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Last year was another year of digital acceleration so what new trends and patterns will emerge in 2016. **St John Dunne**, managing director of Rockpool Digital, reveals his expectations

# 10 predictions for digital technology in the new year

## 1 Designing with data

By the end of 2016, more people will be browsing on mobile devices than on computers. Responsive design is already the norm, but we'll see that expand beyond device and screen size over the next 12 months. What time of day is it? What's the weather like? What are you doing? How do you feel? All of these things will become factors in digital design, helping brands connect with customers in new, natural ways. This, plus device screens getting better and better, make for exciting times.

## 2 Importance of data

Brands will invest more than ever in capturing and using the data they have available to create a compelling user-focused experience. Larger brands are catching on to what smaller, more agile ones have already understood. This is the age of the consumer and they'll invest accordingly. This year, brands will start to understand the importance of data when connecting with consumers during the journey and creating a personalised experience.

## 3 Localism

For its first 15 years, the web was all about access to information and broadening horizons. Mega-corps have used it to achieve market dominance by reaching customers across the world, but the tide will turn in 2016. Greater personalisation and pervasive location awareness will create a local web, bringing communities together and helping small, sustainable businesses come to the fore.

## 4 Ads are losing

While the options and channels to place advertising have exploded, more and more consumers are moving away from them – whether it's ad-blocking or watching video content via platforms that are ad-free, such as Netflix. In 2015, there was a massive rise in the use of ad-blocking – and with brands spending more time and money on content marketing, 2016 will be a pivotal one in which quality and consistency replace the quantity-led approach that has been prevalent to date. This means that when retailers do have users' attention, they need to create the best experiences possible.



## 7 Continued grocery disruption

Digital has transformed swathes of the retail landscape, but there's still room for growth – particularly in grocery. Amazon will expand its online groceries service, with greater product availability and more flexible delivery than established supermarkets. And there's no reason to think it won't expand into Just Eat and Hungry House's territory and start delivering takeaways, too. Supermarkets are already struggling to keep pace with a changing world, and it'll be interesting to see how they react.

## 8 Service to customers improves

While once deemed to be a cost centre, brands will recognise the value of being available and helpful to customers, both reactively and proactively. Bringing together consumer data from different digital touchpoints will help provide better service and relationships. Data and devices will help brands have better experiences with customers, recreating the relationships that were built 20 to 30 years ago.

## 9 Digital assistants

Siri, Cortana, Watson and Amy are the start of what is to come, with digital assistants that can help with everyday tasks, such as playing a song, setting up a meeting, or making sense of data. Imagine when they start to build out application program interfaces, allowing consumers to use them to order groceries or book an airline ticket.

## 10 New digital worlds

Virtual reality is to deliver on its promise with Oculus Rift due for release in 2016. But arguably more interesting is the value-end Google Cardboard and the sensibly priced Samsung Gear VR. They use smartphone features to deliver virtual reality to the mass market, particularly with the prospect of the Gear being included in mobile contract bundles. The cost of shooting virtual reality – and the above mediums for consuming it – has made it ripe for consumers. Facebook recently launched the first 360° ad to get users ready for the virtual world.

## 5 Continued rise of social

In 2015 social networks were the centre of many consumers' digital experiences. You can now purchase goods directly from a tweet or a pin, and Facebook has made great strides towards integrating personalised, relevant third-party content into news feeds, based on implicit personalisation. In 2016, we'll see an arms race between the big social networks, which will roll out new features designed to keep hold of users. The use of social and messaging is also increasing as different networks become primary ways of communication, sharing and connecting. Google will still dominate, but as consumers use networks such as Instagram and Twitter to find the next product to buy, retailers must ensure their traffic comes via the quality of their content.

## 6 Blend of physical and digital

Consumers are using their mobile phones in-store more than ever, and the mobile and physical relationship is set to truly take off. Expect more interaction on mobiles in stores in 2016 as the two environments blend. Consumers will soon be able to check if they have their size in stock and book a dressing room.