

THE FUTURE OF MARKETING

The anti-trend marketing guide
for 2024 and beyond



INTRODUCTION

Just what the world needs, another content piece about the future of marketing. But don't stop reading just yet.

Like many other marketers, we too were brainstorming topics that mark the end of another remarkable year. The usual year-end content often consists of trend research and trend identification. By now your news feed is probably already filled with articles like, "Brand strategies for 2024," "Digital marketing trends in 2024," or "2024 CX trends: what you need to know".

The challenge with trends is that they come and go. What's trending right now, might not be trending tomorrow. You don't know what will stick. Yet we all obsess over trends and are constantly asking ourselves: what's new, what's next. Kinda like a kid at Christmas that opens up one present after another and keeps asking for more.

Don't get us wrong, we have nothing against trends. We live in a world where marketing changes in the blink of an eye. Our rapidly progressing industry is built on trends that drive innovation and change the course of our future.





But just because something's new doesn't mean it's better or something worth pursuing. Instead of out with the old, in with the new, we need to have the wisdom to stand back, zoom out, and reflect too.

Most of us have trouble differentiating our brands, developing a customer experience (CX) vision, or making proper use of all the data we've gathered. Do you feel your brand, tech stack, data platforms, and CX live up to your expectations? Are you getting the most out of what you already have?

We'll take our chances and assume you answered that question with no.

That's why this is not a trend guide. In this guide we'll look towards the future and shine a light on the marketing fundamentals that are shaping the digital industry and you need to get right. The anti-trends that might not be hot and happening, but are too important not to discuss.



Because it doesn't matter how good your grasp is of the latest and greatest without a solid understanding of the essentials of a great digital-first brand.

Our experts have assembled insights on the four key areas: brand, CX, data, and tech that we believe need to be at the very core of your game plan. It's where and how you can make the biggest impact to truly differentiate your brand and accelerate growth. Let these anti-trends be your guide as you craft - and recraft - your marketing strategy for 2024 and beyond.



Introduction

CONTENTS

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1

Brand

2

Customer experience

3

Data

4

Technology

5

The future of marketing is creative

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



If 15 years in the digital industry have taught Michael Vromans anything, it's that whatever dominates the conversation today can become irrelevant tomorrow. That's why he is on a constant quest for creative ideas that not only innovate but also transform brands. As our Chief Creative Officer he gets to do just that, and works with clients such as HKliving, Heineken, and Oxfam Novib.



BRAND

You might have noticed that more and more brands are starting to look and sound the same. Open up any website or app, and you'll find that most brands have settled on iterations of the same design and tone of voice: solid colors, ultra-simple logos, sans-serif typography, and uninspiring company values.

Brands are stepping away from the characteristics that make them unique, are unclear about what they stand for, and have forgotten what it's like to be creative. By doing so, the opportunity to differentiate a brand stands out is lost. The result is a vanilla brand that has a bit of everything, stands for nothing, and speaks to no one in particular.

All the more reason in 2024 to focus on building a strong, creative brand. In the next few pages, I'll share why it's crucial to adopt a brand-led marketing strategy with creativity at its heart and I'll give tips for getting started.



Brand

ADOPT A BRAND-LED MARKETING STRATEGY

Marketing has always been about building bridges between your product and your customer through your brand. It's pinpointing the ways in which the wants and needs of your customers and your business match up, and explaining how you're different from all those other brands out there.

Except somewhere along the way, we became so fixated on implementing the latest tech trends and gathering customer insights and feedback that we neglected our brands. We let technology and our customers dictate the terms of our strategy.

If we do happen to include a branding process somewhere, it's often rushed and tight on budget. It's something that we've to do and get over with as soon as possible.

But you can't differentiate your brand and create a memorable experience with tech alone. And customers won't buy your products if they can't remember who you are.

Adopt a brand-led marketing strategy



You need to communicate what you stand for, why you're in business, and how you're different. Then people decide whether to buy your brand or not.

The only way for your brand to actually innovate and stand out is to go back to your roots and re-examine who you are.





