MARKETING TRENDS 2026

Presented by BreadCrumbs

Agenda

01 What’s trending?

02 Trust is the new tech

03 Designed to connect

04 Smart, simple, seamless

05 Beyond the scroll

WHAT'S TRENDING?

The innovations, behaviours and opportunities shaping digital and financial services

1. Personalised AI

INSIGHT

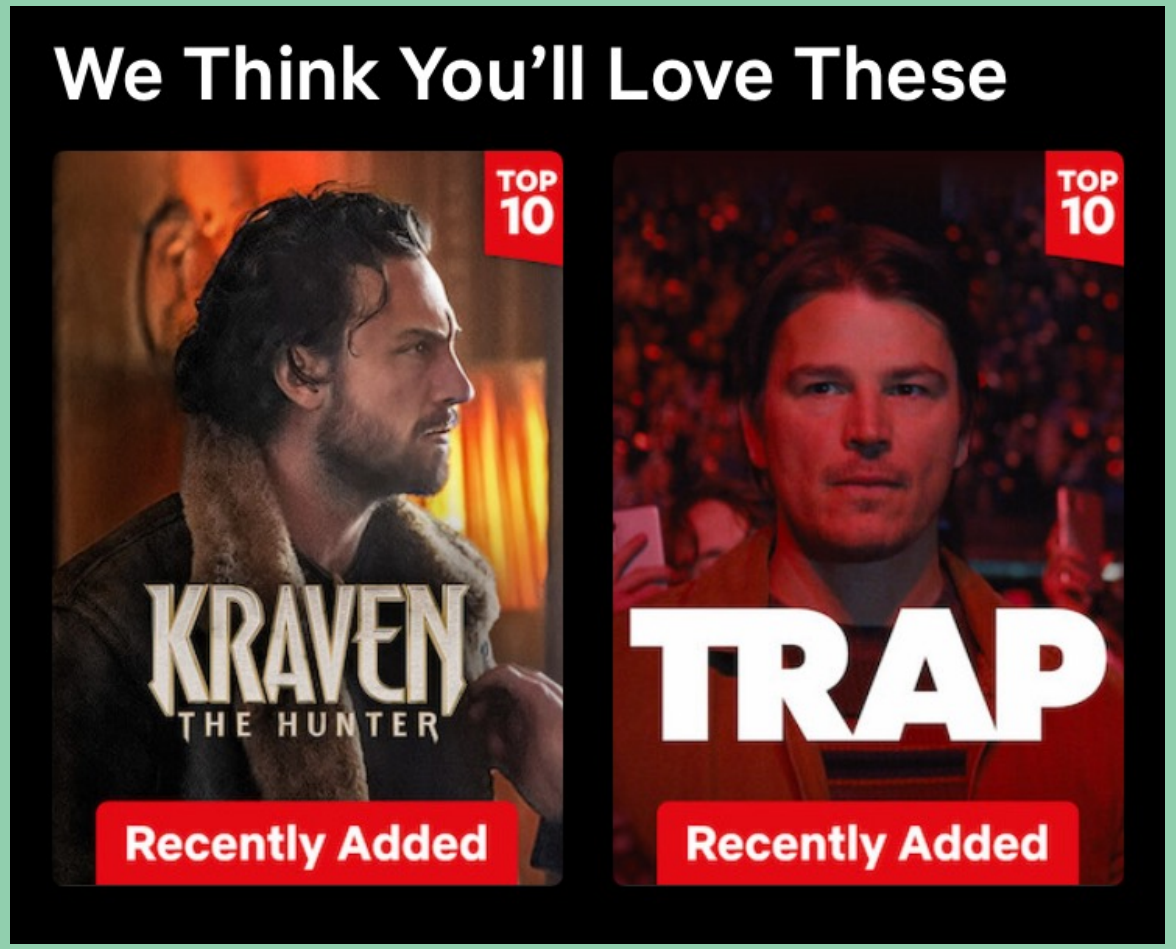
We respond best when tech “knows us” without being too creepy. Consumers want highly tailored content and service, real-time.

