The Digital Day England 2025: Key Takeaways

Thanks for joining us for The Digital Day England 2025. Let's delve into the top ten takeaways and key insights from our amazing 13 sessions of 15 minutes. You can see the photos from the day [here](#) and look out for The Edit coming out 30 May, featuring The Marketing Society's Digital Day series from five out of their seven global locations.

Top 10 Key Takeaways

1. **The Cognitive Revolution Is Here**: We're experiencing a fundamental shift in marketing with AI becoming both a tool for efficiency and a new type of customer, requiring marketers to develop both technical fluency and emotional intelligence.

2. **Velocity with Safety**: The most successful organisations combine rapid experimentation with a "safe to fail" culture. As AJ Coyne from Monzo put it: "Set goals at the squad level and empower teams to run with it in a safe space."

3. **AI's Dual Impact**: AI is both stealing clicks (60% of Google searches now end with no clicks) and creating new opportunities for personalised communication. Marketers must reimagine strategies for both humans and AI agents.

4. **Entertainment Is Non-Negotiable**: In an attention economy, creating entertaining content is crucial. As We Are Social noted, "94% of Gen Z associate all social media activity primarily with entertainment" – the mandate is "entertain or die."

5. **Search Is Everywhere**: Only 35% of discovery now happens through Google – the rest comes from social platforms. Future success requires optimising for multi-modal search across platforms and building genuine authority.

6. **The Non-Human Customer**: By 2028, 20% of digital commerce will be handled by AI agents, with real examples already showing £30M in automated B2B purchases. Brands need different experiences for human versus AI interaction.

7. **Brand Boldness Pays Off**: During economic uncertainty, brands that maintain or increase brand investment recover faster. Data from previous downturns shows 66% of brands that stayed the course on brand investment recovered more quickly.

8. **Digital Natives Seek Connection**: Despite their "brand promiscuity," digital consumers respond powerfully to brands that are human, authentic, and purpose-driven – especially when businesses demonstrate empathy and reward desired behaviours.

9. **Identity-Based Targeting**: The future of personalisation lies in understanding real behaviours of real people. Very Group's use of identity-based targeting across 40 million UK individuals drove 2.3% growth during the golden quarter.

10. **Ethical Considerations Are Emerging**: Responsible AI development and ethical digital practices are becoming competitive advantages. As demonstrated by Lush's stance against certain social platforms, principled positions can strengthen customer relationships.

Introduction

The Marketing Society's Digital Day 2025, held in London on 7 May, brought together leading marketers, innovators, and thought leaders to explore the current state and future direction of digital marketing. The day-long event centred on the theme of "Now and Next," examining how brands can balance immediate performance needs with long-term brand building in an increasingly AI-driven landscape. From Monzo's customer-obsessed approach to Lush's bold stance against big tech platforms, speakers shared real-world case studies demonstrating how organisations are navigating technological disruption while maintaining human connection. A recurring theme throughout the day was the need for marketers to embrace experimentation, harness the power of AI responsibly, and focus on building authentic relationships with increasingly promiscuous digital consumers. The presentations collectively painted a picture of an industry in the midst of a "cognitive revolution" – one that requires both technical fluency and emotional intelligence to succeed.

Opening & Welcome

Sophie Devonshire, CEO, The Marketing Society

- Emphasis on maintaining an optimistic outlook despite challenges
- "I don't think there's ever been a better time to be in marketing, bringing together customers and businesses"
- "These are exciting times... but the opportunity is only there if we continue to learn"

Monzo's Human Approach to Digital Marketing

AJ Coyne, VP Marketing, Monzo

- Customer obsession is at the core of Monzo's marketing approach
- Experimentation is key - aim for 1 in 10 experiments to work, learn from the other 9
- Providing autonomy to teams is essential - "We set our goals at the squad level as a collective and then empower them to run it and give them the safe space"
- User research drives innovation - "Our customers who are using Round Up save on average 16% more than customers who don't"
- On AI: "What I'm most excited about with AI is really the role of search... especially for business banking"

Winning in Culture: How to Build Your Brand at the Speed of Social

Toby Southgate, Global Group CEO and Mobbie Nazir, Global Chief Strategy Officer, We Are Social

- Three key principles to cut through in social media:

  1. "Entertain or die" - social gives brands permission to be more entertaining
  2. Adopt a "chronically online" mindset - understand internet culture to stay relevant
  3. Treat audiences as fans, not just customers - build long-term relationships

- Case study: "For Booking.com, we found that the more unhinged we went, the more absurd we went, the more successful it was"

- "94% of Gen Z associate all social media activity primarily with entertainment"

- "Fandoms are not only something that's great for brands to try and nurture and build, but if engaged with appropriately, they can be an extension to your marketing function"

Spotify Advertising: Easy, Elevated, Effective

Ed Couchman, Head of Advertising Sales, UK & Northern Europe, Spotify

- Spotify has evolved from music streaming to a full audio-visual entertainment platform
- The platform serves as both a mirror and shaper of culture - "We think that's a really powerful vehicle for brands to get involved in"
- Platform insights show real-time cultural trends - "We see a huge increase in searches for playlists around 'all nighter' - it's exam season"
- Key innovations: Daylist (AI-generated playlists), audio books with flexible token system, video podcasts
- Focus on making ads easier to create, buy and measure through automation and AI tools
- "We're not just a music streaming app - people are listening to audio books and podcasts"

From Crisis to Catalyst: How GenAI is Transforming Leadership and Growth

Adam Street, The Incremental Pathway

- GenAI can transform business challenges into opportunities - example of using AI to fight insurance legal battle
- "Generative AI is the most powerful Swiss Army knife ever developed"
- AI creates time for change by eliminating routine tasks - "The first time I've seen in history that you can create time and efficiency"
- AI helps overcome unconscious bias by facilitating deeper customer understanding
- "AI knows today and backwards, but AI doesn't know the questions of tomorrow"
- Shared Shopify CEO's memo on AI fluency: "AI fluency is non-negotiable, and that starts with you. It's immediate. It's not the future."

Creativity and Tech

Lucie Caswell, Chief Innovation and Government Affairs Officer, ERA

- The entertainment industry has consistently seen strong growth through the combination of technology and creativity
- Metadata is critical for the future of content: "It's the rails that we will travel on with any technology"
- AI will play a key supporting role in creative industries, not replace human creativity
- "What we need to do is make sure that what's baked into that code, into that data gathering, is a breadth of perspective and culture"
- "We need to do now is think about inclusion in the infrastructure that we create behind businesses"

Future of TV

Anthony Davies, MD Global Design, Sky

- TV is evolving from distribution disruption to content production disruption
- Sky Glass went from rejected concept in 2012 to reality in 2021 - "The execs were right about the timing, we were right about the idea"
- By 2030, TV will become fully interactive with AI-generated content at 60 frames per second
- Future TV will blend streaming video, sound, and data together for personalised experiences
- Wi-Fi routers are becoming the "central brain for the digital home"
- "70% of traffic on the Comcast network is entertainment... above all else is sports and video games"

The New Era of Search: Why AI is Stealing Your Clicks

Rich Harper, Head of Digital Marketing & Sophie Caswell, Head of Strategy and Innovation, Brew Digital

- 60% of Google searches now end with zero clicks - AI is summarising content directly in search results
- "Google is literally taking content, our content, repackaging it and cutting us out of the equation"
- Only 35% of discovery now happens through Google - the rest occurs on social platforms
- Three key strategies:
    1. Invest in brand building despite economic challenges
    2. Focus on technical excellence (fast websites, perfect schema markup)
    3. Optimise for multi-modal search (voice, visual, conversational)
- "The future belongs to marketers who stop chasing algorithms and start to look to build real authority"

Humans, AI Agents, & Bots: The Next Era of Digital Engagement

Brandon Borden, Sr. Director, Demand Gen, CHEQ

- 22% of website traffic is non-human - "Imagine every fourth seat in this room wasn't a human"
- Not all bots are harmful - some bring value while some humans can be malicious
- By 2028, 20% of digital commerce interactions will be handled by AI agents on behalf of humans
- Real example: AI agents generated £30 million in automated purchases for a B2B company
- "While you may still be selling to a human, an agent or a machine will actually complete the transaction"
- Businesses need different customer experiences for humans versus AI agents

