



IDEA GROVE®

21 Trends for 2021

A Guide for PR and
Marketing Planning

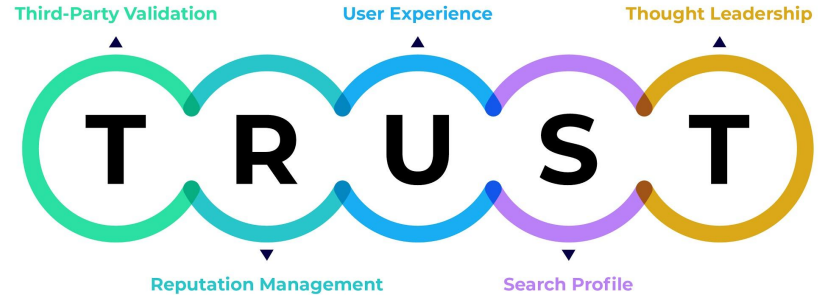
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21 Trends for 2021

This past year was a time when brands faced countless tests—from having to evolve strategies daily due to COVID-19 shutdowns and trying to reach buyers that are exhausted and distracted, to navigating conversations around racial injustice and developing plans of action to combat it through DEI efforts.

The norms have changed, and what worked in 2019 will no longer be effective in today's world. It's time to evolve.

It's time for brands to “Grow with TRUST” by addressing the following 21 trends across the TRUST spectrum: third-party validation, reputation management, user experience, search profile and thought leadership.



Grow with **TRUST** in 2021

Third-party validation: People want to hear what other people say about you, not what you say about yourself.

Reputation management: It's critical to listen and respond to what others are saying about you online. Identify issues and correct errors quickly or your reputation will precede you with prospects—and not in a good way.

User experience: How visitors view your website has a lot to do with whether or not they will want to do business with you. Don't skimp on their experience.

Search profile: When people search for your brand on Google, think of the first page of results they see as your second homepage.

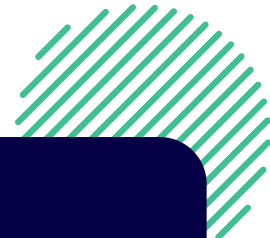
Thought leadership: Sharing interesting and helpful information with those who come across your brand online is one of the best ways to build trust with them. Talk about your ideas more and your product less.

Original Data Drives Results

Let survey data validate your story.

Reporters have never been more pressed for time, so when a brand can support their messaging with meaningful data, it saves the journalist a significant amount of time in identifying supporting elements. By providing all the information media need to report factual, detailed and insightful stories, we substantially boost the impact of our PR efforts—ultimately, driving ROI.

White-labeled surveys are a great—and cost-effective—way to boost brand awareness, nurture media relationships and validate industry authority, when woven into thought leadership initiatives.



PR campaigns centered around original data empower organizations to garner media coverage with complete autonomy—no need for customer buy-in (which can significantly slow or even halt a campaign) to drive the brand narrative.



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THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION

Mix It Up: Paid + Earned + Owned

Newsrooms are shrinking every year, and that means PR practices must adapt to stay relevant and ensure momentum across both traditional and emerging media. As publications' budgets get slashed, more and more are turning to paid, "contributed" content to alleviate the strain.

Luckily, the average news consumer is none the wiser when it comes to earned vs. paid content. While earned coverage is always the goal, paid content offers a great way to boost search, web traffic and drive brand reputation.

To get the most bang for your buck, it is important to find the right mix of earned, paid and owned content.

Earned:

Media coverage, podcasts, nano/micro influencer engagement

Paid:

Forbes Council, Entrepreneur Leadership Network, professional organization partnerships

Owned:

Brand journalism, webinars, virtual roundtables (invite reporters to speak!), white papers, eBooks



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THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION

Play The Long Game With Media

The days of mass distributing a press release and garnering significant coverage are long gone as newsrooms continue to shrink and reporters face increasing pressure to cover more with less..

