



2016 Digital marketing trends in the Benelux

A comprehensive guide on the latest developments and techniques

DEMAND MORE INSIGHT



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Introduction

Are marketers ready to face the challenges and embrace the opportunities 2016 presents in terms of digital marketing and the ever increasing consumer expectations?

It's certainly not a secret that brands are making a push to improve their customer experience across all channels, whether online or offline, because they understand that consumers demand relevant experiences at every touchpoint.

We're competing more than ever for the attention of our audience, while their time and awareness dedicated to us is increasingly shorter and shorter. They're always connected, they own plenty of devices and information is at their fingertips whenever they want to have it.

As digital marketing becomes more and more complex, what are some of the techniques we need to use to ensure our campaigns are noticed and valued by consumers?

Digital Trends Survey

As industry leaders in customer experience management, Sitecore has conducted a comprehensive survey to find out what the digital marketing trends are for 2016 in the Benelux.

We know that it's imperative marketers keep up with the latest trends, developments and techniques in digital so they can adapt and tweak their strategies and capitalize on the tremendous opportunities digital presents.

At the end of 2015, we surveyed more than 300 digital marketers and experts from a broad range of industries, to find out what they had to say about the upcoming trends for 2016.

This digital marketing trends report will highlight:

- What the top digital marketing trends are in 2016 for the Benelux
- Why these trends should be on every marketer's agenda for 2016
- How marketers can integrate these trends in order to improve their digital marketing
- How digitally mature brands perceive themselves
- The confidence marketers have in the effectiveness of digital campaigns
- The need for digital transformation

A look back at 2015

Throughout last year, the hottest topic has been without a doubt customer experiences and it's been consistently rated as the area most digital marketers want to focus on. A seamless online experience across channels and devices, not to mention continuity in consumer interactions, has never been more important.

But how do we define customer experience? Simply put, it's the perception your customers have after interacting with your products, services, offers or brand, through the channel they choose.

“Have marketers changed their views for 2016? Where will the focus be now?”

A look back at 2015

In order to create compelling customer experiences however, there are marketing techniques that were identified as being top trends for 2015.

- 1. Predictive Analytics:** It's the practice of extracting information from various data sources and determining patterns and trends. This allows marketers to use collected data from various touchpoints and anticipate customer preference and needs.
- 2. Content Marketing:** Coming in 2nd place, content marketing is still a hot topic. A successful content strategy, in the right context, allows marketers to solve the needs of their customers, address their challenges and provide the right solutions.

- 3. Personalization:** Looking at customers as individuals, rather than blasting them with “one size fits all” campaigns, increases customer satisfaction, conversion and revenue, while decreasing costs and time for companies.



The top 5 digital trends in 2016

When asked what their top digital marketing trends are for 2016, here's what marketers had to say. The top 5 trends were identified as follows:

- 1. Content marketing**
- 2. Personalization**
- 3. Predictive analytics**
- 4. Marketing automation**
- 5. Social media integration**

It's worth noting that content marketing and personalization have moved up on marketer's agendas as leading trends, while predictive analytics, still considered a hot topic, has dropped 2 spots. Marketing automation has cracked the top 5 spots for 2016 compared to last year while social media integration came in 5th, just like in 2015.

Content marketing

Identified as the top digital marketing trend for 2016, content marketing is certainly not a new or revolutionary concept. Marketers are aware that they need a solid content strategy in order to succeed.

The key to a successful strategy however is what most marketers struggle with when trying to implement a winning formula. It's not about selling or generating buzz, it's about listening to your audience and understanding their pain points while offering them a solution.

Don't treat consumers as KPI's, instead try to humanize your marketing efforts. What are your customer's challenges? What expectations do they have of your brand? How can you solve that?

If marketers can answer those questions, they can take the next step to building a successful content strategy, and that's marketing within context.

Marketing within context means providing the right content at the right moment when a consumer needs it. It looks at the past behavior of a customer, understands their current needs and serves contextually relevant offers.

Context marketing allows marketers to identify how and where the buyers journey has started, how it lead to a purchase and the series of steps that consumers take to get there.

“Marketing within context means providing the right content at the right moment when a consumer needs it”

Tips for a successful content strategy

- Don't use content to sell something or push out your message blindly
- Understand your customer's needs and solve their issues with content
- Teach your audience something new by sharing your expertise
- Make content that's engaging and creates value, not just buzz and views




Personalization

Coming in a close 2nd to content marketing, personalization is regarded as a very hot topic for 2016. As previously defined, personalization means looking at customers as individuals, rather than blasting them with “one size fits all” campaigns, it increases customer satisfaction, conversion and revenue, while decreasing costs and time for companies.

