

December 19, 2017

## 6 OF THE BIGGEST MARKETING TRENDS OF 2017

THESE SIX MARKETING MOVES WERE MADE TO WIN OVER MILLENNIALS & GEN Z IN 2017, AND THEY SHOW NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN IN THE NEW YEAR...

2017 saw more brands move away from traditional marketing and figure out what makes cord-cutting Millennials and Gen Z teens love a marketing move. And more so, what makes young consumers rally to a brand's side, taking up their favorite campaigns and commercials to help them gain traction on social media. Some changes came as a reaction to slowing sales while some came as brands learned how to authentically tap into top trends, reaching the digital generation online and in real life. We looked back at the year in marketing and found six of the stand out tactics:

### Pop-Ups Galore

Temporary retail spaces are giving brands the chance to experiment with concepts that might be too off-the-wall or even off-brand to roll out in their traditional stores. The short-lived pop-up shops are leveraging young consumer's love of [Experiencification](#), and it's safe to say pop-ups are the [marketing trend of the moment](#), making them one of the most popular tactics to bring young consumers in-store this year with efforts from Cheetos and even Limited Too getting attention. Cheetos' pop-up restaurant "The Spotted Cheetah" [served up dishes](#) like "Flamin' Hot and White Cheddar Mac 'n Cheetos" and "Cheetos Sweetos Crusted Cheesecake," created by celebrity chef Anne Burrell, and offered a free digital cookbook for all their fans to make the creations at home. The short-lived restaurant accumulated a [waiting list of over 1,000 people](#), and it only took six hours for all 300 seats to be booked after the restaurant's announcement, which, [according to PepsiCo 's Frito-Lay division](#), "was a surprise to [them] in a big way." Even Limited Too wanted in on the popup trend. The '90s teen store and Millennial mecca was shut down in 2008, but their NYC pop-up allowed visitors a nostalgic revisit. [Business Insider](#) reported that one customer who came said, "I just wanted to come reminisce about my childhood." The brand is now under new management and planning to open 200 new stores, so this activation generated some much-needed buzz. These popups caught ours (and young consumers' attention), but there were so many more this year: from [Adidas' full-body scans](#) that took [customization to the next level](#) to *Marie Claire's* (yes, the publisher) [surprisingly shoppable windows](#) and JC Penney's [Jacques Penné VR holiday popup](#). And, of course, [Kylie Jenner's ever buzzy lip kits](#) came to NYC for a pop-up that amassed long lines of hopeful fans.

### Fun, Viral, (& Ridiculous) Foods

Brands are [turning viral stories into marketing](#) and creating over-the-top food items to get noticed on social media. Fast food brands haven't let the trend miss them this year, coming up with fan favorites and foods that just confuse—but still get attention. McDonald's Frork was definitely among the latter. The wacky invention/food went viral with an introductory infomercial explaining the fork made with french fries known as the Frork. Anthony Sullivan, the pitchman best known for promoting OxiClean, starred in the ["goofy" video](#), demonstrating how the Frork can be used to scoop various sauces and generating almost two million views. Burger King took a slightly different tack, [responding to fans' demands](#) for Flamin' Hot Mac n Cheetos. When they did, the food went viral and inspired a trending YouTube challenge of [food-](#)

[enthusiasts](#) daring to try and review the highly-anticipated menu item. However, another of [the brand's wild treat attempts, the Lucky Charm milkshake](#), went viral for all the wrong reasons with negative tweets saying it was “magically disgusting,” and “tastes like soggy cereal.” Taco Bell got [the internet talking](#) with their new Kit Kat Quesadilla, and Pringles chose to go the ridiculous route for Thanksgiving, [unveiling a Thanksgiving dinner](#) package made up of eight different flavored chips—ranging from Turkey to Pumpkin Pie, all together in a TV-dinner inspired box. Finally, the year in stunt foods wouldn't be complete without mentioning Starbucks. It all started with the Unicorn Frappuccino, an Instagram-ready concoction and “insanely colorful, magical” drink. Its “highly-photogenic” appearance made it [“tailor-made” for social media](#), and it quickly accrued over 100,000 Instagram posts under the hashtag [#unicornfrappuccino](#). After Starbucks' initial unicorn success, they were constantly on the hunt for their next drink sensation, taking on [the dark foods trend](#), bringing the Zombie Frappuccino to life for Halloween, and most recently, launching [a holiday frap](#) meant to resemble a Christmas tree. Food trends are top-of-mind for whimsical Millennials, and they don't seem to care whether a brand is attached or not—making crazy food creations a winning marketing move in 2017.