The key to securing consistent results in 2021 is nurturing relationships with reporters, built on a strong foundation of trust and customization.

- Does this reporter require an executive and/or customer for every story?
- Do they need compelling data and stats?
- Will data increase the likelihood of coverage?

To make reporters care about the message you're selling, you have to first sell them on your commitment to *their* success—not just your own.



Investing the time needed to definitively answer these questions can mean the difference between a successful campaign and a flop. With the proper front-end research and thoughtful media relations practices, you can establish yourself as a trusted resource for reporters, who consistently provides the kind of news and information that makes their life and work easier.



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THIRD-PARTY VALIDATION

Influencers Matter With B2B Buyers

Once considered strictly a B2C tactic, influencer marketing is proving that it can move the needle with B2B buyers. The reality is that buyers are shaped by a wide range of voices—both large and small—and a concerted effort to win the trust and build collaborative campaigns with these influencers can have a significant impact.

Use social listening tools to help identify top influencers, and then turn them into brand advocates by treating them as VIPs and extended members of your team.

Did you know?

91% of B2B transactions are influenced by word of mouth.

Tactics to consider:

- Leverage customers as brand ambassadors
- Tap into leaders of professional organizations
- Deepen analyst engagement with social collaborations
- Encourage internal stakeholders to promote brand news across their networks
- Secure a balanced mix of nano, micro and macro influencers to analyze which ones will make the biggest impact



Move The Needle With Niche Audiences

Every brand wants to see their name in The Wall Street Journal, but is that what your target customer is actually reading? The key to driving business growth through above-the-funnel efforts—like PR—is reaching the right eyeballs.

Often, trade publications are the most effective channel to reach the ultimate decision maker—or at least the person who will be presenting your brand to the ultimate decision maker. Additionally, reporters at top tier publications frequently reference trade publications for new story ideas, often giving brand news a second life after the initial media push.

Before a PR campaign even begins, think through how exactly it will drive your overall business objectives, and use that to guide your media outreach strategy.



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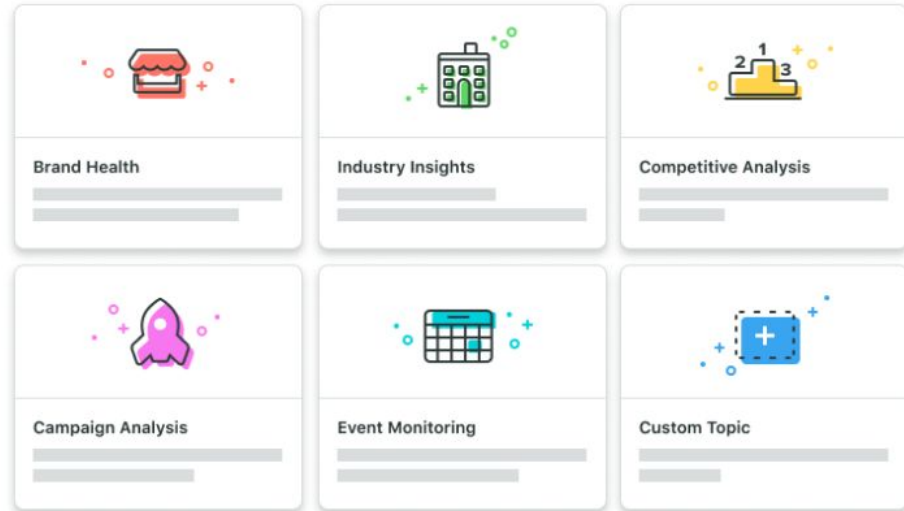
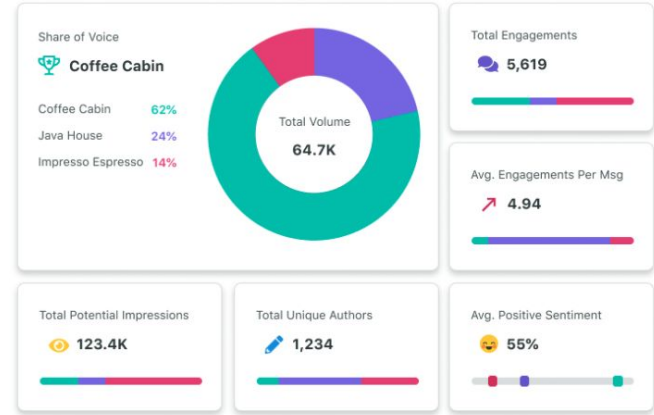
REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Real-Time Listening In A Highly Connected World

