



2016

# The LinkedIn Advertising Agency Roundtable

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**LinkedIn** in

Four agency thought leaders  
discuss the marketing trends that  
will define the coming year

## INTRODUCTION: THE MARKETING TRENDS THAT WILL DEFINE 2016

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In the last days of 2015, LinkedIn sat down with four marketing agency thought leaders to discuss their outlook for the coming year.

In a wide ranging discussion led by moderator Sean Callahan, who is a senior manager-content marketing at LinkedIn, the quartet discussed a host of topics critical to marketers. They dove into the concept of “content shock” and techniques marketers can use to generate engagement with their content. They

talked about the growing necessity of mobile marketing, about the rising importance of paid social media, and why SEO remains an indispensable skill. They also delved into the transformation of the buyer’s journey and how it demands a data-driven approach from marketers. And finally they shared their outlook for 2016 and declared themselves either bulls or bears for the year to come.

An edited transcript of the conversation follows.



**LAUREN GOLDSTEIN**  
VP STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS  
[BABCOCKJENKINS](#)



**THAD KAHLOW**  
CEO  
[BUSINESSONLINE](#)



**GINA MICHNOWICZ**  
CEO  
[UNION + WEBSTER](#)



**LEE ODDEN**  
CEO  
[TOPRANK MARKETING](#)

**Q:**

**SEAN CALLAHAN**, SENIOR  
MANAGER-CONTENT MARKETING,  
LINKEDIN

I'm going to give the first question today to Lee. Lee, some people are talking about "content shock" and seeing a drop in their content shares and engagement.

What are your thoughts about where content marketing is headed in 2016?

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**LEE ODDEN**, CEO  
TOPRANK MARKETING

I guess we all have to thank our friend Mark Schaefer (executive director of Schaefer Marketing Solutions) for coming up with that clever little phrase, "content shock." It is true there is more information being created than we could ever consume in a lifetime. As the shiny object of "content marketing" starts to permeate in the majority of marketing departments, people are making so much more content, so it is an issue. But even though more companies are publishing, that doesn't mean you can't stand out. That doesn't mean you can't dominate.

Some key trends: A lot more content optimized for mobile, more sophisticated content, and interactive content. A lot more of the sophisticated brand publishers will

get into the realm of dynamic optimization and use some of the technologies that mainstream publishers are using now for dynamic A/B testing of headlines, images and page layouts. And certainly sponsored content will continue to grow in popularity as marketers simply choose to buy their way into relevant audiences.

**LAUREN GOLDSTEIN**,  
VP STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS  
BABCOCKJENKINS

The only thing that I'd want to add is that, in this age of the customer, where marketers will focus obsessively on conversations and creating conversations that are meaningful to their key audiences, I think the next evolution of content marketing is conversation marketing. And when you think about the notion of



*Even though more companies are publishing, that doesn't mean you can't stand out. That doesn't mean you can't dominate.*

**Q:** What are your thoughts about where content marketing is headed in 2016?

*(Continued)*

a conversation versus content, which are great moments in time, but conversations are more fluid, they're more contextual, and they're more customer-centric. I think that that's really the opportunity for marketers in 2016: To not just think about how to create great content that's a moment in time, but to really have context and the conversation be top of mind.



*Sometimes using things like a comic book for a really dry topic can be a way to bust through the noise.*

**THAD KAHLOW, CEO**  
BUSINESSONLINE

The only thing I'd add is the notion of relevance. In obsessing with the needs, wants and desires of your customers, if the content isn't relevant, if it doesn't connect with them where they are in the buyer's journey – I think the bar is so high for consumption and engagement that it can be challenging to connect with our customer. The notion of relevancy is so important to content marketing going forward, and it's not what we want to tell the audience, it's what they need to know to make informed decisions.

**GINA MICHNOWICZ, CEO**  
UNION +WEBSTER

What I'd say is you do start with relevancy, but then there is that notion of surprising and delighting your audience. People are so used to the 15-page white paper, but taking things and visualizing them with that still relevant data makes it so much more palatable for the audience. And it entertains them. Sometimes using things like a comic book for a really dry topic can be a way to bust through the noise.

**Q:**

**CALLAHAN**

At LinkedIn we're seeing far more than half our traffic from mobile devices.

What are the trends you anticipate around mobile marketing, particularly for B2B marketers, in 2016?

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**MICHNOWICZ**

We're somewhere between 90 percent and sometimes 100 percent of content being consumed on mobile. So, we're doing a lot of optimization for mobile – doing things like adding bookmarks to the experience, shortening the form, even having interactive infographics be mobile-first, because we know that the audience will most likely access it on mobile – because of where we're publishing: on places like Twitter and Facebook and LinkedIn.