EXAMPLE

Netflix offers personalised recommendations to help you find shows, movies and games they think you might love – boosting watch time by 30% and reducing churn.

TAKEAWAY

Use AI for product recommendations, personalised offers and dynamic pricing to boost conversion rates and customer satisfaction.



2. Nostalgic marketing

INSIGHT

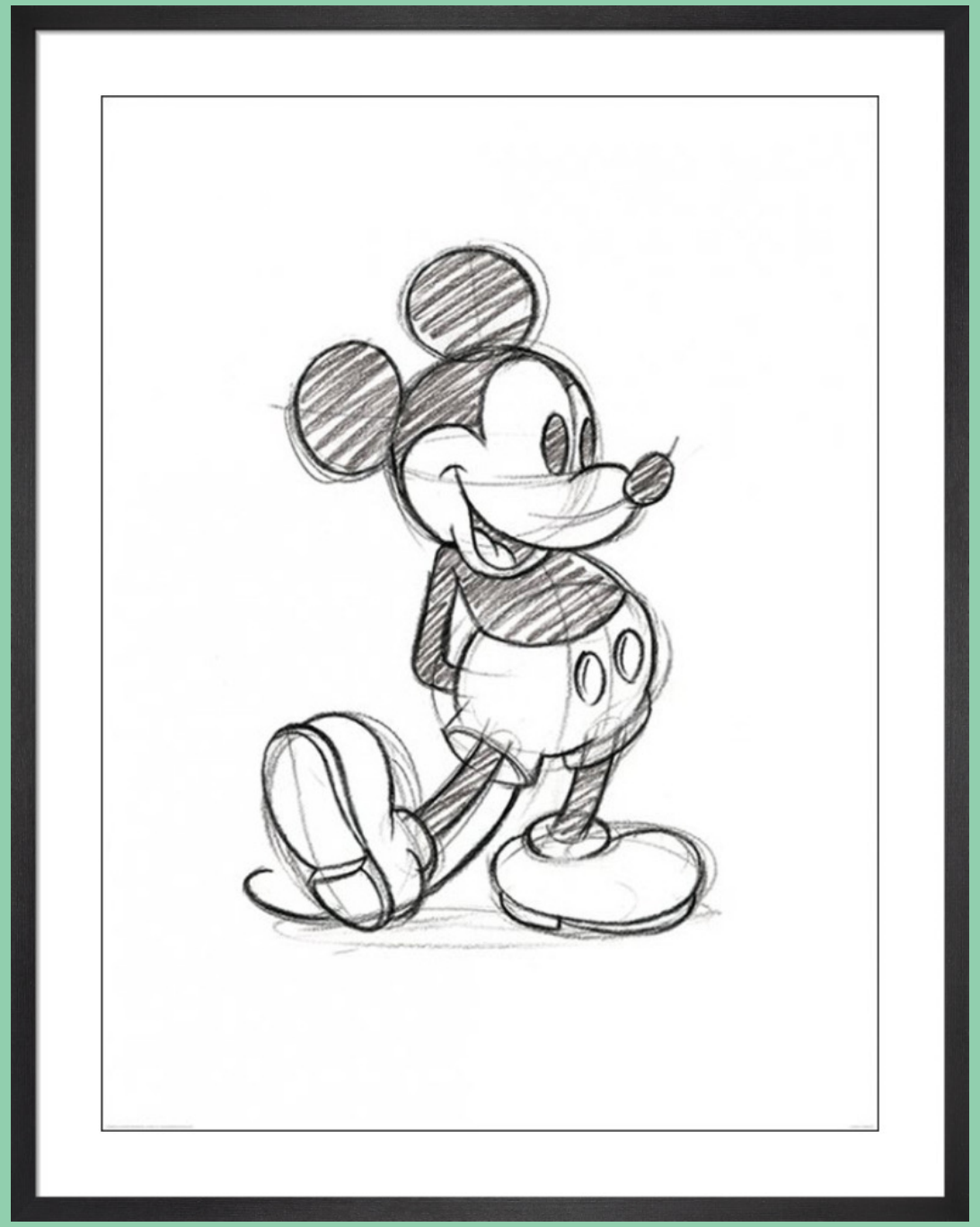
Strategic use of nostalgic content offers comfort and identity, driving brand likeability and economic ROI.

