

The rise of bots and artificial intelligence

By [Lisa MacLeod](#)

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Bizcommunity.com interviewed Lisa MacLeod, Head of Digital for Times Media Limited, on her trends for 2017.



Lisa MacLeod

Q: What are your key trends for 2017 in your industry?

A: In digital advancements generally, we will see the rise of bots and artificial intelligence, driving everything from call centres, to smart apps and smart homes. The Amazon Echo (PA / speaker) is the start, even if it can just help your kids with their homework. In media, I think there will be increasing pressure to monetise on mobile as audiences dominate on mobile handsets. User experience and speed will be more important than ever, and so will social referrers.

Q: Your game changer trend for this year?

A: Definitely programmatic advertising. I don't think this will be a silver bullet for the industry, but it will help shift unsold inventory, and help automate sales on premium, freeing sales staff to focus on client relations and solutions instead. What programmatic is doing is forcing a retreat to quality though, and for me that will be the biggest game changer of the year:

both advertisers and readers will demand quality, verified news and destinations for ad placements. That is really good news for legacy media houses, for once, because we are well placed to serve on both fronts.

Q: What do you hope to see more of in 2017?

A: Revenue.

Q: What do you hope to see less of going into the New Year?

A: I would like to see less fake news sites and social accounts. I think 2016, especially in the run up to the US election, was a depressing low point for journalism. The fact is that people don't actually know, or care, if they are reading fake or real news, and that is a shocking state of affairs.

Facebook's Elliot Shrage said recently: "Until this election, our focus was on helping people share. This election forced us to question whether we have a role in assessing the validity of content people share. And I have to tell you all - that's a pretty damn scary role to play."

And of course, that "pretty damn scary role" is what editors do all day, and seeing Facebook is by far the biggest publisher platform in the world, they have a responsibility to discern, as we all do. In the interest of public discourse and democracy though, it is incredibly important that news is verified, and Facebook is held to account for its role as an editor – like it or not.

Q: How will you keep yourself and your team inspired during the next year?

A: We have an incredible team, so we do keep the energy up pretty well and have a lot of fun. We try to see best practice newsrooms wherever possible, and we share insights and analysis all the time. I'm very lucky to have a fantastic international network from my time in London, and I tap it heavily for advice and direction as we need it.

The biggest inspiration is seeing our new products launch successfully, and after five new sites launched this past year on a brand new tech stack, we are all feeling inspired and looking forward to the new ones coming next year, especially TimesLIVE and SowetanLIVE.

Q: What book have you recently read that stood out for you?

A: I (finally) read '100 Years of Solitude' by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. I went to Cartagena in September for the World Newspaper Congress and Marquez lived in that city for a long time and his ashes were laid there earlier this year. 100 Years is often said to be the greatest novel of all time. I don't know if that is true, but I did get through it – except for the last chapter: I left the book on a plane. I will have to buy it again just to finish, because it is niggling me that I didn't quite make it.

Q: Best advice on keeping positive when times are tough?

A: Somebody once told me: "Worry is interest paid on trouble not yet due". I try to remember that and I share it in turn. I'm definitely an optimist, and I prefer to see the glass half full (preferably with pink bubbles).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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