Personalization, in combination with big data and an omnichannel customer experience, allows marketers to be vastly relevant in the conversations consumers have with a brand. But just like content marketing, personalization isn't a new concept.

In the older days, when you'd go to your local neighborhood shop ran by the same owner for years, he'd know all of his regular customers by name and face and what they usually purchase. He would talk to his customers to find out what they need and provide them with goods to satisfy those needs. He would create an emotional bond with his consumers because he knows them and can provide them with what they need, when they need it.



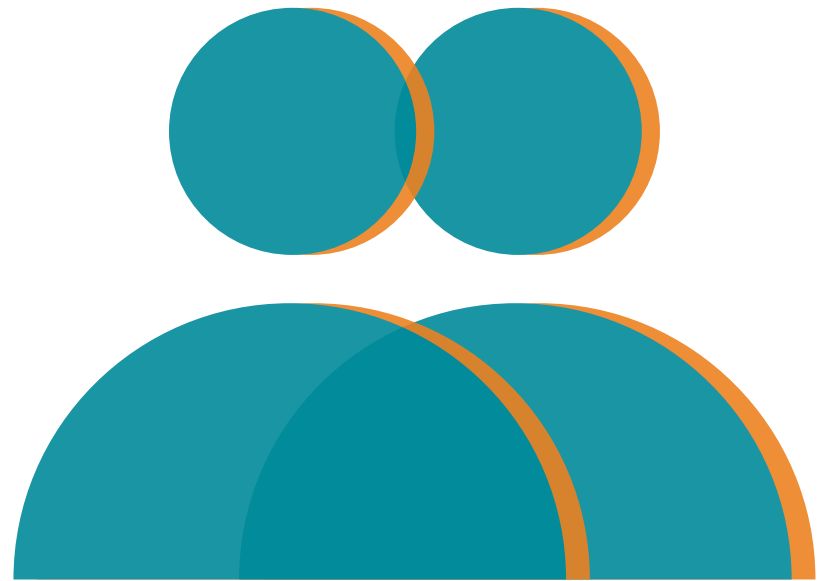
The same can be said about digital marketing, except that your local neighborhood shop is your website and your digital presence. Your products and services need to satisfy the needs of your potential customers, which can be found everywhere.

And with all the data that you're able to collect, you know their names, their interests, their past purchasing history, their intent, their needs and you can be relevant at the right time at the right moment of the buying cycle.

“Personalization, in combination with big data and an omnichannel customer experience, allows marketers to be vastly relevant in the conversations consumers have with a brand”

Tips for a successful personalization strategy

- Start simple, but start. Treat your customers as individuals
- Make use of all the data you collect to personalize every experience
- Have a single, connected view of all your channels and your customers
- Personalize experiences within context based on a consumer's needs



Predictive analytics

Every brand can benefit from making better decisions and it all starts with understanding your customers. Today, marketers are getting more and more insight into what their customers are doing, who they are and what they want.

This data is being collected from all the different channels that consumers use to interact with brands, whether it's from digital marketing campaigns, social media, email, website or even a call center. But how do brands know what a customer might do in the future based on their past actions?

The answer is predictive analytics, which occupies the 3rd spot on the hottest trends for 2016. Predictive analytics is the practice of extracting information from various data sources and determining patterns and trends.

This allows marketers to use collected data from various touchpoints and anticipate customer preference and needs.

Simply put, the more connected data you have on your customers, including their past behavior and purchase history, the more accurately you'll determine what they need when they need it.

“Predictive analytics allows marketers to use collected data from various touchpoints and anticipate customer preference and needs.”

Tips for a successful predictive analytics strategy

- Collect and connect every piece of data you gather and make sure your data is clean
- Get insight into who your customers are and what they want
- Determine patterns and trends based on past behavior
- Create a strategy, test and optimize using the right platform



Marketing automation

Imagine the perfect scenario: you embrace big data, you collect it at every touchpoint and every interaction a consumer has with your brand. Your ability to obtain the right data, in a single repository and not siloed allows you to have a single view of your consumer.

Let's go a step further and imagine you analyze all that data correctly about that one customer that interacts with you. You know their age, their likes and dislikes, their location or purchasing behavior, and you can tailor your message and effectively personalize the interaction within the right context.

Sounds like the perfect scenario and it would be, if brands had to deal with only a very few number of consumers on a daily basis. But what about having hundreds, if not hundreds of thousands of customers? It becomes impossible for marketers to do all that themselves for each individual.