The power of branding

Creating a memorable brand is complex, full of sacrifices, and filled with difficult decisions. There's a lot of uncertainty and elements to get right. Some might find that scary, but you can't be original without taking some (calculated) risks.

You need skills to define your brand and connect it with an audience. It's an art and a science. And that's where part of the problem lies - more often than not, brands don't invest in talented people or teams who are capable of that.

Branding is the creative process of clarifying and refining the emotional meaning behind your business strategy and its relationship to your customer. It goes further than your logo or tagline.

Customers are looking for brands that are unique, authentic, and provide an engaging experience that they can share with others. At the end of the day, customers won't always remember what you did or what you told them, but they will definitely remember how you made them feel.

Adopt a brand-led marketing strategy



Setting the foundation

The key is to start with your brand foundation. Assess what there is, what is not, and what needs work. Develop or improve your brand positioning and base everything that comes after on these fundamentals.

Do this by fine-tuning your purpose, mission, vision - basically your values and beliefs. This will give you a clear direction about where your brand is going and why. Make sure to invest significant time and resources into this process. If you don't do that and rush, you'll risk becoming bland and create more of the same rather than a standout brand.

The next step is developing your brand identity and incorporating this into all aspects of your marketing and of course the business. Who you are and what you look like inform all other activities, from website design to photography all the way down to campaigns. Every product, every word, every image, should always reflect your brand.

This will define your legacy.

Adopt a brand-led marketing strategy



What matters most



Branding is the cornerstone of long-term success and has never been more important in making sure that you stand out in this crowded marketplace.

Following and copying your competitors may be easier and a lot safer, but will definitely not lead you to victory. Your real competition is the last best experience your customers had - which can come from basically anywhere.

No brand becomes a leader in its industry or category by playing it safe. You need to be daring, have a vision, and constantly evolve and innovate. The future of your brand will be determined by your creativity and guts.

Technology won't be the defining difference, as everyone in marketing has access to the same tech stacks. The same goes for listening too much to our customers - we're not the only ones conducting market research and customer satisfaction surveys. Generally speaking, the more people you ask, the more you will be drawn to mediocrity.

Adopt a brand-led marketing strategy



What matters most is how
you define and differentiate
your brand .



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Pim van Helten is CEO and co-founder of DPDK. He simply couldn't pass up the opportunity to co-found the agency in 2004 to make brands a better version of themselves than that they occur in a 30-second commercial. As the agency's CEO he has made it his mission to transform brands through exceptional digitalism. Pim is ill-suited for prefab and ready-made and as an energetic strategist, he loves to keep his eyes on the horizon and fight the ordinary with passion and craft.

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Your CX is a combination of your unique brand identity, innovative products, and engaging content. A great CX helps you achieve your business goals and offers a unique opportunity to differentiate yourself from others. At least that's what CX is supposed to do.

CX has become stagnant during the past few years. Many brands are struggling to improve and differentiate. And while **80% of brands** believe that they offer a superior CX, only **8%** of their customers agree.

There's a reason why brands are having difficulties: most rely on templated frameworks, standardized software packages, and a basic understanding of customer needs to support their brand promise. At best this will give you a mediocre experience that just functions. Which is exactly the problem, it just works. Nothing memorable about it.

Let's shake things up a bit and rethink how we see CX. In this chapter, I'll dive into the essential building blocks of a successful CX and share why we need to rediscover the lost art of creative thinking.



REIMAGINING CX

Building a great CX has a lot of similarities with designing a building. Architects give meaning to form and space and create unique buildings from scratch. They're masters of merging form with function and believe that every inch in and around a building should enrich the overall experience.

Just look right at the recently opened [Depot Boijmans van Beuningen](#) in Rotterdam. The one-of-a-kind building brings together 151,000 art objects in the world's first publicly accessible art storage facility.

MVRDV, the architects, aimed to create a new immersive art experience and designed a building that takes an equally special form. They planned, designed, and executed their work meticulously.

The same holds true for creating a successful CX. Every touchpoint you build, every piece of content you publish, and every campaign you run should always enhance your CX.



