

# From Town Squares to Living Rooms: Why Marketers Need to Embrace New Digital Approaches

Community Contributors Jun 11 2019 | 07:30 PM | 4 Mins Read | [Level - Intermediate](#) | [Read Mode](#)



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*Facebook and Google are making sweeping transformations to their respective platforms, shifting from content consumption to communication. According to Barry Nolan, chief strategy officer of Swrve, these changes mean that marketers must embrace real-time, omnichannel marketing strategies to succeed.*

At Facebook's F8 conference this year, chief executive Mark Zuckerberg announced plans to overhaul the social network, with a big emphasis on privacy and interpersonal communications in its redesign. While Zuckerberg's declaration that "the future is private" should be no surprise following the fallout from Cambridge Analytica, the looming question is how these changes will undoubtedly impact marketers. According to a [report by eMarketer](#), Facebook was slated to generate "an estimated \$23 billion in U.S. ad revenue in 2018 (and \$54.4 billion globally, an increase of 36.3% from 2017)." It's clear that despite privacy and fake profile issues, Facebook is still a major workhorse channel for digital marketers. However, marketers will need to amend their advertising playbooks as Facebook (and the broader digital marketing space) continues to evolve.

## Upcoming Facebook platform pivots

In Facebook's [January 2019 earnings release](#), Mark Zuckerberg said, "Our community and business continue to grow... We've fundamentally changed how we run our company to focus on the biggest social issues and we're investing more to build new and inspiring ways for people to connect." Two major pivots highlight this new focus.

Firstly, Facebook Messenger, Instagram Direct chats and WhatsApp messages and calls will now all have end-to-end encryption. It's part of Facebook's bigger plan for all three previously-disparate apps to communicate between each other (even if a user doesn't have accounts on the same app. This is certainly highly strategic: identity management is one of the single most powerful tools in technology). It also means that in theory, Facebook will be unable to access or investigate any messages sent on its platforms.

Additionally, Zuckerberg stated in his open [letter-style Facebook post](#) that the company already sees that "private messaging, ephemeral stories and small groups are by far the fastest growing areas of online communication." Accordingly, he announced at this year's F8 conference that Facebook's UX will shift away from "digital town squares", where users openly browse and discover pieces of content, to offering communication services that are akin to the privacy of one's own living room. This means focusing on

video chat capabilities (including allowing users to chat, stream and watch videos simultaneously), centering user newsfeeds around private group content, as well as making private messaging channels faster, easier and more robust.

These pivots are a further indication that consumers have even more choices — in both the type of platforms available and the type of channels they use to communicate with people and brands. With Facebook's greater focus on privacy, however, could this close the opportunities for marketers to gain the right insights to truly understand and meaningfully engage with the consumer?

## How marketers should adapt

If marketers have learned anything from [the rise \(and slight fall\) of push notifications](#), it's that frequency is a declining currency. 84% of consumers think the communications sent to them from companies are irrelevant and 52% say they would switch brands as a consequence.

Because consumers are used to receiving so many messages in any given day, from many different brands, they have become highly attuned - and highly critical - of blatant brand promotion. This attitude, plus the explosion of channels and potential touchpoints across every customer journey means that the responsibility placed on marketers to be relevant is heavier than ever before.

The irony is that relevance does not mean more communication: oftentimes it actually means *less*. The demand is now that communications from brands need to have razor-sharp precision. The "one-to-many" messaging and general personalization strategy is no longer enough. To succeed, marketers must go a step further, to both identify and *anticipate* customer interests, preferences and goals - then deliver a tailored offer, at the moment it matters, through the right channel of communication.

One example of providing highly relevant messages to a customer at the right time is in the travel industry. A customer could book an economy flight through an airline's app. But on the day of the flight, the airline app registers that the customer is running late to their flight using geolocation services which triggers an inspection of the customer's profile to see what type of ticket and check-in process they purchased. The airline then sends a mobile push notification to that customer about upgrading to "fast-track check-in" so that he or she can expedite the process and make it to their gate in time. In this case, the airline was able to successfully identify an immediate need, reach out on the appropriate messaging channel and send an offer that was relevant and beneficial to the customer. It's a great example of how relevant, real-time campaigns can both increase company ROI and strengthen customer engagement and loyalty.

To execute these hyper-targeted, relevant campaigns, marketers will need deeper analytics to understand customer behaviors, including past purchases and other preferences. Today, it's about capitalizing on the latest advancements in machine learning and AI to conduct highly-targeted campaigns, and identify customer propensity to churn or other behaviors to customize messages accordingly - whether it's through an app, on the web, via email, or through another channel.

## The takeaway

Zuckerberg's major pivots announced at F8 don't come as a major surprise — they are symptomatic of a wider shift going on in the digital consumer space. Consumers want powerful communication tools that also include real privacy protections. The days of programmatic advertising and one-to-many targeting strategies are not enough to entice and engage today's savvy consumers. Instead, marketers need to find a way to create more meaningful and impactful touchpoints, delivering and anticipating relevant communications at every step of the journey. Ultimately marketers want to reach out to their customer as if they're having a conversation in the comfort of one's living room.