

Is your business falling behind?



10 technologies you should already be using in 2018

Introduction

Is your business technology falling behind?

We recently published a paper that outlines a few trends that you can't ignore in 2018 ([You can download it here](#)). It explores current trends like the Blockchain, IoT, AI, and more that will play a major role in the business world in the coming years.

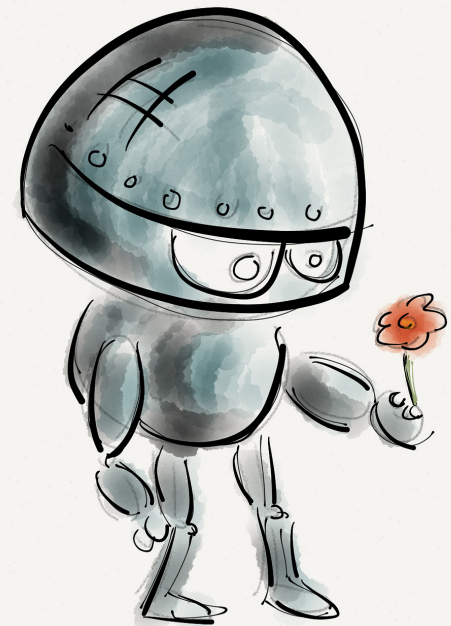
But, that got us thinking: What about old trends? New trends get all of the press. But, nobody talks about the trends that were popular a few years back.

Why are “old trends” important? While they may not be on the “cutting edge” anymore, many of these trends have now become necessities for the modern business. The fact is, new trends might impact businesses in the near future. But, “old” trends play an essential role today.

The big question: **What former trends are now necessities for today's business?** What technologies should businesses be using in 2018 if they hope to remain competitive?

In this paper, we'll explore that topic in more detail. We'll take a look at technologies/processes that the modern business should already have in place by now.

Now, these aren't cutting edge tech trends. But, if you're not using these technologies in 2018, your business is probably falling behind.



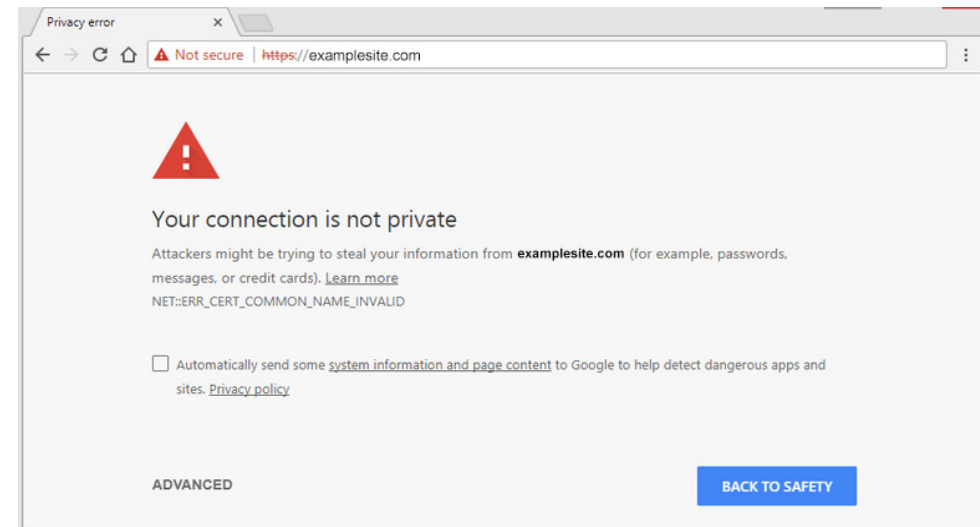
1. SSL Certificates

In October of 2017, Google made a change in their Chrome web browser. They began marking non-HTTPS pages containing input fields as “Not Secure” in the address bar. These pages now display an icon (and often a warning) when users try to submit data through a non-HTTPS page.

What’s the difference between HTTP and HTTPS? Essentially, an HTTPS page encrypts the data submitted on the site, while an HTTP page does not. By taking this step, Google is trying to help the web become more secure.