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A new type of experience





I know this might sound logical, perhaps simple even, but I assure you that it's a lot harder to remember and live up to when you're trying to meet your targets, are caught up in data, and are launching campaign after campaign.

Many marketers don't even have a clear CX vision or strategy. And that's one of the reasons why we end up with look-a-like experiences that customers have difficulty distinguishing from one another, and where things go south.

Your CX is not a process you follow, the website or app you launch, a piece of technology you implement, nor the communications you send out. It's all of those things and more working together. This requires a change in mindset. Let's dive in.



The building blocks of CX

The first step to building a successful CX is defining what type of experience you want to deliver. It's putting pen to paper and documenting how your CX is going to convey your brand promise and achieve your business goals.

One of the traps marketers often fall into is not taking their brand into account when designing their CX. Your brand promise defines you as a brand and sets you apart from others. It's the foundation from which you start building your CX and what should shine through in all that you do.

A great example is Nike. I don't want to state the obvious, but we've experienced firsthand how dedicated Nike is to creating an inspiring experience. We've partnered up on the release of their most important innovation in years: Nike React.

They asked us to bring the feel of Nike Epic React to life through mobile, desktop, and in-store. Key was to develop a personalized and mobile-first digital shopping experience that drove potential customers to stores and lived up to Nike's CX vision.



Reimagining CX



Reimagining CX

By building a [customizable experience](#) optimized for mobile, the target audience could virtually explore Nike Epic React and match the shoe to their specific running style and requirements.

The end result was an innovative running adventure that could be named, downloaded, and shared with friends and followers through social media too. The campaign was well-targeted and created a lot of buzz and in-store traffic. A true extension of bringing inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world.





Once you've defined your vision, the next step is translating this into valuable experiences. Ask yourself the following questions:

- 6 What type of experiences are my customers looking for and how do they match up with my vision?
- 6 What specific changes in customer behavior do I want to see?
- 6 How am I going to drive those changes and move my customers to action?
- 6 What experiences are paramount and have the biggest impact on driving the desired customer behavior?
- 6 How am I going to prioritize those experiences and measure success?

These questions will take you to the heart of the matter and help you decide where you want to go and how you're going to get there. Only then is it time to start thinking about your internal processes and technology capabilities needed for execution. Together this is what informs your CX roadmap.

Put creativity at the heart of CX

When you've established your roadmap, it's time to operationalize. Many marketers run CX transformation or initiatives as business-as-usual programs with boxes to check off on their checklists. Don't make that mistake.

Your CX is how you set yourself apart from others, and entertain and engage but also inform and guide your customers. It comes to life through your brand, product, and content, and you need a talented and dedicated team that is capable of helping you do that.

This team needs to be made up of creative thinkers: people that are able to look at things in fresh ways and come up with new solutions you previously didn't think of. Creative is the central word here. How else are you going to design a distinctive experience that sticks and captures your customers' attention?

I would even argue that the C in CX should stand for creative instead of customer. A creative experience has elements of surprise, is challenging and daring while inspiring at the same time.



But that's a [whole guide](#) and story on its own. For now, I'll conclude with this: let's no longer make creativity the forgotten C in CX and put it back where it belongs, at the heart of your experience.



Reimagining CX



DATA

Data can be a friend or a foe, and most marketers have a love-hate relationship with it. We collect an unprecedented amount of customer data, we build our campaigns on data, and we predict customer needs and wants on data.

Data helps us make smarter decisions about all sorts of stuff like finding new customers, predicting sales trends, and increasing customer retention. To sum up, data is key to understanding our customers and increasing our market share.

At the same time, we also know that we can make better use of the data we collect, as [87%](#) of marketers see data as their most underutilized asset.

It's time to change that in 2024.

This section explains how to make the most out of your data and why integrating data and creativity is key for success. I'll also dive into the importance of data-driven creatives in a cookieless world and how to get yourself ready.