It takes years to build a rock-solid brand reputation, but just seconds to quickly dissolve in today's highly tumultuous online climate.

Now, more than ever before, brands must understand how they're perceived in the evolving industry conversation—while also keeping a close eye on competitors and industry influencers.

Listening tools such as Sprout Social offer a cost-efficient way to constantly monitor brand health, share of voice, trending events, and maintain a finger on the pulse of conversations.



Ensure Your Message Is Seen With Paid Social

As audiences continue to become more fragmented, paid social is becoming a vital part of a reputation management strategy, while also helping to enhance brand awareness and consideration.

Social has become a “pay to play” environment in recent years, with platforms relying more heavily on ad revenue.

Sophisticated targeting capabilities present an opportunity for brands to ensure that their messages reach the right audience at the right time.

- Paid campaigns allow you to target niche audiences with strategic messaging.
- Amplify your earned media coverage to ensure it reaches the audiences you care about the most.
- As audiences spend more time online, there's more opportunity to serve ads.



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REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Growing Influence Of Online Review Sites

Review sites have become a key part of the evaluation and decision-making process across virtually every product and industry.

Target those sites that show up in the first three pages of branded search results, and focus on adding reviews by reaching out to happy customers and brand ambassadors.

And don't forget Glassdoor! Employee reviews can shape the perception of prospective customers, revealing the company's values, ethics and approach to customer service.

Just as you can embed full reviews from review sites, you can also embed your aggregated star ratings from a variety of sources. For those scanning your site, seeing five gold stars from reputable review sites is a great trust-builder.



The Content Glut Is Real, And It's Here

Discussions around content glut started years ago, first with blogs, then videos, and now around podcasts.

With increased competition for attention, brands must focus on high-quality content campaigns that tell stories in unique ways, focusing first on building affinity as opposed to driving conversions.

People have less patience for strong sales messages; they crave authenticity. Focus on gaining trust and providing true value.

Who's doing this well?

YETI inspires adventure on [YouTube](#)

Dickies highlights customer heroes with [Dickies Makers](#)

The attention competition:

- 2 million+ blog posts go live every day
- 500 million tweets are sent per day
- 500+ hours of video are uploaded to YouTube per minute
- In 2019, Netflix launched 2,769 hours of original movies, TV shows and other productions



Owned Media To Connect With Decision-Makers

Create an owned-media program that regularly produces and distributes thought leadership content focused on diving deep into the problems you solve and not the products you sell. This establishes authority and creates affinity for your brand. That will help you be part of the consideration set when it's time for one of those fans to purchase a product like yours. It should be informed by:

- Buyer personas that hone in on your target audience
- Brand messaging that defines how you talk about industry challenges
- A defined editorial viewpoint serving as the lens for all your content

Who's doing this well?

ServiceNow's [Workflow Quarterly](#) digital pub

[The Forecast](#) by Nutanix

Thought leadership matters:

- 89% of decision-makers say thought leadership affects their perception of an organization
- Nearly 50% say thought leadership impacts their buying decisions
- Only 15% consider the thought leadership they are consuming to be of high quality



Buyers Will Prefer More Video

Video content will continue to grow in 2021, so consider mixing it into your owned media repertoire and promote across your social channels. Video captures more attention and allows you to tell an in-depth story by allowing viewers to feel a deeper sense of connection and absorb information in a more engaging way.