**GOLDSTEIN**

I would simply share that our friends at Demand Gen Report did a content preferences survey, and they reported from a host of B2B buyers that 86 percent use mobile phones to access business-related content and a great percent are also making B2B purchases online. So, absolutely: Having a mobile-first mindset in all of your marketing is a requirement.

**ODDEN**

I was just talking with a Fortune 50 SVP earlier this week. It was interesting when we got to the topic of a pain point, and that was the responsiveness of the corporate website. It's interesting how many companies haven't even made their sites responsive yet. They haven't even gotten to the point where they just become present either through a mobile optimized site or a responsive site. Just getting to the game is a big opportunity for a lot of companies even though there's so much momentum behind mobile overall.

**MICHNOWICZ**

I would add that if your site isn't mobile optimized with all of Google's algorithms, you're going to have an issue with search. One of the ways that you're higher in page rank is actually being mobile optimized. That's another data point to contribute to why people need to optimize for mobile.

**CALLAHAN**

Yes, if you're not optimized for mobile you're just going to be invisible to a huge chunk of your potential customers.

**MICHNOWICZ**

Exactly. And if you're in the hi-tech B2B side, it's going to be to your whole chunk.



**Q:**

**CALLAHAN**

I wanted to direct this next question first to Thad Kahlow.

What trends are you seeing around the capability to measure marketing programs' success now and in the future in 2016?

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**KAHLOW**

In the B2B marketing world, we have a very difficult job in convincing upper management and the executive team to understand the value marketing plays in an organization. Because of the growth and explosion in data and metrics, now we have this amazing opportunity to close the sales and marketing loop to some degree and prove and improve the value we deliver to business. We're moving beyond what I call digital indicators: rankings, traffic, impressions, click-through rates, conversions. Those are nice to have. Those give us some general indicators that we're heading in the right direction. But at the end of the day, what we're finding with the midmarket enterprise clients that we're working with – and especially as you move up the food chain – no one cares. Where we're really seeing attention, time, effort, money and resources addressed in the metrics and marketing space is around proving and improving business values or the full notion of the rise of the revenue marketer if you will. So, in our eyes the

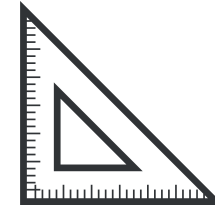
notion of cost per marketing qualified lead, cost per sales accepted, lead or sales qualified lead is incredibly important. What are those business drivers that are going to gain me attention of the executive team as well as VPs and executives in sales and marketing roles? What is the influence marketing is having on the pipeline value?

**ODDEN**

Senior marketing executives are definitely interested in the metrics that Thad is talking about -- no doubt about it. But it's important to make the day-to-day KPIs available to the folks who are actually making and promoting and optimizing marketing performance.

**GOLDSTEIN**

I think that the real challenge that we see within our client base – and these are all B2B marketers, executive level Fortune 500 companies – is that it's really about getting the whole organization on board with the realignment of this value framework. It's



shifting an organization that's just started to rally around this notion of MQLs and SQLs as a key metric, and it's forcing them to shift that thinking to be more about the qualified lead revenue or the average transaction value.

**MICHNOWICZ**

We're actually talking now about measuring down to a particular asset and how much sourced pipe came from a specific asset, so that we can use that to inform our content planning. That might mean that you can actually invest less if we have pieces of content that are really providing you the bulk of qualified leads coming in.



**Q:**

**CALLAHAN**

Lauren, I wanted to start with you on this next question.

What are the trends you're seeing around social media for marketers?

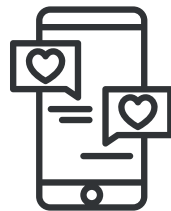
And what about trends with paid social media – and with LinkedIn in particular?

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**GOLDSTEIN**

I'm going to cite another statistic from the Demand Gen Report: 94 percent of B2B buyers say peer reviews and user-generated content carry the most weight (in influencing purchase decisions).

Third-party content and information rank a close second. We all intuitively know this to be true when we see, for instance, that you post something – you post a piece of content on LinkedIn and that real-time feedback of who's interested, who's sharing, who's liking is really, really powerful.

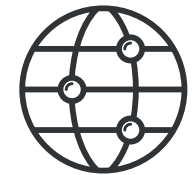


**KAHLOW**

If you think about what LinkedIn has done with the acquisition of Bizo and in the ability to scale first-party data through third-party network and publishers, it's unbelievable. With LinkedIn Sponsored Updates and LinkedIn Lead Accelerator, you now can get unbelievably precise targeting that includes individual role, certain size company, certain contextual information to put a very specific ad or a very specific piece of content in front of that audience to get them to engage and then to nurture them over time with new assets as they move down the buyers journey through the platform itself. This has been singularly one of the most effective ways of not only generating awareness and engagement but actually driving all the way through to qualified lead to sale that we have seen. It's been unbelievably successful for us.