Data

UNIFYING DATA AND CREATIVITY

Data and creativity are often seen as counterparts and being at odds with each other. Where creativity represents the process of engaging customers and building emotional connections, data focuses on the numeric and logical reasoning aspect.

I've frequently heard "I need to be able to think outside the box, data restricts my creative freedom." or another favorite, "You don't need creativity, just take a look at what the data tells you."

Many times, creatives and data analysts work in different teams and departments or are handled by different agencies, further widening the divide. In reality, creativity and data are actually an inseparable duo and should be treated as such.

Data can actually help you become more creative by providing insights that inspire new campaigns and opportunities. In fact, marketers that successfully integrate creativity and data grow their brands **twice as fast** compared to those that haven't, according to McKinsey.

Unifying data and creativity





Time for data-driven creatives

With increasing competition and higher customer expectations, in the upcoming years it will be crucial to build long-lasting customer relationships and differentiate your brand. Here's how integrating data and creativity can help:

1. Treat data and creativity as a marriage of equals, but with defined roles

Unifying data and creativity stands and falls with how both disciplines are defined within organizations. It should be clear from the get-go what role they play and what can be expected. This way it will become easier to grow your brand, launch successful campaigns, and manage any disagreements.

Imagine you want to launch a new marketing campaign. Data then plays a decisive role in whom you can best send what, when, and at what time. Creatives on the other hand focus on the how part and what that campaign should look like.



Unifying data and creativity



2. Data gives direction to creative thinking

Data isn't a silver bullet. You still need to make difficult decisions and choices. See it this way: data isn't here to tell you what you need to do and how, but it certainly helps you decide what not to do. Insights gained from data can give you direction on which customers to target or areas to avoid and invest in.

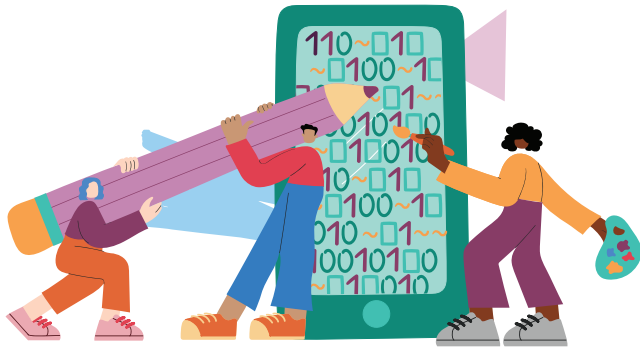
Examples of these directions are the type of customers who quickly leave again after specific marketing campaigns, CX interactions that are less valuable when compared to others, or particular attributes of high-value customers.

The creative opportunity then lies in the areas that do offer value and where your imagination, creative ideas, and solutions have the best chance to flourish.



3. Maximizes creativity

Implementing a data-driven creative approach will increase your creativity. The insights derived from data can inspire new ideas and direct you to optimization points you would have otherwise never thought of or looked at. Creativity is key in differentiating your brand, and inspiring and engaging your customers. Embrace every opportunity you have.





The cookieless future

Another reason to bring data and creativity together is Google's announcement of stopping support by the end of 2024 for third-party cookies on Chrome browsers.

This change will force brands to focus their efforts on owning the relationship with their customers, and establishing a connection that's built on engagement, trust, and authenticity. That's where creativity comes in.

Third-party cookies have helped marketers track online activity, better understand customers' interests, and increase reach for digital advertising. As a result, targeted advertising became much easier. But all that is about to change.

Marketers are understandably nervous and concerned about the impact this will have on their digital marketing strategy and activities. While challenging, I see it as a positive change that will push us to make better use of the data we have and assess what we still need. Most of all, it's an opportunity to invest in building meaningful and direct customer relationships.



Unifying data and creativity



Preparing for a cookieless world

For years, we've been using data-driven (re)targeting at scale without thinking twice. Somewhere along the way we started to place more importance on how to distribute and increase the reach of our content than the content itself.

It was easy and pushed the need to be creative to the back seat.

A world without cookies requires a fundamental shift in how you approach your digital advertising. This change presents an opportunity for the entire industry to come together and create a new system that is transparent, simplified, and better catered to customer needs.