EXAMPLE

Disney is considering a major return to hand-drawn animations for the first time in over 15 years to bring back older audiences while also creating new ones.

TAKEAWAY

Blend the past and the present to create consumer connection using vintage music soundtracks, specific jingles or era-specific typography.



3. Treat-onomics

INSIGHT

Tiny nudges = huge habits. Small, well-timed rewards or prompts can create lasting habits.

EXAMPLE

Magenta Telekom in Austria used both personalised push notifications and timely in-app messages to increase app adoption by ~1.5x.

TAKEAWAY

Design subtle nudges and rewards to encourage repeated use. The key is to make the desired behaviour easy, timely and appealing.

TRUST IS THE NEW TECH

Why truth, transparency and human connection are key in an AI-driven world

1. The human touch

INSIGHT

Bots are fast but humans are remembered – especially in tricky moments. The human element of emotional intelligence is critical.

EXAMPLE

Vodacom's TOBi escalates complex queries to human agents, empowering frontline agents to resolve customer problems as quickly as possible.

TAKEAWAY

Identify key moments and unexpected issues that require empathy, judgment and accountability where humans should step in to strengthen trust.

2. Say sorry

INSIGHT

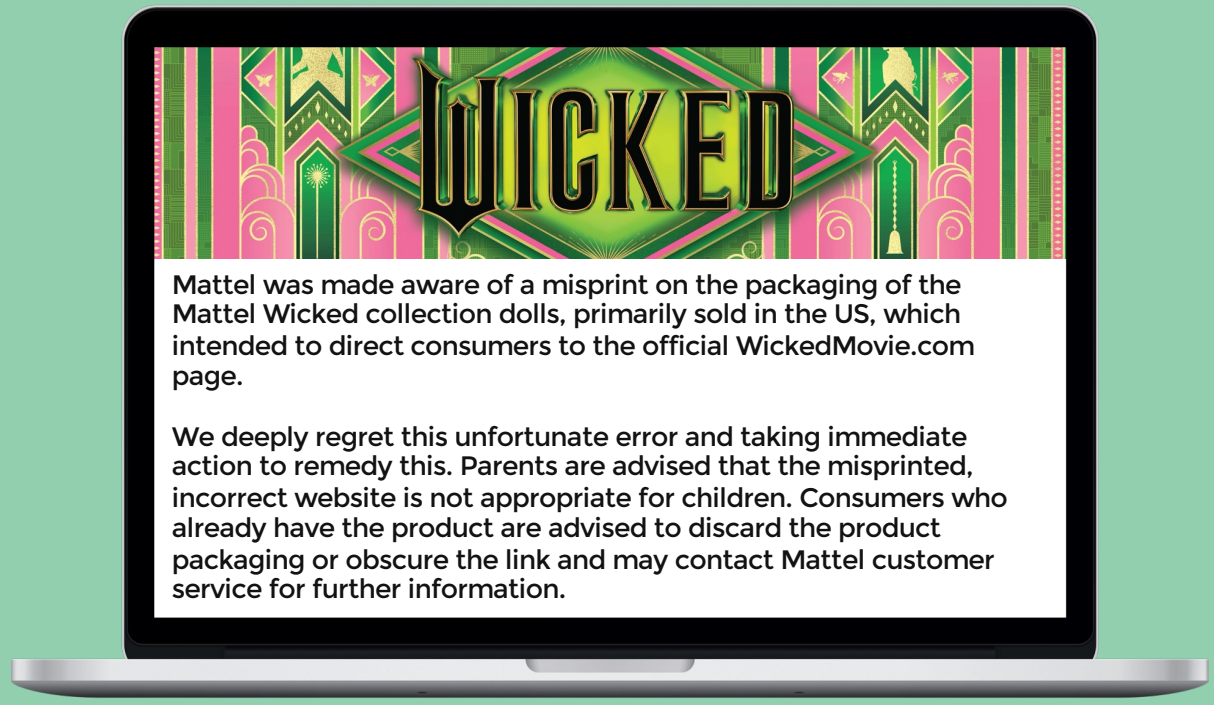
A sincere apology acknowledges fault and shows commitment to fixing issues, crucial after data breaches, mistakes or poor service.

