

Spotlight on: **Technology** PR and Content Marketing



HENLEY GROUP INTERNATIONAL

Technology's new normal: The trends that will drive tech success

While debates rage around what normality will look like post-COVID-19, one thing is for certain. The pace of digitisation will only increase as organisations turn to automation and AI to gain efficiency and leverage the vast amounts of data available to them.

With supply chains disrupted and workforces locked out of their workplaces, the pandemic has forced businesses to become more innovative in the face of adversity. Most organisations have unearthed new ways of working and have made huge technological strides over the course of only a few weeks to stay operational.

Consumers, meanwhile, have shown no sign of reacting against the communications technologies that have helped them do their jobs remotely and allowed them to stay in touch with loved ones during the pandemic.

In some respects, then, the future for tech looks positive. But a number of issues that had arisen around technology, and which had taken a back seat, look set to re-emerge. These trends will not only drive the adoption of technology, but threaten to hold it back.

It's essential that tech marketers recognise and understand these issues. Doing so will help them establish thought leadership, build competitive advantage, spot new commercial opportunities and raise awareness of their brands.

The issues outlined here are the result of analysis conducted by The Henley Group International, a PR and content marketing agency with experience for organisations such as Toshiba, Siemens, Honeywell, NEC, Reliance High-Tech, Milestone Systems and the recently launched Tech for Life movement.

If you don't have the time or resources to leverage these issues, call us. We can help you create engaging content, post it online, push it across social media and place it in your target media.

To see how the Henley Group can help with your PR and content marketing contact James Tate on james@henley.co.uk or 01491 570 971

Trend 1: Data

The new oil

Analysis of the massive amounts of data created by businesses and individuals has allowed organisations to unearth new insights into the world around us.

They are using AI to identify previously hidden patterns of behaviour in large datasets. In fact, it's now clear that the fuel that will power this century's economic growth will not be hydrocarbon-based, but digital.

As all businesses work to digitise core processes, helping them locate, understand and leverage their data will be the key to competitive advantage for today's tech start-ups, platforms and providers.

Privacy issues

Yet the subject of data – its privacy, ownership and management – has become the centre of a fierce debate over recent years. Concerns over how our data are used lead to the introduction of GDPR in 2016, and the subject was given added impetus with the Cambridge Analytica scandal.

More recently, while technology has been at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, the pandemic has also highlighted concerns about privacy, as Governments have sought to introduce track and trace apps to contain infection.

Looking around the corner

“We may see the break-up of Big Tech itself, presenting new opportunities for smaller organisations.”

A backlash against the monetisation of customer data and heightened awareness of privacy abuse may result in a tighter regulatory environment for tech companies. This would be accompanied by increasing customer demand for visibility into the use of their data, and even wider regulation to enforce it. We may see the break-up of Big Tech itself, presenting new opportunities for smaller organisations.

Meanwhile, the ‘Surveillance Capitalism’ that was exposed in one of last year's most popular business books is itself undergoing transformation, as video surveillance is being re-purposed to detect those who aren't wearing facemasks, are maintaining unsafe social distances, or have a high body temperature - all of which raise questions around privacy and intrusion.

Some technologies are already being rowed back due to privacy concerns: Amazon and IBM recently withdrew facial recognition technology from sale over concerns that the technology can be misused by bad actors and may present false positives due to bias.

> Wise tech PRs and Marketers need to ensure that concerns over privacy are front and centre of their messaging. Their commercial offerings must address widely-anticipated greater scrutiny around data privacy and they must be ready to address searching questions over data use and ownership.

Trend 2: Automation

Machines take over

A key part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as it's being called, is the role of automation technology. This promises to revolutionise the way we work in a more fundamental way than the first Industrial Revolution, the development of industrial manufacturing and the more recent arrival of the computer.

According to Bain & Company¹, most if not all sectors could use industrial automation to reduce operating costs by 10 - 15%. This investment in automation could be worth \$8 trillion in the US alone over the next 10 to 20 years, and captures a wide range of technologies. These range from machine to machine communication over 5G, to robots that replace humans entirely, or cobots that augment them in the workplace.

Right here, right now

The latest generation of cobots have already dropped in price to the extent that they are nearing the same hourly cost of their human equivalents in developing economies like China and India. They are already far cheaper than employing humans to do the same job in Germany, the US, Japan, and even Mexico.