## Levelling Up with Esports

Nielsen's first-ever esports [report found that](#) 70% of esports fans think competitive gaming will become a “mainstream activity” in the near future,” and in Ypulse's own deep dive into the trend with Millennials & Gen Z: [Esports Levels Up](#), we found that 45% of 13-35-year-olds are interested in tuning in to esports. Several big brands are betting on the niche activity by setting aside some of their marketing budget for the up-and-coming pastime. Alibaba thinks competitive gaming has a “bright future,” and they're willing to lose money until esports makes it mainstream. The company's “esports arm,” Alisports, held the World Electronic Sports Games recently, and lost 70% of what they invested in the event—but they believe their early investment will pay off because in China alone there are “1.8 million esports fanatics and 65% of those are between 18 and 25.” Young Chinese consumers' interest in esports could also be a boon for beer brands, according to [Forbes](#). Chinese beer brands are struggling to capture Millennials, but advertising in esports may be the extra life they've been looking for. Anheuser-Busch Inbev found that 18-29-year-old Chinese Millennial men had a more positive response to esports than other passion points like sports, food, and music. Now the company has started to play with the newly-discovered advertising touchpoint, and other Chinese beer brands may want to take note. And while both of these brands indicate that esports is having a greater boom in China, the U.S. is starting to see brands make moves too. [Gillette is one of the most](#) aggressive brands currently pushing into the esports space. They have sponsored several teams, and named League of Legends player xPeke their first esports global brand ambassador. Perceptive players also may have noticed a Dollar Shave Club sponsorship in an ELEAGUE match earlier this year, meaning shaving brands are noticing the trend take off. Axe and Old Spice have also tapped into the trend, but [Bud Light stood out](#) with a larger-scale activation. They let viewers vote on players to put together an All Stars team to compete in four different video games. 2017 is their second year running the promotion, and they'll be streaming content from their Twitch channel, including documentary-style videos of each all-star. With expected global revenues of \$1 billion in 2019, [according to Newzoo](#), esports is taking off and becoming a bigger advertising opportunity every year.

## New Steps in Augmented Reality

Last year, Snapchat filters caught our attention as one of [the marketing stars of 2016](#), and this year brands took augmented reality to the next level, integrating it into their own apps and spaces. Throughout 2017 we saw brands [get creative with augmented reality](#), integrating the tech into shopping experiences, marketing efforts, and more—all to cater to tech-savvy young consumers. Perhaps no industry showed their love for augmented reality this year [as much as the beauty business](#). L'Oreal [launched](#) their first lens on Snapchat this year, which

added makeup like cat-eye eyeliner and lip color, while Urban Decay's lens allowed users to "try on" multiple colors of lipstick—[reportedly](#) boosting engagement and sales for the brand. Meanwhile, Sephora [launched](#) new augmented reality features to its mobile app which allow users to virtually try on products while learning the steps to perfecting looks, and their new concept store [put a digital](#) spin on makeup shopping for the [Customization Nation](#). According to [Glossy](#), CoverGirl, Rimmel London, Shiseido, and OPI, have also taken similar approaches to overcome the challenge of “creating a connection between physical products and customers.” Beyond the beauty industry, several home décor brands took the opportunity to let customers test out furniture via AR apps: Ikea rolled out their app Ikea Place, Wayfair integrated new features into their app, and Lowe’s tested out something similar. Toys R Us used AR to take [in-store experiencification](#) to the next level with their Play Chaser app, which interacted with “trigger points” throughout the store to activate AR experiences. Meanwhile, [Kate Spade sent customers](#) on an AR tour of Paris to promote its first French flagship store, [Lego added AR](#) to playtime by letting virtual dragons breathe fire onto kids’ real-world Lego buildings, and Nike re-imagined the shoe drop by sending fans on [high-tech sneaker AR treasure hunts](#).