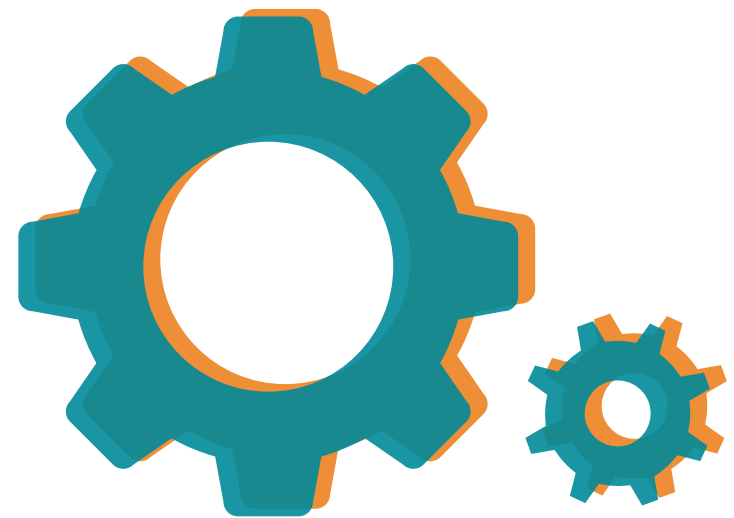
That's where marketing automation comes into play. Identified as the 4th leading trend for 2016, marketing automation plays a crucial role in targeting your campaign messages to the right customer, through their channel of choice and in the moment they need it.

Marketing automation allows brands to speed up the conversations and interactions they have with their customers, track and analyze what they do while tailoring and personalizing their messages and offers to their individual needs.

“Marketing automation allows marketers to tailor their message and effectively personalize the interaction within the right context.”

Tips for a successful marketing automation strategy

- Collect data in a single repository and use it in your automation process
- Personalize the message you're sending out
- Create automation scenarios based on rules, personas, services and offers
- Track, analyze and optimize your conversions




Social media integration

The idea that we need to delight our customers with the best possible experiences has become the norm for the modern marketer.

Yet ask yourself this: how many times does a customer go out of his way to reward over the top service? Now ask yourself: how often do consumers punish brands for bad customer experience?

Due to bad customer experience, offline or online, consumers have gone as far as purchasing promoted tweets in order to complain about a lack of service or their disgruntlement. Promoted tweets are usually used by advertisers to reach a wide audience on the social media platform Twitter, but a few consumers have done it to highlight their issues with brands.

The negative impact this has on a brand is exacerbated by the fact that these kind of tweets or posts are shared by thousands of people, effectively reaching a lot more potential customers, while being picked up by news sites and read all around the world.



The bottom line is that in the infancy of social media, brands created accounts just to be cool and experiment with a new form of advertising. Today however, this is no longer an experiment, but a necessity for brands.

Social media allows brands to open up a new channel of communication, increase their marketing efforts, solve customer's problems in real time, understand what their customers want, what they're saying about the brand and increase customer retention.

*“Today however, social media is
no longer an experiment, but a necessity
for brands”*

Tips for a successful social media strategy

- Engage with your audience and provide real time solutions
- Create relationships, build credibility and awareness
- Target specific consumers based on demographics, likes, interests
- Don't venture on all platforms, make the right choice for your business



A black and white photograph of two young women in a retail environment, possibly a clothing store. They are both smiling and looking at a smartphone held by the woman in the foreground. The woman in the background is leaning in to look at the screen. The image is partially obscured by a purple overlay on the right side.

Not so trendy? e-commerce, mobile responsiveness and email marketing

Perhaps the most surprising finding of our survey wasn't what the top 5 trends were for 2016, but rather what marketers don't consider as trends and have put at the bottom of the list.

It's important to keep in mind however that e-commerce, mobile responsiveness and email marketing, while not considered trends, are imperative to successful digital marketing campaigns and often go hand in hand in the broader customer experience picture.


Let's take a look at each channel in part and understand why they shouldn't be an after-thought in any digital marketer's campaign planning if they want to book success and maximize conversions.

E-commerce and the online buying behavior

In the past decade alone, between 2005 and 2015, there's been a meteoric rise in the volume of commerce conducted on digital channels. This isn't likely to slow down any time soon.

With more and more brands setting up shop in the digital space, the competition is fierce. Flooded by choice, consumers have not only come to immediately find what they need but they also want and expect experiences that contextually adapt to their shopping needs across all channels.

However, grabbing a consumer's attention, keeping it on us and differentiating ourselves from the competition is no easy task. As we browse a website and look at products and services our needs as shoppers change. Marketers need to dynamically respond to these changing needs in real time by guiding consumers down the right path to maximize conversions and minimizing cart abandonment.