Unifying data and creativity



Creativity and customer engagement need to be your driving force. It won't be easy, but it's certainly not impossible:

1. Find out where you're using third-party cookies

Before being able to adapt to this new world, you need to understand where your third-party cookies are currently being used. Communicating with your paid media partners helps you evaluate your third-party cookie performance and determine how it can be converted into first-party data collection.

2. Focus on collecting first-party data

The importance of high-quality, first-party data can't be overemphasized. First-party data will pave the way for new direct customer relationships, and will help you meet customer needs efficiently. To make sure your hard work pays off, ensure your tech stack lets you keep the data. Owning the data means you own the customer relationship.



3. Audit your current technology stack

To ensure your technology stack will still meet your needs without third-party cookies, it's crucial to audit your current solutions. Only by understanding what your technology is capable of, and how it can be utilized, will you be able to navigate this cookieless environment successfully. You may need to rely on new tools to grow and deepen customer relationships.

4. Integrate your data sources

As mentioned previously, data can improve your creativity. Integrating your data sources is key to providing a more complete picture and better information about your customers and campaign performance. This can lead to crucial insights that inspire your creatives, better messaging, and deeper connections with customers.



5. Test, experiment, learn

It will be 2024 before you know it. While the path ahead is not clear, there is no excuse to sit on the sidelines. Work on your action plan, start testing and experimenting now, and identify what works. Your ads, content, and communications need to engage and attract attention. It's time for creativity to retake the center stage.

“The shift to first-party data is a great opportunity for the digital industry and marketers to build deeper connections with customers. Together we can create a future that’s built on trust and offers mutual value for both customers and brands.”

Pim van Helten
DPDK's CEO

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Marianela Queme is a systems engineer with close to 20 years of global experience in the tech industry. She kicked off her career as a web developer in her native Guatemala before moving across the globe to software engineering in the UK and Netherlands.

It's no secret that Marianela's passion lies in developing innovative tech solutions - she has even won the Tech Star DevelopHER award. As our Head of Technology, she is responsible for ensuring that we deliver the best digital experiences.

TECHNOLOGY

In today's competitive digital landscape, playing it safe and copying others will make it harder for you to reach your audience and leave a positive impact. A lot of digital experiences lack the creativity they need to succeed and inevitably fall flat with their audience.

While it may not seem obvious, creativity and technology go hand in hand. They're not opposite ends of the spectrum and actually complement each other. You need technology to express your creative ideas and bring your brand to life.

Most memorable experiences are more than websites or applications with information. They're digital adventures that allow you to experience what something [like driving a car](#) or [wearing a shoe](#) feels like.

In this chapter, I'll explain the importance of creative technology in creating richer engagements and distinctive digital experiences, and share why it's the one thing you should invest in techwise for 2024.



THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Typically, when we think about technology we tend to think about function, not form. We see it as a tool that keeps our infrastructures afloat and our websites, apps, or platforms running. From a marketing point of view: technology helps us engage with the masses and communicate our brand to more people than we could have ever imagined.

In my opinion though, we're selling ourselves short.

Technology can make your brand and design come to life, create wholly immersive and innovative experiences to attract, engage, and retain customers, and eventually help build a stronger brand.

We need to start using the creative possibilities that technology offers to our advantage. And to do that we need to embed creativity into every layer of our products, platforms, and experience.

The importance of creative technology



Technology as creativity enabler

For you to deliver creative content and craft exceptional digital experiences, you'll need to get creative - on every account.

At DPDK, we see creative technology as an essential part of any immersive digital experience. Everything that comes with it, from custom code to virtual reality and hand-drawn animations can bring out the true DNA of a brand, set it apart, and leave a lasting, positive impression. Here's what to pay attention to and where to focus your efforts:

1. A seat at the table

It's challenging to recognize the value of something when you don't have a clear understanding of the concept. Creative technology is often overlooked because it's hard to grasp and understand the difference between a design and what it takes to make that design come alive and interact with you and your customers.