EXAMPLE

Mattel's apology after Wicked movie dolls mistakenly linked to a pornography website on the packaging was timely, brief and sincere, helping to prevent sales loss.

TAKEAWAY

Admit fault, show genuine regret, explain what went wrong without excuses and outline specific actions to fix the issue and prevent future occurrences.



3. Purpose > profits

INSIGHT

We connect with brands that show authentic social or environmental impact. This is especially true for younger consumers.

EXAMPLE

Patagonia shares environmental initiatives and impact stories, proving that customers are prepared to pay more for brands with purpose.

TAKEAWAY

Build social causes into your marketing strategy. Highlight why your brand exists, not just what it sells. Caring for something more than the bottom line increases trust.

DESIGNED TO CONNECT

The visual, verbal and digital design cues that are shaping 2026

1. Real pics. Real people.

INSIGHT

Relatable, authentic, warm visuals create emotional connection. Here, real and unposed imagery helps communicate transparency.

EXAMPLE

AirBnB shows real people in real spaces rather than staged stock images, increasing engagement and booking confidence. It also helps with “people like me” social proofing.

TAKEAWAY

Using real people or showing behind-the-scenes glimpses or unposed team interactions helps put a human face to a business that is more memorable.

2. Movement matters

INSIGHT

Tiny animations and cues make digital interactions feel alive and satisfying. It draws in the eye and captures quick attention.

EXAMPLE

Duolingo celebrates small wins with celebratory animations and sound effects. This fun and positive reinforcement keeps learners returning daily.

TAKEAWAY

Incorporate small interactive moments to delight users, like moments of recognition, progress bars and thumbs up visuals to motivate users to keep engaging.

3. Local flavour

INSIGHT

Design for diverse users and local contexts. Accessibility and cultural relevance improves adoption and loyalty.

EXAMPLE

The Springboks often opt for their white away kit when playing teams in red/green. This is to make it easier for spectators who are colour blind (approx. 300 million people!)

TAKEAWAY

Inclusive design features, like screen-readers and local language options, appeal to more diverse demographics and showcase a brand's social awareness.