What marketers need to understand is that the original message or trigger that attracted a visitor to their website may no longer be relevant as customers continue on their buyer's journey path.

The information and context that we gather from each customer interaction, such as the device that consumers use to get to our website, the Geo-IP location, search keywords and even the demographics allows us to effectively identify which content works best with which type of customer so we develop a deep understanding of the customer journey and offer them what they need, when they need it.

“The information and context that we gather from each customer interaction allows us to effectively identify which content works best with which type of customer.”

Tips for a successful e-commerce strategy

- Dynamically respond to consumers' changing needs in real time
- Guide consumers on the right path to minimize cart abandonment and maximize conversions
- Use data to understand the customer's needs and how he got there
- Provide consumers with contextually relevant offers



Mobile Responsiveness

The biggest surprise is the fact that mobile responsiveness not only didn't crack the top 5 digital marketing trends, but that it sits in the bottom 3.


While e-commerce and email marketing have been around for a long time now, therefore not considered trends moving forward but pillars in successful digital strategies, mobile responsive websites should be an urgent priority for 2016.

Marketers know that a customer's buying journey isn't linear, so their approach to create compelling online experiences shouldn't either. Buyers move at their own pace; in the direction they want to while using whichever channel serves them best at that point in time through the device of their preference.

Just think about the proliferation of devices. Long gone are the days we accessed the internet only through desktop PC's. Nowadays consumers own laptops, smartphones, smart watches, smart TVs, tablets and so much more.

All these devices serve each customer in part a different purpose. They come in different shapes and sizes and makes the customer "always connected". It's critical you present your content accordingly, in order to make navigation and finding information as quickly as possible.

Let's take a step back and imagine this: you receive an email and open it up on your smartphone. The email isn't optimized for mobile, so naturally you can't see the whole text or what the email is about at first glance.



You're already more than likely to have lost a potential customer now because most consumer's attention is limited, especially on mobile where things have to happen quickly and smoothly.

However, let's assume you start to pinch and zoom to decipher what the email is about. After finally finding the CTA, you get to the website to find that the design isn't responsive either.

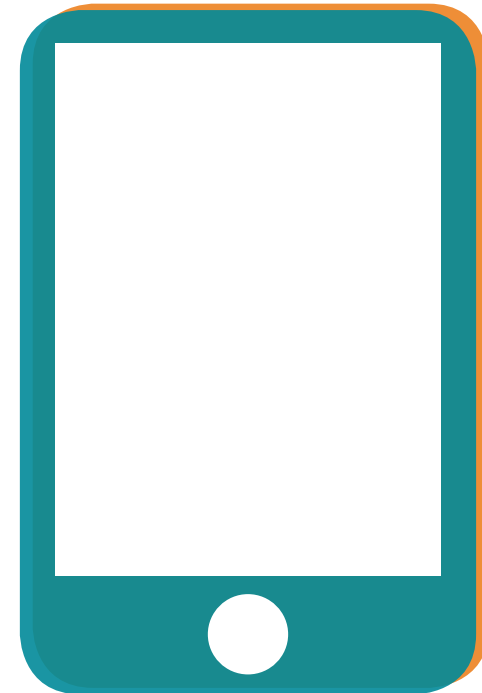
Put yourself in that position; would you continue to zoom in and out trying to navigate your way through too much information? Would you keep struggling to fill in forms on a mobile that aren't optimized and take ages to fill in?

Make your website responsive and make it a priority for 2016. Not only will your email open rates and click rates increase, but your website conversions will skyrocket too, thanks in part to meeting what consumers now demand and expect out of each website.

“Target mobile customers with relevant, context-based content”

Tips for a successful mobile responsiveness strategy

- Determine the amount of content to be presented on a mobile website
- Make sure information is easy to find and at first glance
- Use Geo-IP location to personalize offers, services and products
- Keep things simple and to the point




Email marketing

The demise of email marketing has been greatly exaggerated by industry experts and digital marketers alike. Email marketing isn't dead; in fact, it has never been more alive. What has changed is the way consumers interact with email.

But the fact of the matter is that email marketing was proclaimed dead due to the way marketers were setting up their campaigns.

Blasting out irrelevant email messages that felt like spam, buying databases in order to push out promotional emails, always having a one-size-fits all approach, all these factors have given email a bad connotation in a consumer's eyes.



Think about it, when marketers started with email marketing, they never took into account customer preferences, demographics, device, location or any other factors that today's savvy digital marketers use to segment their audience and tailor their messages.

Unfortunately, some old habits never die and it seems that it has carried on into 2016, where marketers still don't make use of data to personalize, engage, create value and make use of dynamic content to create relevant customer experiences through email.