**MICHNOWICZ**

If we start with LinkedIn as a platform, our highest quality leads and our highest conversions from all of our campaigns come from LinkedIn. That isn't completely accurate in Asia-Pacific just because that is a different market, and we're seeing that grow over time as LinkedIn grows a little bit more globally. In terms of comparing to any of the other platforms, it's really a top performer and especially at the quality level.



**Q:** What are the trends you're seeing around social media for marketers?  
And what about trends with paid social media – and with LinkedIn in particular?

(Continued)



*I think it's a combination of organic and paid where a lot of social media magic happens.*

### ODDEN

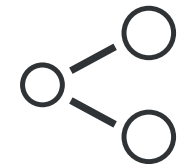
I think organic social media visibility still presents a tremendous amount of opportunity. But even more so is the data you can collect from doing experiments with organic content on social channels – and simply identifying those trending opportunities to allow you to develop a paid program. This is a great opportunistic approach that you can use to amplify

campaigns, squeeze out extra value, squeeze out extra performance out of organic centric campaigns with paid advertising. I think it's a combination of organic and paid where a lot of social media magic happens.



### GOLDSTEIN

I would just put in one other thing around social. As marketers we talk a lot about the benefit of social from a marketing perspective, but in fact it's really a hub for social selling also. All of the great sales people that we speak to on the client side, they are using social to help them close deals, they're using social to help them add value in those later stages.





**Q:**

**CALLAHAN**

Lee, you get the first swing at this one. At LinkedIn we did a study earlier in 2015 that showed the skill that companies most wanted from their new marketing hires was SEO.

What trends do you see around this enduring skill in 2016?

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*SEO is important, but it's not the only thing.*

**ODDEN**

Having been in the SEO world since the late 90s, I've seen the writing on the wall as people would proclaim that SEO is dead, which has been happening for about 10 years now. And yet, there are studies and polls that reveal what you just said, that it's still high in demand. SEO is foundational. SEO is important, but it's not the only thing.

I think from a trend standpoint what we're seeing is sort of a separation. There are specialists or SEO mechanics as they're often called, people who specialize in the technological aspects of optimization – everything from information architecture, making pages load faster, structured data and duplicate content and all those sorts of

tweaks and refinements. And then you also have a more horizontal approach to SEO, where it's becoming a skill set that is cross-trained across the organization. Anybody in a role where content is being created – whether in customer service, public relations, or corporate communications, anybody in marketing is getting some kind of SEO knowledge, where at least they know a little bit about what keywords are, where to use them, how to link and how to promote content to attract links.

**KAHLOW**

I think a potential problem is the notion of thinking in silos. It's the notion of thinking about I need an SEO expert and I need a page search expert, and I need a display

expert, and I need a CRO expert. I see that a lot, and I think there's some flawed thinking in that potentially, depending upon how the organization is set up and what you're trying to accomplish. I think the smartest marketers that we're working with right now in the B2B space are most interested – five-, six-fold more than SEO – are folks who can interpret, analyze, connect, collect and understand and derive insightful data. They're interested in folks who have math and statistical skills who can actually begin to derive inferences from that data. We're seeing a lot more value placed in folks who can do those things at the data and insights level than more specifically at the SEO level.

**Q:** What trends do you see around this enduring skill in 2016?

*(Continued)*

**MICHNOWICZ**

We find that you're always using some of your SEO capabilities in everything that you do – in search and page search and optimizing. Nobody can deny that Google is still the top place that people search for, even within the B2B world, but it's all integrated and tied together. It's looking at data science and how it's connected and how to make sure that you can still be searchable and findable in all of the places. If you look at it just from a straight

SEO perspective you're looking at it in a vacuum. You have to look at it as an integrated approach, and that search is applied everywhere.

**GOLDSTEIN**

In terms of whether that becomes the single most important skill set that an organization needs to hire, it depends. There will be a huge variance between whether you're a small business or a larger organization, because if you're a

small business, you really need somebody who understands all of the parts of buyer insights and how that influences the multiple channels that they're going to be leveraging. Yes, SEO is one of the pre-eminent skills, but in some ways you need a jack-of-all-trades who understands all of the ins and outs of the buyer and the different channels they use. But organizations that are on the enterprise scale or those that can afford to work with agencies that have a huge range of skill sets can specialize more.



**Q:**

**CALLAHAN**

Next question: Thad brought it up, but I want to start with Gina and talk a little bit about data-driven marketing.

What trends do you see around data and marketing in 2016?

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**MICHNOWICZ**

In some ways it's less is more. It's really focusing on, based on what your objectives are for your campaign or just in general for the business or client's business, the data that really is most important. Everybody talks about big data. The reality is it's not about all of the data. It's about sifting through and trying to figure out what the most important data is. It's the ability to tell what your users are doing from platform to platform, what they do when they actually download a piece of content, and that next part of the buyer's journey – what is that next piece of content? Those are the types of things that we're tracking right now.