All the trends point to increasing automation: rising wages in China will stimulate investment in automation, while the mooted return of some manufacturing to the West to build stronger supply chains post-COVID-19 would likewise result in automation investment.

From boom to bust

“The risk is that tech companies get caught out on the wrong side of the investment cycle.”

The growing reliance on automation raises a number of questions around the responsible use of technology, a subject that has grown in importance over recent years as corporations grapple with their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) agendas, and define purposes beyond profit alone. These questions include the impact of automation on jobs: Foxconn replaced 60,000 jobs, or 55 per cent of its total workforce, with robots at one of its factories in 2019.

According to Bain & Company, projected growth in automation over the next 10 to 15 years risks being followed by a bust, as “the next wave of automation investment will create many opportunities but will grow increasingly perilous as it builds momentum.” The risk is that tech companies get “caught out on the wrong side of the investment cycle.”

> Automation represents a key opportunity for tech companies. But it raises a number of issues that marketers need to be acutely aware of if the technology is to be accepted. Meanwhile, the narrow window for investment in automation will force organisations to develop and market solutions with greater speed.

¹ Labor 2030: The collision of demographics, automation and inequality, Bain & Company, <https://bit.ly/2XuZjmN>

Trend 3: Artificial Intelligence

Smart tech

Artificial Intelligence (AI) sits behind so many deployments of technology today it's not hard to see why PWC believes it will add \$16 trillion to the global economy by 2030.²

AI helps traffic light systems predict traffic flows and identifies the different faces in the image galleries of our smartphones. AI is a prerequisite for self-driving cars, and promises to make medical diagnosis faster, cheaper and more effective. It's easy to see why Google's CEO describes AI as "more profound than fire or electricity."

Learning the ropes

"Does 2020 mark the year that AI falls down the scale of Gartner's hype cycle?"

Yet it is now more widely recognised that a massive amount of time and effort is required by the machine learning that underpins AI. This may explain why Gartner says 2020 may be the year that AI falls down the scale of the company's well-known 'hype cycle'.³

Machine learning requires massive data sets and lots of time to get that data prepared in a way that learning is even possible. Tech firms are discovering that bias can easily emerge in the data selection and preparation process, either through skewed data sets or assumptions about outputs. Then there is the difficulty of harvesting enough useful data in the first place, especially in countries where the use of public information is restricted or stripped of details that could otherwise discriminate.

An intelligence test

Faced with these challenges, it appears that many businesses are giving up: a survey by PWC reveals that only 4% of managers planned to deploy AI across their firms in 2020, down from 20% in 2019. Some of this could be down to skills shortages, but it could be that, like the self-driving cars that are still yet to feature on our roads, AI may simply be over-hyped.

There is also a greater focus on how AI is used, and growing calls for oversight of the 'decisions' AI makes. Consumers will rightly want to know why a loan application has been turned down by the AI employed by a bank, for example. Insurers will need to understand the decision-making process that lead a self-driving car to crash into another vehicle rather than hit a pedestrian.

> It will be the role of tech PRs and Marketers to explain in simple language how and why AI is employed in any of the systems or products they market. Indeed, this may become a regulatory requirement, as a number of initiatives are under way to establish principles for the correct use of AI. In the meantime, AI presents an exciting if thorny subject for PR and marketing.

Trend 4: Openness

The rise of the big players

Many technologies owe their advancement to a few innovators who developed proprietary systems firstly to provide functionality, then to lock users into a particular platform or system. The famous example, of course, was the VHS / Betamax battle in the early years of consumer video. This proved that 'better' technology was no substitute for a large user base, access to plenty of content, and aggressive marketing and promotion.

In recent years, the closed eco-system that Apple has developed so profitably has relied on tight control of the apps and content that can operate on its phones, tablets and computers. But it's a model that looks under increasing threat, as consumers demand more control and greater choice. It's one reason why Google's Android operating system has become so popular.

Open for business

If anything, the need for greater control over technology is more pronounced in the business-to-business environment than in the consumer space. Tying up capital investment in closed protocol systems - whether these control the heating, ventilation or air conditioning systems of a building, or make digital payment fast and easy - doesn't make sense. This is because success increasingly lies in the ability to capture, aggregate and analyse data from devices that talk to each other.

This communication was first made possible by the adoption of common internet protocol standards, and has been further enabled by the emergence of cost-effective and reliable cloud storage, faster system hardware and computing at the edge.

