

Digital communication trends that will boost your business in 2021

By [James Bayhack](#)

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2020 has been a year full of upheaval, but it's also been the catalyst for many businesses to finally start embracing digital - whether that's by adding e-commerce to their offering or by moving to an online customer data platform.



Source: pixabay.com

The digital communication trends on my radar for next year are:

1. The future is mobile – and it's already here

Businesses are starting to take notice of how easy it is to connect with customers through mobile platforms and apps. While this trend already existed within various industries and businesses, Covid-19 has accelerated the need for remote-friendly, mobile communication between customers and businesses.

Although many people are, of course, online, a lot of mobile time is spent using apps and messenger platforms other than just browsers. WhatsApp is currently the favourite messenger platform worldwide. According to Statista data of October 2020, two billion users access WhatsApp on a monthly basis, followed by Facebook Messenger (1,3 billion monthly users) and WeChat (1,2 billion monthly users).

Thus, companies need to be focused on discovering which mobile platforms their customers are on, and finding ways to

reach them on those platforms.



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As fewer people visit brick-and-mortar stores, the use of online platforms to do business will increase, and with it, mobile communication methods. For businesses to really benefit from mobile communication, they need fast and effective ways to implement the systems needed for it to work. Companies are looking for simple plug-and-play solutions that enable customers to communicate, interact, and make payments with the least hassle possible. Cloud platforms that leverage communication channels and payment functionalities are leading the way in this regard.

2. Interactive messaging to build relationships

Messaging services are set to become even more popular in 2021. We've seen an explosion in messages; during the first half of 2020, 1.6 billion messages were sent worldwide through our platforms – that's 53% more than in the first half of 2019.

We have found that messages have become richer and more interactive – they are no longer just 'messages', but are more like conversations. Businesses have seen that customers appreciate these personal interactions and like their conversational quality.

Finding new customers has become more difficult because more people are staying at home, meaning that foot traffic will be less effective at driving customer acquisition. This trend will continue into 2021, making it even more important for companies to recognise that they need to strengthen their relationships and loyalty with existing customers. Interactive and personalised messaging is a great way to start doing just that.

3. Artificial intelligence at the forefront

As businesses start communicating more with their customers to cement loyalty, they will also be able to further benefit from automation - another important digital communication trend to watch.

Artificial intelligence allows businesses to optimise their operations quickly and effectively with the simple click of a button. Chatbots can be implemented to respond to queries, provide information, or even pre-empt requests. AI-enabled communication uses algorithms to pick up patterns and respond to them in the best way possible, facilitating innovative ways of doing business. Juniper Research predicts that chatbots will facilitate \$142bn in consumer retail spend by 2024, up more than 400% from \$2.8bn in 2019.



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As businesses seek more integrated systems to address their needs, they should look to partner with technology providers that are passionate about staying ahead of trends, able to optimise their service offerings, and that can provide AI solutions in one convenient package.

4. Money has gone digital

When was the last time you exchanged actual money with a business? Cash has almost completely disappeared from our

lives, and while card payments have played an important role in this, mobile payments have also been gaining momentum. Stores have options that allow you to scan a QR code to make payment, banks have started allowing money to be transferred to cell phone numbers, and online payments have become the new normal.

The popularity of digital payments is reflected in research by Mordor Intelligence. They predict that the global market value of mobile payments will rise from \$1,1bn in 2019 to \$4,7bn in 2025. As digital payments will certainly increase as we go into 2021, companies that can provide seamless payment experiences for their customers are the ones that will thrive.

That being said, we need to remain vigilant of the risks associated with transacting online. Cyberattacks are a real threat, and their prevalence has increased together with online payments. Educating customers and employees on data safety is key to the continued success of the system.

5. Voice-enabled technology

Home automation devices have greatly increased the quality and usability of speech recognition technology. This opens up opportunities to innovate in the space of traditional voice technology. Old-school dual-tone multi-frequency-based menus can now be replaced by much more user-friendly, speech-driven chatbots. Can you imagine talking to a bot that automatically provides you with the right answer or connects you to the right department, without even realising you weren't talking to a human?

This has enormous potential to increase customer satisfaction and reduce operational costs if implemented correctly.

6. A hybrid approach

The pandemic has forced many people to work from home, and we've seen that call centres are transforming into something more like contact centres and, in some cases, represent the only point of contact that customers have with a store. While this development was already underway before 2020, it has now accelerated, making these points of contact that much more important than they were before. To ease the burden on these 'contact centres', businesses should explore which other communication channels they can use to build relationships with customers.

Companies are starting to focus more and more on using hybrid models, where people and machines work together more efficiently. This gives customers the best of both worlds: people have more sympathy, while computers can get things done more effectively. Our ability to harness the benefits of these two worlds will only get better going into next year.

Ensuring the optimal experience

Organisations that take customer experience seriously will stand out from the noise and win over loyal customers. Although there may be a lot of uncertainty surrounding the start of 2021, one thing is for sure: to deliver a positive experience, you have to know your customers better than ever before. Today, customers have more power and choices than they've ever had, making you responsible for understanding and acknowledging their needs.

Once you know your customers well enough, you can use that knowledge to personalise every interaction and take advantage of these customer experience and digital communication trends.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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