SMART, SIMPLE, SEAMLESS

How convenience and frictionless experiences will define customer loyalty

1. Consistency is key

INSIGHT

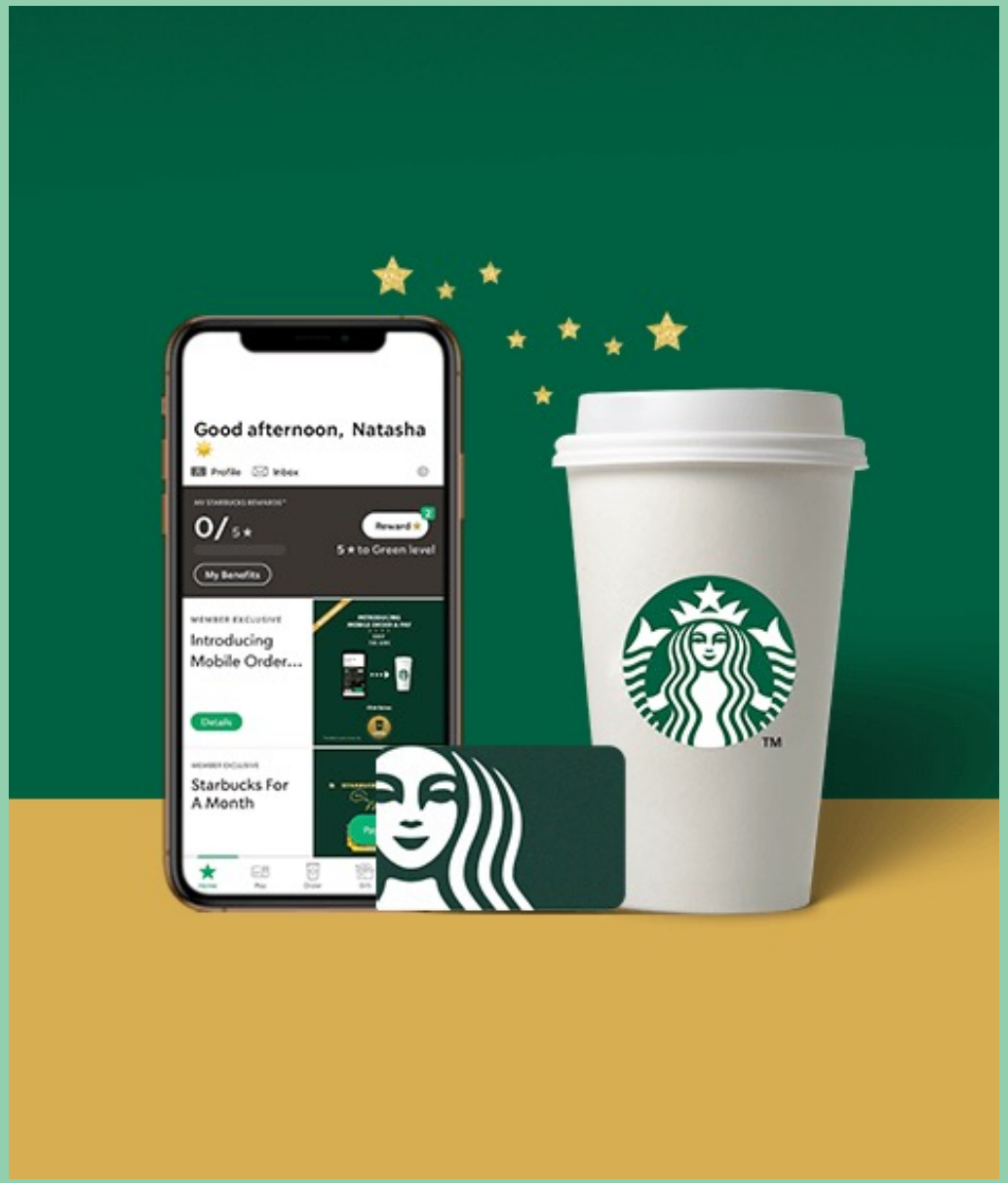
Customers expect consistent, effortless and unified interactions whether they're on your website, app, social media or in-store.

EXAMPLE

Starbucks integrates its app, in-store ordering and loyalty system, creating a unified, frictionless experience. The result? Customers pay more for better experiences.

TAKEAWAY

A seamless journey across all channels is no longer a differentiator but a baseline expectation, driven by the rise of digital tools and smartphones.



2. Friction-free

INSIGHT

Minimising the mental effort and time needed to complete a purchase through fewer steps and clear CTAs drives engagement.

EXAMPLE

Amazon One-Click checkout simplifies purchases and increases repeat sales. It removes lengthy and complicated checkout processes, resulting in fewer lost sales.

TAKEAWAY

Remove as many steps as possible and vague CTAs like “Learn more”. Instead, use specific, benefit-driven language to tell users exactly what they’ll get.