Openness has grown more popular as firms have embraced open platforms that serve to pool the resources of many, and bring innovations to market faster. The vast marketplace of inventiveness that thrives within Salesforce is a great example. Open source solutions are also being driven by a reaction to the monopolization of many areas of tech, such as 5G, where rivals to Huawei are emerging.

Being open presents challenges

"How do firms differentiate their solutions in a crowded marketplace where collaboration is key?"

Building open solutions may make economic sense, but it presents unique challenges to marketers. How does a firm differentiate its solutions in a crowded marketplace where fierce rivals must play alongside each other? Where does collaboration end and competition start? And on a practical level, when systems are closely integrated, where does responsibility for reliability lie?

> The 'shift to open' presents classic branding challenges to tech marketers, who must work with partners and platform providers yet ensure their brand gains the awareness needed to scale.

² Sizing the prize: What's the real value of AI for your business and how can you capitalize?, PWC, 2017, <https://pwc.to/33vAqLN>

³ Steeper than expected, Technology Quarterly, The Economist, 13 June 2020.

Case Study

techforlife

When Tech for Life, a movement that champions the responsible use of technology, first started, it was imperative that messaging struck the right chord. We helped create this messaging, which was used to underpin the book of the same name by Jim Hageman Snabe, chairman of Siemens, and tech entrepreneur Lars Thinggaard. We created the movement's website, populated it with engaging content, amplified this across social media, arranged speaking opportunities, and created articles for the likes of the Financial Times, WEF Agenda and Wired.

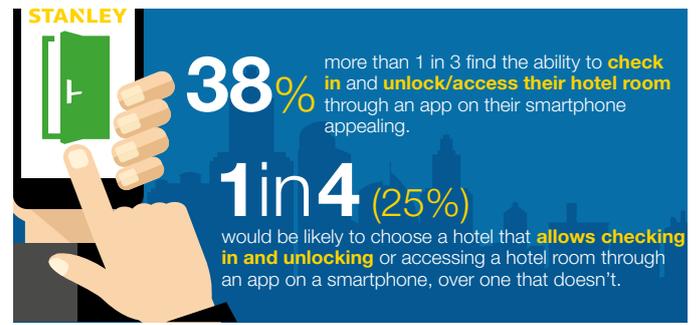


Case Study

StanleyBlack&Decker

We conducted research among hotel users to assess check-in pain points and used the resulting insight as a vehicle to promote the adoption of STANLEY's bluetooth-enabled room locks by hotel chains.

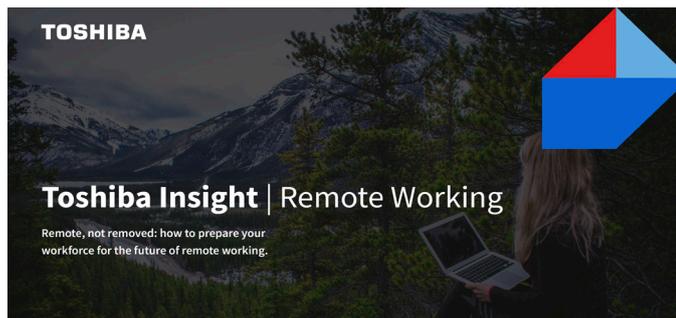
Our findings were presented in an infographic that guided readers through the hotel guest experience, highlighting the benefits of an app that removes the need for a room key and makes check-in swift and simple. Powerful social content was developed to drive home the benefits to users and hotels alike.



Case Study

TOSHIBA

Toshiba required engaging content around which it could build lead generation campaigns using Pardot, and it turned to the Henley Group for help. Working to a content calendar, we developed a series of high-value, engaging and informative white papers on a range of subjects. These were supported by blogs, promoted through emails and amplified across social media. The campaign hit all campaign goals and delivered a wealth of marketing qualified leads to telesales for follow-up.



Case Study

milestone

To support a series of events aimed at end users, our content team devised a content programme to include LinkedIn articles, thought-leadership activity and media features. The content offered insight and advice and was published on a regular basis in advance of, and during, the event period. Content was amplified across social media, and we rolled out live social media reporting from the events, including short interviews, photos, and newsbites. Engagement rates were strong and helped drive sign-ups for the event, as well as increasing follower numbers.



Copies of other Insights and Passnotes, the Henley Group's guides to best practice in PR and marketing, can be downloaded at

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