Now, let’s hope that your business jumped on board the HTTPS train last year. Otherwise, your visitors are likely seeing security warnings when they visit your site. What can you do if your website is still HTTP? We won’t get into all the steps here, but as explained on the right, you need to purchase and install an SSL certificate.

“SSL certificates have been around for years but have been considered increasingly mandatory for the past eighteen months,” says Mike Catania, Chief Technology Officer of PromotionCode.org. “Any company with an online presence that doesn’t utilize this technology to protect their customers is not only behind from an IT perspective, but behind in user experience. Google has been trying to push these sites forward both through negative ranking signals and now with Chrome showing a big “Not Secure” icon in the Address Bar. The good news is that an installation is relatively fast and cheap, so there are officially no excuses left for those companies lagging behind.”



Example of a Chrome security warning

2. Self-Service Development/Reporting Tools

The modern IT department is under more pressure than ever before. They must move quickly. They must shift from a back-office role into a technology driver. They must become a true business partner.

The problem: Most IT departments are already overworked and understaffed. They'd love to move quickly, but they're always putting out fires. They'd love to become a technology driver, but supporting the business keeps them busy already.

How can IT departments do more, despite these challenges? Self-service development platforms.

Over the past few years, we've seen a growing push for these self-service tools. They let end users create basic reports and applications without coding, which removes the burden from IT. As a result, IT has more time for mission-critical tasks.

As explained in [ZDnet's article](#), "Low code development is coming: Welcome to the future," this approach is becoming commonplace. As development demands increase, you cannot ignore self-service platforms in the coming years.



3. Mobile-Friendly Websites and Web Applications

It's no secret that smartphones are here to stay. It's also no secret that usage is still rising. Yet, some businesses aren't adapting. [This article](#) claims that 17% of small businesses with a website still do not have mobile-friendly websites.

Why is this so important? The article above highlights the importance of mobile-friendly websites with a few important facts:

- Mobile web traffic has surpassed desktop traffic. Mobile traffic as a share of total global online traffic in 2017 was 52.64%.
- 57% of internet users say they won't recommend a business with a poorly designed website on mobile.
- Nearly 8 in 10 customers would stop engaging with content that doesn't display well on their device.

The need for mobile-friendliness doesn't stop with websites either. Are your web applications mobile friendly? Can customers access their data via a mobile-friendly customer portal? Can employees access data and applications on their mobile devices? As explained on the right, this is now a "must-have" for business.

"Most people access the internet on the cell phones these days and if you're a businessman moving from one meeting to the next, you don't always have the time or space (or internet connection) to use a laptop," says Nate Masterson, Marketing Manager at [Maple Holistics](#). "Being able to host at least some of your services, or even create a portal through which clients can contact you on their mobile phones is imperative for increasing lead generation and improving customer service. The more accessible your business is, the more likely you are to succeed."



4. Tools to Automate Manual Processes

“Businesses that haven’t adopted even a modicum of automation or begun storing files, and collaborating via cloud-based services are falling by the wayside,” says Kristine Neil, Owner and Creative Director of [Markon Brands](#). “Eventually, the clumsiness of their internal processes will show externally.”

One of the biggest productivity killers across the business world stems from a lack of automation. Every day, employees across the globe waste precious time on tasks that they could (and should) automate.

Why is this so important? Business agility suffers when manual processes run rampant. As explained in this [Forbes article](#), agility is more important than ever:

“In today’s market, not only is change happening quickly, it’s forcing businesses themselves to change quickly. It’s a constant flow of innovation, disruption — and sometimes chaos — that is moving us ahead, even faster than we ever imagined. Many say agility is the key to surviving in the age of technological hairpin turns. In fact, 68% of companies identify agility as one of their most important initiatives.”

What types of tasks should you automate? While it varies by company, here are a few questions to ask:

- Does IT still handle end-user reporting?
- Do you manually enter data into your system?
- Are workflow processes still completed manually?

The list could go on, but it’s a topic covered in more detail in [this article](#). Make sure you analyze your processes and explore ways to automate manual tasks. While it requires time up front, this will let you do more with your current resources.



5. Basic BI/Reporting

Businesses have access to more data than ever before, and it's only growing. The ability to turn this data into actionable insights has become a competitive advantage.