There is hope however and email is being embraced once again as a channel that knows the highest ROI. Marketers should create emails for specific target audiences, tailored to their needs and at the right time with the right offer.

Combined with marketing automation, a responsive design and big data, email will still be the channel that digital marketers will create most value from and increase conversions.

“Email marketing isn't dead; in fact, it has never been more alive. What has changed is the way consumers interact with email.”

Tips for a successful email marketing strategy

- Email should be a conversation channel, not a “one size fits all” blast
- Don’t focus on click rates and open rates, value and conversions are most important
- Segment your audience based on the data you have on them
- Automate, test, analyze and personalize your messages



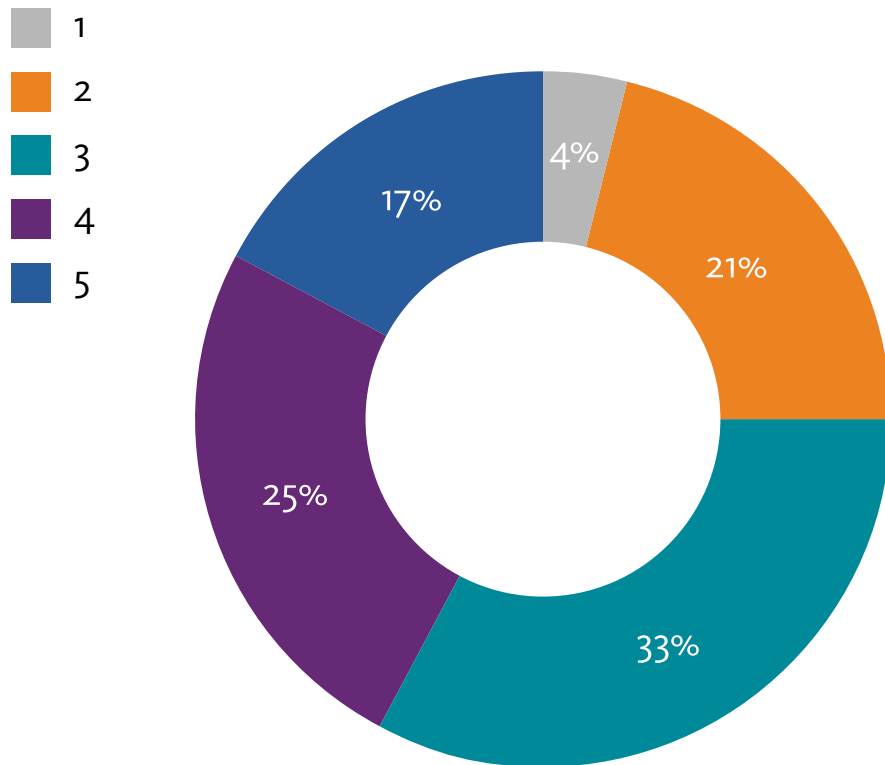
Current state of digital marketing



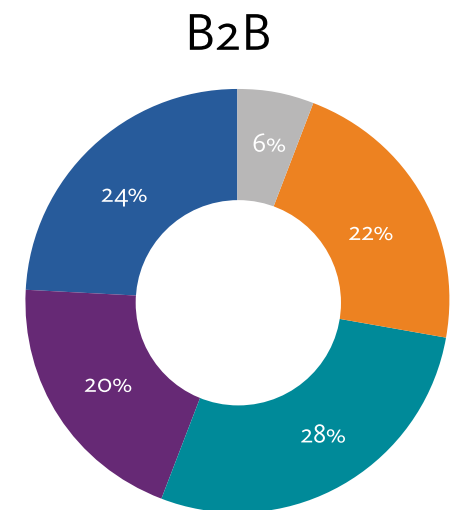
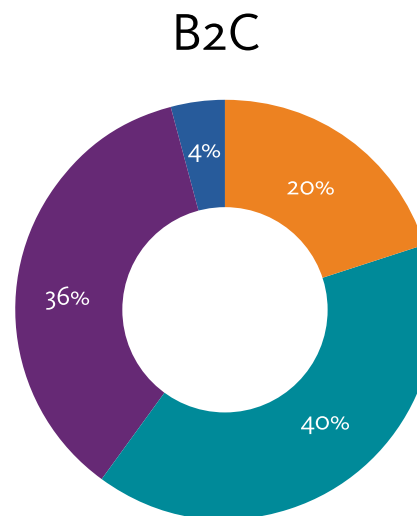
In addition to finding out what the digital marketing trends are for 2016, we've surveyed marketers on how they perceive digital marketing, their own digital maturity and their customers' digital maturity, by asking them:

- How would you rate your company's digital maturity?
- How digitally mature are your customers?
- Are you planning on increasing digital marketing spend in 2016?
- How confident are you in the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns?