- The average person spends 16 hours per week watching video content
- Social platforms are pivoting toward video as the preferred format of choice



Webinar Fatigue Is Real

Prior to the pandemic, webinars were already saturating the attention economy. With nearly everything—from events to happy hours—moving to digital formats this year (and likely a portion of 2021), many marketers pivoted to doing more webinars more frequently, leading to a critical level of webinar fatigue.

To webinar or not to webinar?

While we don't recommend discontinuing webinars, there are ways to create and promote them to help address this fatigue:

- Brainstorm on a creative and unique spin on the typical topics
- Explore new presentation formats (move beyond the powerpoint slides!)
- Highlight more brand culture and personality to make webinar experiences more enjoyable
- Create a strategy to promote engagement and prolong the value of the content beyond the live session (making the recording just as much, if not more, valuable than the live session)



Validate Your Website With Trust Badges

A [trust badge](#) is an emblem on your website that is intended to instill trust in prospective customers. For e-commerce sites, trust badges are most visible during the checkout process, but many sites today use them on their homepage, product pages and About Us pages as well.

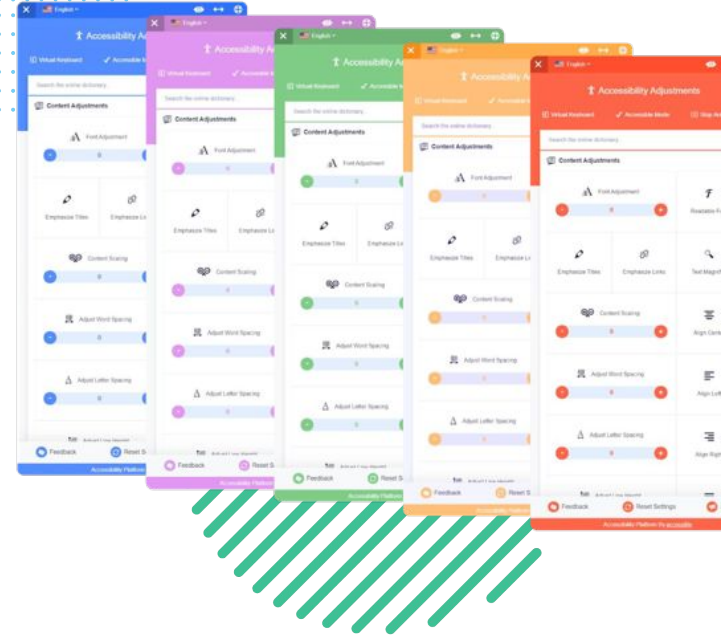
For B2B companies, trust badges provide third-party validation to boost your website conversions. There are several different types that can communicate to your users that your business is trustworthy.



ADA Compliance And Accessibility

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is nothing new, but the majority of the websites out there are still not compliant. In 2021, ADA compliance will become law in Ontario, and any qualifying businesses that do not meet the standards could see hefty fines of up to \$100,000 a day.

We recommend staying ahead of the curve, and making your website accessible to everyone before it becomes a legal problem. We've partnered with [AccessiBe](#), an easy to implement, machine-learning powered tool that can ensure your website is **compliant within 48 hours of implementation**.

The AccessiBe logo features a blue checkmark icon to the left of the brand name "accessiBe" in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The background behind the logo consists of a grid of light blue dots.

More Video And Interactivity

Interactivity isn't just for B2C—adding interactive sections to your website is a great way to provide value for visitors, get them to engage with your website, and learn more about them, even if you can't meet face to face.

As you think through the areas of your website that you'd like to build out, consider adding interactives like:

- Assessments and quizzes
- Polls and surveys
- Calculators
- Contests

Need some inspiration?

Here are some of our interactive examples!

