

Mobile World Congress 2018: What mattered for brands

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Mobile World Congress was full of new handsets, but all marketers want to know is how this new tech will change behaviours

Three things have happened in the last week that should encourage marketers and media folk to change. And all of them happened at [Mobile World Congress](#).

Say hello to Sarah

First, we met [Sarah](#), the first personality-led and emotionally responsive avatar. Sarah was launched by Daimler and uses AI to interpret our moods and respond accordingly. If you are angry she'll calm you down. If you are a potential new car buyer, she'll try to motivate you.

Sarah is a stunning demonstration of the progress that AIs are making and how powerful they could be on the customer journey. We are now creating AI-based behaviours that could help change our purchase decisions and enable companies to build a brand personality that goes far beyond simple integration with Alexa and Siri.

If there's one thing that any marketer should be looking into in the wake of Barcelona it's the ability to create a brand with a distinct mode of expression and response. That will become even more essential if they want to stand out.

Data moves

Second, we saw some key moves on data that will make it easier for brands to actually deliver this personalised brand experience. An announcement at this year's event was the acquisition of Placecast, a location and data provider, by Swedish networking and telecoms company Ericsson. This follows last year's \$4.2m (£3.05m) purchase by Telefonica of StatIQ. The appetite for companies with GDPR compliant data is unlikely to diminish and the Placecast acquisition will be used by Ericsson to help telcos monetise their subscriber data.

Ericsson's purchase also highlights another key change in the mobile media ecosystem. Locational and other forms of data such as purchase data or cross-platform data used to be controlled by those companies selling media and was often only available to those who bought media through those companies. This controlled model is now being discarded, enabling brands to access data more easily.

This pivot has made it simpler for brands to develop more personalised experiences, whether AI-powered or not, because they can incorporate more understanding into their algorithms.

Daimler, for example, sought to combine data with behavioural change with an app tracking our driving style and fuel consumption to try and get us all to behave better on the roads. The reward for good driving: free bitcoin.

Fast forward to 5G

The third important announcement at this year's show was the meaningful arrival of 5G in developed markets. It's been the next big thing in mobile for a few years (and is needed more than ever as we continue to watch more video on devices with ever-sharper resolution).

Right now, it's only up and running in South Korea and parts of India but T-Mobile made a big pledge to launch in key US cities this year. The arrival of super-fast connections in the world's richest economy promises to get everyone thinking about mobile in new ways.

The widespread adoption of 5G will mean that we'll be able to do more with our handsets, even faster, enabling brand-led behavioural change to be even more powerful.

But while there was much excitement in Barcelona there was also a sense of frustration when it comes to mobile ad tech. While some companies have been acquired, others have refocused on new areas of business or have closed down. Hall 8.1 – the venue for ad tech – was still full of mobile DSPs and other businesses with wacky names that failed to offer a clear point of difference.

Only about 5% of the Lumascape will survive in their current form and many of these companies need to find something more distinct to say – and be able to do it – if they want to be the one in 20 that has a viable future.

And before we go, let's also celebrate the weirdness that can be Mobile World Congress. As veterans of the show will know, every year has its own rather strange and wonderful image. A few years ago, it was the [internet of cows](#) (actually a useful illustration of how mobile and connected devices can transform business operations), but this year it was the connected hula hoops from [Vhoop](#) and the cork mobile from Portugal's Ikimobile.

Mobile World Congress is the perfect blend of the serious and frivolous of the mobile world, all wrapped up in one giant exhibition space. Never change Barcelona.

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