How would you rate your company's digital maturity?



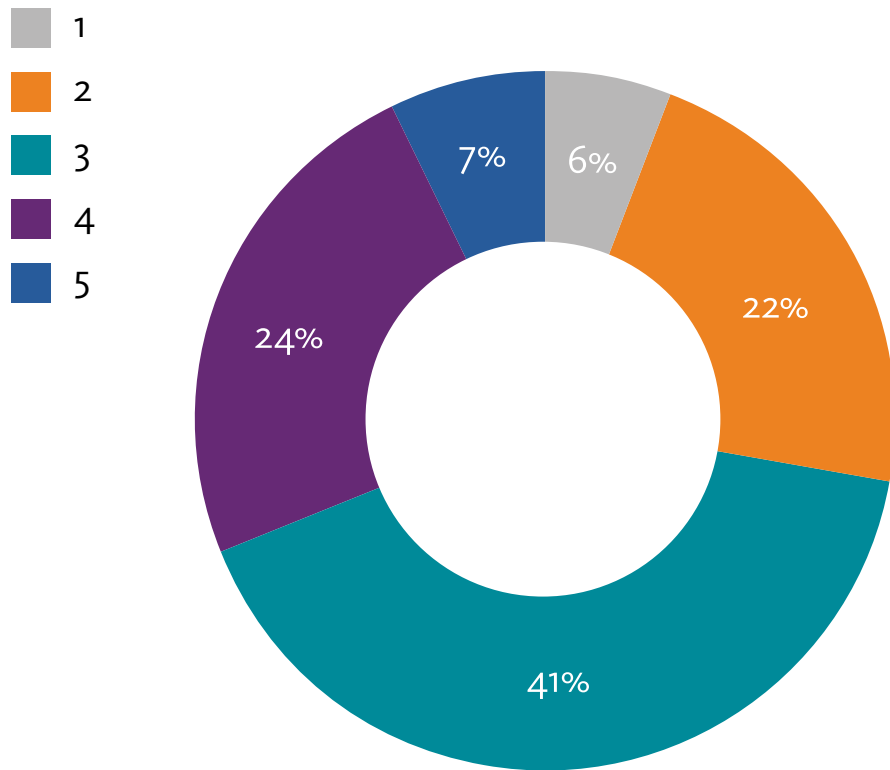
Ratings from 1 (low) to 5 (high)



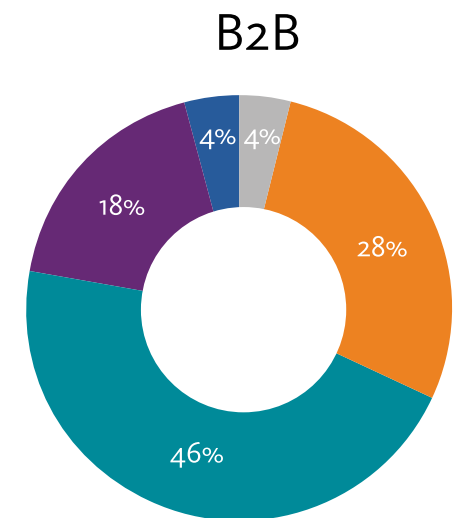
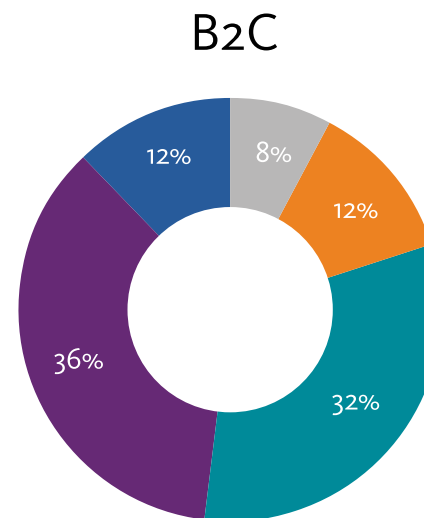
Conclusion:

The majority of respondents find their brands to be above average in digital maturity, with over 40% of brands in B2B finding themselves in the upper most tier.

How digitally mature are your customers?