**ODDEN**

Data, obviously, is worthless unless there's insight. You often hear the expression, "It's not big data that's important, it's the small data or insight." There are plenty of people getting reports right now that are very data rich, but they're not really doing anything with it. That's something that needs to be solved.

**GOLDSTEIN**

We're going to continue to see that we get smarter about how to use the data. I was at a conference a few weeks ago talking with several predictive analytics companies. While there's considerable buzz about predictive in B2B, the adoption is still very low. And those who have adopted are still looking to prove out some of the usefulness of their investments. So I just think it's an area that's going to continue to get mature. We're going to learn more and also look to data to help give us more insights about our buyers.

**KAHLOW**

There is so much opportunity. I think we are just scratching the surface on it, and we're just in the first inning, maybe the second inning. And "insights" is exactly right. I think Lee and a couple of other folks have mentioned it. It is about deriving insights from the data. I think that's one of the biggest missing issues with a lot of the marketers we see. And then right underneath that is attribution. I think data is the next 10 years of B2B digital marketing, and we're just getting started.



*It's not big data that's important,  
it's the small data or insight.*

**Q:**  
**CALLAHAN**

How is the buyer's journey changing and how should marketers be responding to it in 2016?

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**KAHLOW**

There are two things happening in the buyer's journey. Number one, it's about planning for it. How do we plan a holistic campaign that connects to those individuals in a meaningful way with the right content in the right channel and that's from a planning perspective? Number two, the other end of the buyer's journey is how, in real time, are you able to anticipate and interpret where your prospect is in a buyer's journey – so you can provide relevance, so you can provide the right next piece of content? So, you have things like lead scoring happening. You have marketing automation playing a role. And you have predictive analytics coming in, which I think is very early in its stages, but for those vendors that are doing it well, they can really add some significant value to understanding what to market to them next or how to get sales involved in a meaningful way to add value to that buyer's journey.

**GOLDSTEIN**

We're starting to evolve strategic thinking from being about the journey to following a conversation. The conversation has more fluidity, because we know that the journey doesn't necessarily move in a straight line from left to right. It's not just about understanding the insights and making sure that we're designing campaigns and content to support them, but it's also driving internal alignment in an organization around that journey or that conversation. If an organization is not fully aligned, you still run the risk of a very disjointed message to your market.

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*The conversation has more fluidity, because we know that the journey doesn't necessarily move in a straight line from left to right.*

**Q:** How is the buyer's journey changing and how should marketers be responding to it in 2016?

*(Continued)*

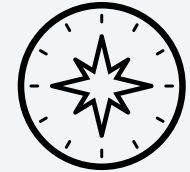
**MICHNOWICZ**

We're getting much more sophisticated. We're actually able to say that when a person is on this part of the website, they tend to be in this part of the journey. Or if they have this piece of content, they are at this stage of the funnel. We're getting much more sophisticated about what our flight plan looks like, how we're targeting, how we're segmenting, and it's looking at the segments from that customer perspective that are really not just oh here is an IT practitioner but really slicing it based on do they already have a relationship with our client.

**ODDEN**

There's one thing that I find a lot of folks still fixating on, and that is marketers trying to singularly identify a buyer. It's common to use an archetype, a representation of a group of potential prospects manifested as a persona. But oftentimes in B2B, it's not one person; it's a group or a committee that's tasked with making some of these purchasing decisions. The group is making different decisions; research decisions, evaluation decisions, purchase decisions.

We have to be sophisticated enough to actually understand what the buying experience is really like in an organization. Is it one person? Is it a group of people? Who is actually influencing who, and what can we do to be a part of that conversation to be influential in the research and decision making process?



**Q:**

**CALLAHAN**

What spending trends do you anticipate in 2016, and are you bullish for marketing spending for next year?

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**GOLDSTEIN**

Am I bullish or bearish on marketing in 2016? I'm bullish on business. I think as marketers are able to more quantify their investments, and because marketing is a catalyst for driving the transformation in growth, I'm definitely bullish on marketing.


**ODDEN**

I'm definitely bullish on marketing spending, especially marketing that's truly accountable to performance. I'm more bearish on the fluff, such as content for content's sake. I'm bullish on more spending for technology and platforms, paid amplification like social ads, retargeting, and mobile.

**MICHNOWICZ**

I'm really bullish, and I think also because a lot of people are looking at 2016 in the right way. They are looking at making sure that we're driving value for their businesses.

**KAHLOW**

I'm a marketer so I have to be bullish, right? That's the job I'm in. If we can prove the value to the business, we have a much better chance of growing our footprint in resources and budget. 





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