. Ideally, this integrated tool would use AI for organizational as well as campaign analytics and stimulate creative ideas.

And it must be cloud-based. For any tool to properly integrate with all your marketing software solutions, it needs to work in the cloud. The cloud is today's unifying platform—but [Adobe's 2021 Digital Trends](#) survey found that just 28 percent of leading companies use only a cloud-based platform for marketing data. Among the rest, only 11 percent are fully in the cloud.

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Francesca Casillas

Art Director, Dailey

Brand size doesn't matter (or doesn't have to).

When it comes to building a large and loyal customer base, it's not the size of the company or even the budget that matters. It's your team's ability to think big: to imagine and dream, to see problems from a different angle, to come up with wild and crazy ideas—to be creative.

These trends are only some of the ways you can help your company stand above the crowd and get your brand noticed. All involve technologies. This is, after all, the digital age. As a creative leader in today's world, you—like your marketing strategy colleagues—need a bit of AI know-how, some skill with analytics, and a level of comfort with media in its many forms. It's more challenging than ever to be a creative leader, but it's also more rewarding. The entire world is at your fingertips. And if you're frustrated by all the time it takes to manage and juggle your many software tools, take heart: There's a cloud-based solution for that, too.



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