Ratings from 1 (low) to 5 (high)

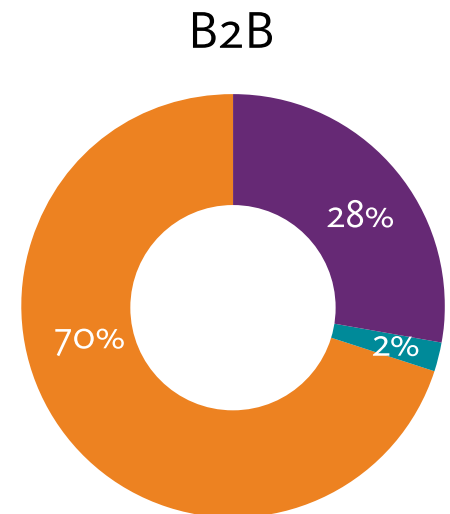
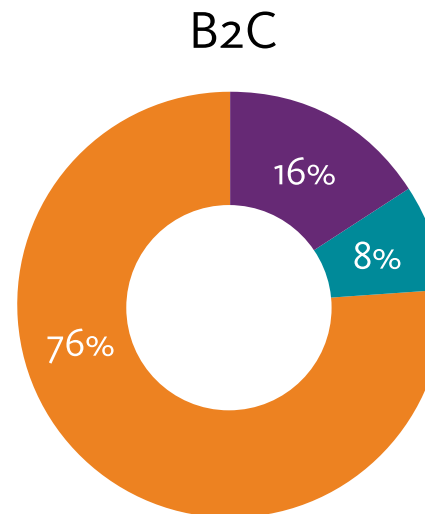
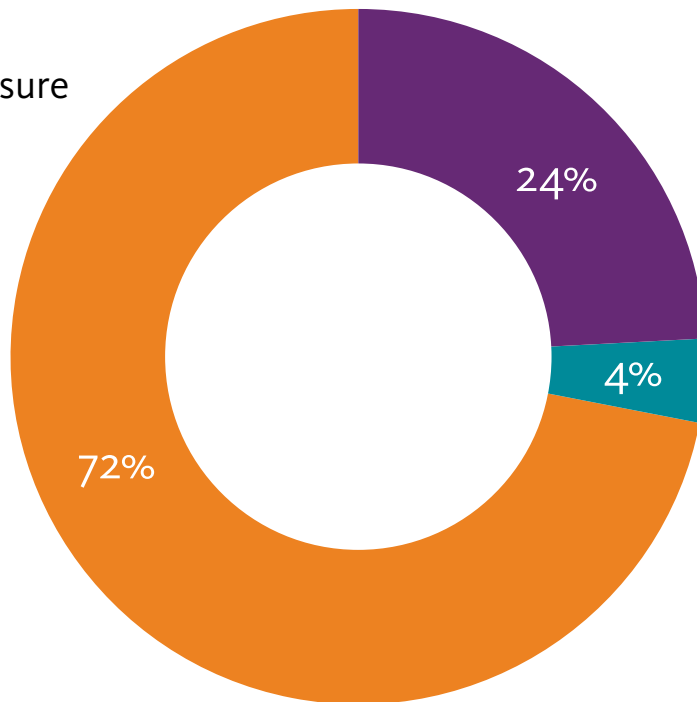


Conclusion:

Marketers seem to think their consumers are mostly average when it comes to their own digital maturity, with a very slight percentage in the upper tier.

Are you planning on increasing digital marketing spending in 2016?