## Tapping TV Fandoms

This year, brands found new, more creative ways to tap into all the excitement around [Millennials’ & Gen Z’s favorite TV shows](#)—outside of traditional commercials. *Stranger Things* went all out partnering up with brands to build up to their season two premiere, otherwise [known as Stranger Things Day](#). (Yes, they got a whole day). Brands rode the excitement by celebrating the [Millennial and Gen Z favorite](#) with tie-ins that pulled out all the stops. Just a few examples: Lyft crept out riders with [Strange Mode](#), Google’s Home speaker allowed users to [speak to characters on the show](#), and Reebok unleashed a special edition [Stranger Things x Ghostbusters sneaker](#) modeled after a pair worn on the show. Perhaps the most obvious tie-in was for Eggo frozen waffles, who made sure to capitalize on [their unexpected Stranger Things’ fame](#). The brand seized the marketing opportunity by tying themselves into Netflix’s Super Bowl ad, creating a special toaster for select fans, and swarming New York Comic Con with people dressed up like Eleven armed with “watch party kits” (aka “waffles and a microwavable syrup server”). To prep for the premiere of season two of the show, Eggo even sent out a fully-loaded food truck for the red-carpet premiere, going all out on social media to connect with fans. Meanwhile, *Rick and Morty*, another show beloved by young viewers, practically forced McDonald’s hand to team up for a marketing stunt. The show has carried a torch for McDonald’s defunct Szechuan Sauce, continuously demanding a re-launch of the short-lived *Mulan* promotion. The brand responded to the surprising interest in their nostalgic product by bringing it back, but they seriously underestimated [next-level fandom](#). The ill-fated rollout started when the restaurant [announced](#) the return of their 1998 Szechuan sauce for one day only in select locations, but McDonald’s “supplies of the sauce didn’t even come close to meeting demand.” The release [sparked an internet frenzy](#) as fans searched for the long-discontinued sauce, with packs selling [for hundreds on ebay](#)—and one woman even [traded her precious packet for a VW](#). (You read that right, a car.) Despite the biting backlash, McDonald’s apology tweet, which promised more Szechuan Sauce to come, garnered over 37,000 likes—proving that brands are right to tap into TV fandoms, but they better be prepared.

## Real Talk—for Millennial Parents

One underserved demographic got extra attention this year: Millennial parents. Several recent studies show that brands are missing the chance to cash in on these consumers, and “missing the mark” on [what they want](#). A [report from PwC](#) showed why marketers shouldn’t [forget about dad](#), finding that 94% of 22-35-year-old fathers planned on spending the same or more on holiday shopping as they did in 2016, spend more on their family than on themselves, and more on holiday travel than any other demo. A study from MediaPost showed that Millennial

moms have more social accounts, spend more time on them than moms overall, and are asked for a product recommendation 9.6 times per month on average. However, one global study [found that](#) advertisers “may be overestimating the value women place on appearances during early motherhood” because “airbrushed version[s] of motherhood,” aren’t resonating: six in 10 Millennial moms state they rather see real moms in ads instead of actors. And, according [to Adweek](#), 51% of respondents believe advertisers have an outdated view of motherhood, and don’t understand them. Meanwhile, [Ypulse’s parenting survey](#) found that 94% of Millennial parents say they like when people are honest about how hard it is to be a parent. Brands started to get the hint in 2017, changing their approach to reach the influential demo by getting more real. [The Honest Company](#) launched “Honest Moments,” its first campaign ever, intended to be “the ‘bedrock’ of how the brand interacts with its customers.” In one of its spots, “The Big One,” the campaign celebrates and gets honest about childbirth by featuring real moms and dads telling their birth stories and showing actual footage of the moment. Babies R Us also responded to Millennial parents’ desire for “honest,” “raw” messaging with [their biggest rebrand ever](#). There’s been “backlash” to portrayals of “perfect” parenting, so they changed everything from their tagline to their app, with a marketing push that showed more realistic family situations, in a humorous way. The digital-first “Be Prepared-ish” campaign leveraged influencers like Daphne Oz and the hashtag #iwasntpreparedfor to spark a conversation.

**Terms & Conditions:** Use of this content must adhere to the Terms & Conditions, published at <http://www.ypulse.com/about-ypulse/terms>