40% of marketers site original graphics, like infographics, as their best performing content. (Venngage)

A website is 53 times more likely to reach the front page of Google if it includes video. (Insivia)



This year, video and virtual communication became more important than ever. Along with that came the rise of self-generated video content, using only a home webcam. This means that video production costs no longer have to break the bank and can be accessible to even smaller marketing budgets.



Buyers Expect More Personalization

With the increased prevalence of strategies like ABM, your prospective customers will expect a more tailored, personalized experience across the board—from their initial website experience to the nurturing and sales process.



What should you personalize?

Some easy personalization tactics that can create a significant impact include:

- Personalization tokens in emails
- Highly-targeted segmentation within your marketing automation platform
- Implementing smart content across your website



It's Time To Ungate Content

When it comes to lead generation, the standard practice is to put all your valuable content behind a form.

This exchange of personal information for content is becoming increasingly ineffective. It's not the easiest sell when teams are desperate for contacts and leads, but ungating at least some of your content, particularly those pieces backed by ad dollars, can go a long way.

Ungating content can help you:

- Establish trust early on with new audiences
- Collect retargeting data for mid- to lower-funnel ads
- Improve SEO
- Boost more impressions for content



Google Has Joined Your PR Team

Create content with Google's featured snippets in mind. Having a snippet of your content appear as the top search result confers authority on your brand.

Buyers do an average of 12 online searches before visiting a brand's website, which means the story you tell on Google — and within Google's own properties — is crucial for establishing trust and shaping perception.

- **Google My Business (GMB) profile:** When people search for your brand by name, think of that first page of results as your "second home page," with your GMB box as its centerpiece.
- **Google knowledge panel:** Google may choose to create a knowledge panel on your company, product or execs, which signals notability. It can be claimed by you, but the content is controlled by Google.
- **Google Maps listing:** When you search for a business, the top three local results will appear with a map that includes your location, office hours, phone number and a link to your website. This "Google 3-Pack" is great for trust and even better for traffic.
- **Google Reviews:** These reviews and star ratings appear in GMB and Google Maps results, making them arguably the most important reviews of your company online.



Performance Matters To Google

Does your website load in less than 5.3 seconds?

Google is releasing a search algorithm update in May of 2021 that will take user experience into consideration for ranking in search results, meaning things like load time, interactivity, and visual stability will become ranking factors.

Luckily, they've given us a heads up on this and [shared some high-level details](#) on what brands need to review and address prior to the update. The biggest thing businesses can do for their SEO strategy in 2021 is to make sure that their websites are as user-friendly as possible.

We recommend using tools like [PageSpeed Insights](#) from Google and [Website Grader](#) from HubSpot to see how your site is performing, and how we can help you improve it.



WEBSITE GRADER

HubSpot



PageSpeed Insights



Tap Into Strategic Internal Linking

Strategic internal linking is one of the biggest untapped opportunities with SEO. This helps Google's natural language processing algorithms understand the full picture of the information and services your site provides for users — in turn, increasing rankings.

The simplest way to tackle this is to refer to your buyer personas. What would they search for to end up on your site? Are there any natural questions they would have after consuming that content? What happens next on their buyer's journey? Who do they have to get buy-in from?

A [topic cluster or pillar page strategy](#) is great for ensuring that your content both ladders up to a priority goal, and that internal linking is properly maintained.



Content Must Demonstrate Authority

The [E-A-T \(Expertise, Authority, and Trust\) framework](#) is a guiding philosophy on the type of content Google aims to provide in results, and it will become even more important in 2021.

The three biggest ways to do this from an SEO perspective is by making sure that SSL certificates are updated, an internal linking strategy is in place, and content is as comprehensive as possible.

There's an endless number of qualities that indicate E-A-T to users. To identify yours, take a step back and brainstorm on what matters most to your buyer personas based on their titles, industries, and priorities.



**Expertise
Authority
Trust**



Thank You!