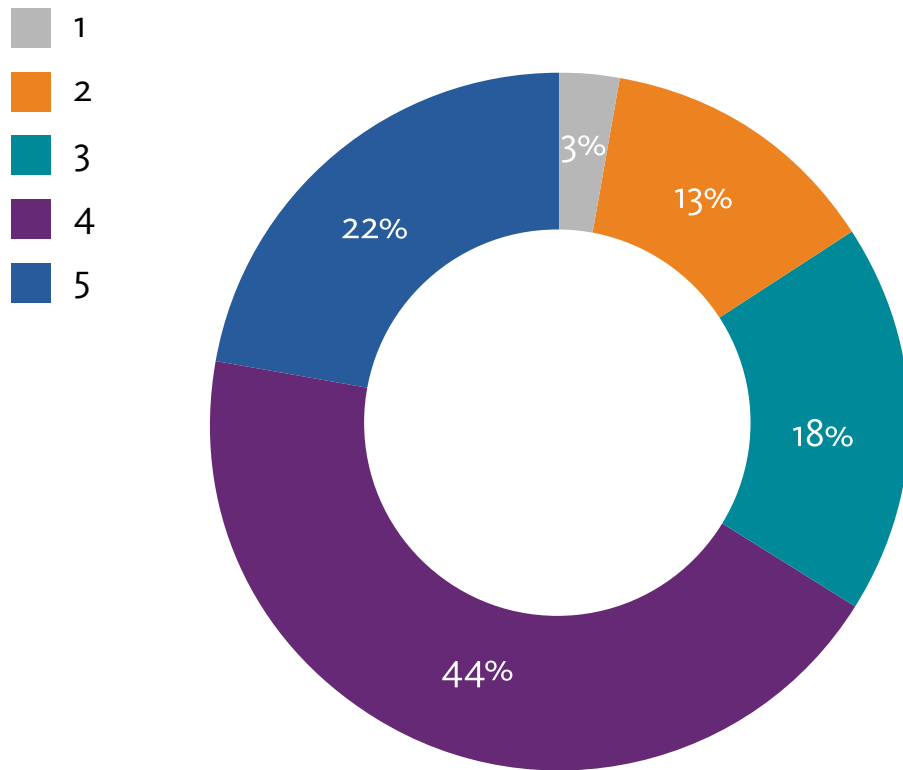
- Yes
- No
- I'm not sure



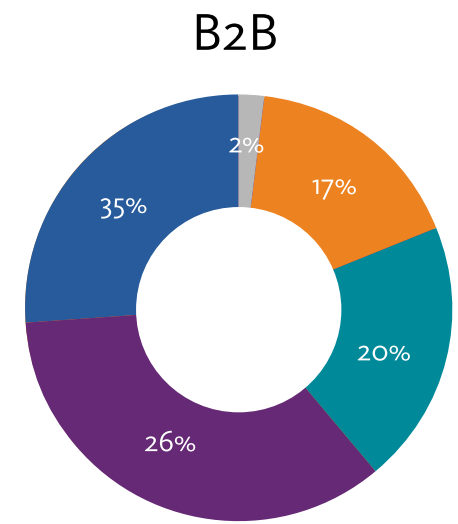
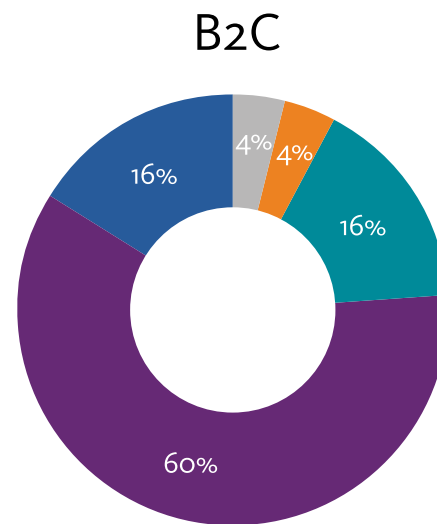
Conclusion:

An overwhelming majority of digital marketers plan on increasing their budget for 2016, indicating that they understand the need for digital transformation.

How confident are you in the effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns?



Ratings from 1 (low) to 5 (high)



Conclusion:

Marketers are aware that digital presents huge opportunities and they're very confident in the effectiveness of digital campaigns, with an overwhelming 76% in the B2C sector.

Summary of the digital marketing trends for 2016

- 1 Brands are making a push to improve customer experience across all channels, realizing that consumer's demand more relevance at every touchpoint
- 2 There is a need to market within context, identifying how and where the buyers journey has started, how it leads to a purchase and the series of steps that consumers take to get there
- 3 Content marketing, personalization and predictive analytics are at the top of the agenda for most marketers in the Benelux
- 4 Marketers are aware that they're not yet digitally mature while understanding that the always connected consumer is
- 5 Digital marketing spend is on the rise, with over 70% of digital marketers acknowledging that their spending will increase
- 6 The effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns is well understood and recognized by marketers and they are willing to capitalize and invest in it further
- 7 While this digital trends report looks at the Benelux as a whole, it's worth noting that there are no major differences in the individual trends for Belgium, Luxembourg or the Netherlands. Marketers in the 3 countries are on the same page about where digital is heading.

Want to know more?

Sitecore provides enterprise-class technology that makes context marketing readily attainable for marketers who are looking for a better way to own and manage the experience they deliver customers.

In doing so, we offer an alternative approach to silos of digital marketing and homegrown databases, allowing marketers to get the complete picture that context marketing enables.

BOOK A DEMO TODAY

About Sitecore

Sitecore is the global leader in experience management software. The Sitecore® Experience Platform™ manages content, supplies contextual intelligence, and automates communications, at scale. It empowers marketers to deliver content in context of how customers have engaged with their brand, across every channel, in real time. More than 4,400 of the world's leading brands - including American Express, Carnival Cruise Lines, easyJet, and L'Oréal - trust Sitecore for context marketing to deliver the personalized interactions that delight audiences, build loyalty, and drive revenue.



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