3. Super service

INSIGHT

Proactive service is a must this year. Predicting customer needs makes a brand feel more thoughtful and attentive.

EXAMPLE

Vodafone notifies users before their data runs out, prompting timely top-ups and avoiding frustration with an easy-to-action and real-time prompt.

TAKEAWAY

Map your full customer journey to understand the various touchpoints where customers interact with your brand and opportunities for proactive outreach.

BEYOND THE SCROLL

From social feeds to connected communities, where digital and IRL conversations are happening

1. Take it offline

INSIGHT

Consumers are hungrier than ever for IRL moments and crave more in-person brand exposure through events or meet-ups.

EXAMPLE

Red Bull's Soapbox event where teams build and race homemade, non-motorised vehicles (soapboxes) down a hill with the focus being on creativity and speed.

TAKEAWAY

Consider how your brand can host workshops, movie nights, wellbeing events etc. to build communities around shared interests.

2. Unfiltered; unedited

INSIGHT

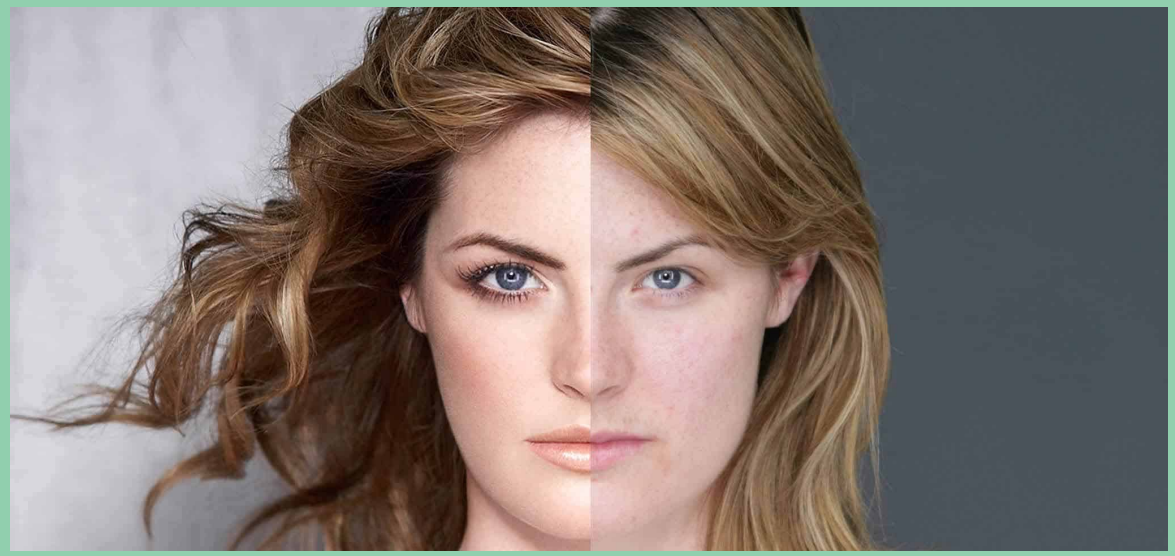
Real users carry more weight than polished marketing. Consumers are sceptical of brand-created content, especially with AI.

EXAMPLE

Dove's Real Beauty Pledge is a benchmark for purpose-driven marketing and increased sales and brand loyalty by connecting with consumers on an emotional level.

TAKEAWAY

Regularly collect authentic testimonials from happy customers using interactive forms that make sharing easy and enjoyable.



3. Snackable content

INSIGHT

Participation captures attention better than passive scrolling. This helps to make brand information more relevant and memorable.

EXAMPLE

TikTok's polls, quizzes and challenges boost engagement by making users active participants, which fosters a sense of community.

TAKEAWAY

Design content that’s interactive, quick and shareable. Get involved with viral trends (trend-jacking) where relevant and authentic to your brand.

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