The importance of creative technology





Tech is frequently seen as a source for productivity and efficiency improvements rather than a source of transformative value that can drive and encourage creative innovation. Let creative technology help shape your strategy by giving it the attention and monetary investment it deserves.

2. Embed developers into design teams to co-create digital experiences

Good design is not possible without great engineering and vice versa. The further away developers are from designers, the less they understand about what kind of role technology should play in creating a specific experience.

Rather than working on the design in isolation and handing it over to development when finished, developers should always be included in the design process. Getting feedback early is the best way to improve and key to inspire creative thinking.



3. Create a workplace that breathes creative tech to attract talent

Bringing design to life with animations, making your site look great on desktop and mobile, and creating on brand 3D experiences is a form of art. It calls for curiosity, problem solving skills, and most of all, creativity.

You need to build a stellar tech team. Fostering their creativity and creating a diverse work environment is key. This starts with hiring talent from diverse backgrounds, age groups, genders, and races, and runs all the way down to creating space to test ideas and experiment. It's definitely not easy, but getting this right pays off tremendously.



4. Prioritize craftsmanship

It's a given that looking at peers and best practices, and building generic solutions will get you nowhere near a memorable experience. Coding systems that follow standard input-output templates or cloning features of your competitor's website will definitely not lead you to success.

Old ways won't open new doors. Focus on creating something fresh that will bring out the best of your brand. Be bold, take risks, and become comfortable with the uncomfortable. Exceptional digital experiences come to life through craftsmanship. Let creativity take the lead and give your team the freedom and space to experiment.

Technology + creativity =
magic



THE FUTURE OF MARKETING IS CREATIVE

What do you see when you think about the future?

Hopefully by now we've provided some compelling reasons to convince you that creativity holds the ticket to a better tomorrow. It's key for the success you'll have as a brand and should play a central role in your marketing strategy. You can't differentiate your brand and inspire your customers without being creative.

But creativity doesn't just happen when you write it on a list of objectives or gather your team for a brainstorm. Unfortunately, it's not a topping that you decide to put on your strawberry ice cream. It bubbles up from below, it's in your culture, your processes, and above all, your people.

Also important to remember is that it's ineffective to implement anything trending when your marketing foundation is not in order. What's the point of ordering a roof when the walls of your house are still shaky? Don't buy into what's fashionable and let yourself get distracted from what's most important - fix your brand, CX, data capabilities, and tech stack above all else.

The future of marketing is creative





And when you feel overwhelmed, simply remind yourself that working in marketing isn't supposed to be comfortable. Here are a few other words that come to mind: challenging, exciting, fun, demanding, inspiring, frustrating, rewarding, but definitely not comfortable nor predictable. In fact, if we learned anything the past year it's how unexpected and surprising the future can be.

So when you answer the question above, we hope you say that you see the future of marketing as more creative. That you're prepared to take risks and be bolder and more daring in the upcoming years. And that you'll focus your efforts on your marketing fundamentals first.

In 2024 it's time to write your own rules, push boundaries, and resist the pressure to conform. Let's focus on rediscovering the lost art of creative thinking and getting the most out of what you've already got. Why wait? There's no better time to start than right now.


WHY WAIT ANY LONGER? CREATE A BETTER DIGITAL EXPERIENCE TODAY



+ This guide probably hasn't given you all the answers you were looking for. We'd much rather hop on a call, have a coffee, and talk it through - so don't hesitate to get in touch. Talk soon!

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ABOUT DPDK

20 years of transformation, change, innovation, and adaptation. We saw tech emerge and disappear, trends come and go and customer expectations change and grow.

Today more than ever, our clients count on us to be new every day. As an innovation partner, they rely on our experience and expertise dealing with continuous transformation and resilient adaptation. We help them answer and exceed customer expectations in a hyper-personalized landscape, keep them on the offense, and have their brand differentiate through customer experience.

From 20 years till now, and from offices in Rotterdam, New York, and San Francisco, we can proudly say we are still living our mission:

Transforming brands through exceptional digitalism