The Future of CX in the Agentic Era

Sally Nowroozi-Gardner, Responsible AI Strategy Senior Manager, Salesforce

- We are in a "cognitive revolution" where AI is transforming customer experience
- AI agents should be viewed as "interns" with access to trusted customer information
- Future of marketing: shift from campaign management to real-time conversations with customers
- Brand personality engineering: training AI agents to embody your brand voice and values
- "If you want your customers to love your brand, we get the employees to love their jobs"
- Responsible AI is everyone's responsibility, not just a department's

Digital Innovation: Lessons Learned at Matalan

Charlotte Dewhurst, Marketing Director, Matalan

- Importance of having a separate "test and learn" budget with no ROI expectations
- AI applications at Matalan:
    1. AI-powered feed optimisation tool (16% uplift in advertising)
    2. Holly Lock AI outfit builder (£350K incremental sales in 6 months)
    3. Testing AI for radio ad voiceovers
- Using first-party data to target customers and build lookalike audiences (£1.7M annual sales uplift)
- TikTok delivering 17x ROI despite not being their core customer platform
- "We have a separate budget that we set aside from our BAU marketing budget, which is our test and learn budget that has no expectations on ROI"

The Performance of Marketing: Revival or Circus Act?

Andy Sandoz, Global Chief Creative Officer of Deloitte Digital

- Marketing performance is a "high wire balancing act with a hula hoop"
- Two key balances:
    1. Passion vs Process - using process to unlock passion
    2. Value Now vs Value Next - creating immediate returns while building for the future
- "The best marketers are well into what they're doing... they're passionate about the product"
- Technology isn't the problem - it's how we apply it: "It's not the technology that is limited, it's the way we're applying it"

The Brand One-Night Stand: Strategies to Turn Digital Natives into Loyal Brand Lovers

Simon Jamieson, Marketing Director & Sarah Turner, Marketing and Propositions Director, The Marketing Lounge Partnership

- Digital natives are less brand loyal than previous generations across all aspects of life
- Three brands successfully building loyalty in the digital age:
  - Surreal Cereal - disruptive, humorous, and purpose-driven
  - Currys - making their staff the USP and injecting playfulness
  - Octopus Energy - transparent communication and rewarding customers for positive behaviours
- Key strategies:
  - Be human and inject emotion
  - Don't fear imperfection, but be honest
  - Reward customers for desired behaviours
  - "Celebrate people, be kind"

How Using Identity Bagged The Very Group the Most Fl-amazing Golden Quarter Ever

Katie Kinchin-Smith, Head of Brand, The Very Group and Sannah Rogers, CEO, Zenith UK

- Very Group achieved 2.3% year-on-year growth during the golden quarter (Christmas period) - four times the retail market average
- Success driven by identity-based targeting of 40 million UK individuals
- Created targeted content featuring Alison Hammond as the "Very Godmother" based on data showing she resonated with their audience
- Partnership with ITV created their "best ever performing branded collaboration content"
- "Having a shared culture of boldness is important... it's not just about disrupting the status quo just because there's something shiny and new"

The Big Tech Resistance: How LUSH is Leading the Charge

Taniya De Abrew, Global Head Digital Marketing, Lush

- Lush has removed itself from major social media platforms for ethical reasons
- The decision came after noticing algorithmic promotion of disinformation and hate speech
- Alternative approaches to engagement:
    1. Focusing on in-store community building
    2. Working with like-minded influencers and activists
    3. Building their own app ecosystem (now with 2M customers)
    4. Creating technology that encourages mindfulness and "digital detox"
- "We need other brands. We are looking to speak to like-minded brands to join us in revolution"
- "We want customers to come to us, to hear directly from us, to interact with like-minded fans"

Closing Thoughts

- "We're not just building brands anymore. We're building belief systems"
- "Success now belongs to those brave enough to explore, bold enough to fail, and wise enough to listen to the customer"
- The day highlighted the balance between technological advancement and human connection
- The most effective examples showed how brands are using technology to enable more meaningful human interactions
- "The real common theme was about speed - velocity really matters, but also creating an environment that is safe to fail"

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Shining a light on the technologies shaping the future of marketing. The rapid rise of AI, AdTech and MarTech presents endless opportunities for innovation and growth. But with the landscape evolving so quickly, staying informed and inspired is more important - and more difficult - than ever. The programme will keep you informed, inspired and ready to embrace the next wave of marketing innovation.