



11 Brand Marketing Trends for 2018

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“Legends of prediction are common throughout the spectrum of mankind. Gods speak, spirits speak, and computers speak,” author Ursula Le Guin wrote. What she missed, however, were consumers. Consumers speak too. Volumes if you know how to listen.

Predictive brand loyalty and engagement metrics allow marketers to more accurately decipher consumers’ words, emotions and expectations, aspirations and inclinations, propensities and passions. And all *those* allow us market researchers to predict behaviors in the marketplace, which Brand Keys (brandkeys.com) has been doing for over two decades.

This year’s insights are based on over 100,000 consumer psychological assessments that measure the direction and velocity of category values 12 to 18 months in advance of the marketplace. That permits us to identify future trends with uncanny accuracy and we offer up 11 trends that will have direct consequences to the success – or failure – of 2018 branding and marketing initiatives.

1) Value Will Become What the Consumer Says It Is

How consumers define “value” will get more complex, and only the consumer will be able to tell you why they buy the way they do. Any appearance of ubiquity will create trouble for brands seen to have no authentic meaning or emotional resonance to engage consumers. The consumer “voice” will be more important than ever! Learn how to listen!

2) Establish A Brand Surrogacy

Brands will increasingly need to become surrogates for “value” based on what’s wrapped up in the brand promise and what consumers believe the brand means to them. In the consumer-owned, digitally-driven marketplace accomplishing that only gets harder. Brands will have to work much harder to avoid reliance on price-points.

3) Consumers Will Only Expect More (and More)

Over the past five years cross-category consumer expectations have increased 28% while brands generally keep up by only 7%, leaving a big gap between what is *desired* and what is *delivered*. Expectations will continue to increase. The ability to accurately measure unarticulated expectations will become critical for brand stewards.

4) Consumers Will Talk to Each Other *Before* Talking to the Brand, More and More Often

Social networking outside of the brand space will continue to increase as consumers become more and more comfortable with their power to get what they see as the truth from total strangers. Brands will have to drive positive feedback in the virtual world like never before, necessitating a deeper understanding of their categories – particularly the emotional aspects– than they currently possess.

5) The Funnel Will Continue to Flatten

What marketers call the “purchase funnel” has morphed into a “path-to-purchase,” and will become an extraordinarily category-specific “multi-path-to-purchase.” Content and communication with the right platforms in the right way will become the *only* way to create emotional engagement, which happily, always comes with significant brand profits.

6) Real Differentiation Will Become More Emotional

Differentiation will remain critical to brand success. Every marketer nods at that, but it’s just getting harder to achieve. While true innovation *will* continue surprise, increasingly differentiation will be dependent upon what the brand is able to offer consumers emotionally.

7) The Need For Emotional Engagement Will *Not Be* Going Away

Engagement is how consumers do business with you. Period. Marketers will need to continue to use the right platforms, programs, messages, and experiences to connect but brand engagement will be the ultimate *objective* that will guarantee future growth and customer loyalty.

8) The Ability to Distinguish Between Engagement and Entertainment Will Be Critical

Entertainment is the action of providing amusement. It’s a nice way to get consumer attention, and it’s fun, but it doesn’t guarantee engagement. Real engagement is the consequence of any marketing or communications effort that results in an increased level of how well your brand is seen by consumers to meet their very high expectations. See Trend #3.

9) Brands Will Need to Get More Emotional

(See Trends #6 and #7) If it makes your marketing folks feel less anxious tell them emotional engagement *can* be entertaining. Successful brands will need to identify which emotional values exist in their category first, and then worry about the entertainment factor.

10) Visuals Will Need to Entrall the More Visually-Literate Consumer

Today’s consumers are more visually literate and agile than ever. Video will dominate social. Major platforms and social networking apps will need to improve feed quality and add interactive features.

11) You Won’t Be Able to Take Your Eye Off the Brand

Increased consumer expectations will come with a greater sense of commoditization. You may be known, but you will need to be known for something meaningful and important to consumers. This is already true for Baby Boomers and will be something you’ll need to worry about for Millennials.

Accommodating these trends will require changes in the way companies measure, manage, and market their brands. Yes, change can sometimes be terrifying, but change is, more or less, another chance. But if brands ignore these trends, it could very well be their last chance, as our [What Happened?](#) recording series proves every year.

One final prediction

The best way brands can manage change will be through validated and predictive loyalty and emotional engagement metrics. Such data can help marketers to accurately hear *and* interpret the voice of the consumer.

We wish brand stewards everywhere an accurate, engaging, and profitable 2018.

About Brand Keys:

Brand Keys is a world leader in brand equity, loyalty and emotional engagement metrics.

These metrics have been validated to be the most accurate brand assessments and benchmarks available for brand evaluation, architecture, tracking, media optimization, and strategic communications research applications. Brand Keys metrics are predictive of future in-market behavior. Independent validations have shown these assessments to correlate highly (0.85+) with positive behavior, sales, and profitability.

Brand Keys' independently validated research approach fuses emotional and rational aspects of the category where your brand competes and identifies the four behavioral drivers for the category-specific 'Ideal.' In addition, they identify the values that form the components of each category behavioral driver. These validated assessments measure how well brands are seen to meet expectations that consumers hold for each path-to-purchase driver that makes up the Ideal for a specific category.

The research, a combination of psychological inquiry and higher-order statistical analyses, has a test/re-test reliability of 0.93, and results generalizable at the 95% confidence level. It has been successfully used in B2B and B2C categories in 35 countries.

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