The question is, what are you doing with your data? Are you using data to your advantage, or are you falling behind? Here are a few questions to ask:

- Does your reporting process still run through the IT department?
- Does it take more than a few minutes to access the data you need?
- Is your Business Intelligence (BI) process primarily Excel-based?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then it's time to implement a modern BI strategy. Why is this so important? As explained on the right, even basic analytics will improve your decision-making process significantly.

"The top processes and technologies that we see businesses still neglecting in 2018 is using even basic analytics to make data-driven decisions and sticking to a CRM to manage sales," says Mathew Lazarus, Chief Innovation Officer at [Archbolt](#). "These are interrelated issues, a key symptom for which is when businesses tend to act on assumptions or anecdotes, which leads to inconsistent and retroactive decision-making."

And with so many analytics tools and methodologies out there, there's no excuse when we see a business having to call IT every time they need to run a simple data query or search. That's the whole point of dashboards and reporting."

6. CRM Software

Let's take the last point one step further. One common area that often relies on manual processes is Customer Relationship Management (CRM). As explained below, businesses often use spreadsheets when they should be using CRM software.

"If you are still using notecards or spreadsheets to keep track of current and potential clients then your technology is falling behind," says David Waring, Co-Founder of [FitSmallBusiness.com](#). "CRM software is inexpensive and the better client followup and internal collaboration that results from implementing it should more than pay the additional cost."

Why is this so important to your business? CRM software offers an automated way to keep track of your interactions with customers/prospects. To learn more, here's an [article](#) that explains the importance of CRM software in more detail.

Perhaps the most important reason comes down to customization. As explained on the right, CRM systems help you personalize your correspondence with your contacts.

"A CRM system captures customer contact details, such as demographics, purchasing history, service preferences, etc.," says Andrew Pearson, Founder and Managing Partner of [Intelligencia Limited](#). "This is extremely important in today's personalization environment because the more detail you have on a person, the better you can market to them. Data captured is analyzed and categorized into a unique set of criteria. This information is then used to tier the customer base and tailor service delivery accordingly."



7. Web-Based Applications

The rise of cloud computing and mobility opens up opportunities for businesses of all sizes. In a digital world, businesses aren't limited by physical location as they were in the past. Employees can access the data and applications they need from any location.

The problem is, many businesses aren't prepared for today's digital world. They're still running systems and applications that aren't web-based. Employees can only get things done when they're physically in the office.

While this approach worked in the past, it puts your business at a disadvantage. Productivity suffers. Your business moves slower than it should. In a digital world (where speed is king), this is one sign you might be falling behind.

"If you have white-collar employees, and they are not able to get work done when they are not in the office, then this is a sign that your business is falling behind from a technical standpoint," says David Waring, Co-Founder of FitSmallBusiness.com. "The first thing you will likely need to do is upgrade any software that is not cloud-based, so that your employees can access the needed software wherever they have an internet connection."



8. Collaboration Tools

Let's take the last point one step further. As the world becomes more and more connected, we see two things happening.

First, as mentioned above, the need to physically work in one specific location declines.

Second, the need for instant communication increases. The problem is, standard email communication just isn't fast enough. In a world where speed and agility have become a necessity, you can't always wait until someone reads and responds to your email.

As a result, collaboration tools have become essential. These tools let employees communicate instantly with each other, regardless of location. As explained below, the instant communication provided by collaboration tools is now a must-have for modern businesses.

"Collaboration tools are the foundation for teamwork," says Michelle Kubot MBA, Marketing Director at [Ambrosia Treatment Centers](#). "A company can't function without the ability to communicate information quickly and easily. You may think that's the job of email, but email is 23 years old. There are much better technologies. The most trendy brand in the space is Slack. It works with the efficiency that generations who grew up with computers expect – including chat, hashtags and constant access through a mobile app. Microsoft offers a very similar tool called Teams. In fact, a business that uses Office 365 likely has access to this tool already for free. If you're not streamlining your workflows by integrating collaboration tools, you're falling behind."



9. Basic Security Measures

Security breaches are increasing, and it's only set to get worse. How bad is it? This [article](#) states that more data records were leaked or stolen during the first half of 2017 than all of 2016. Yet, some businesses still don't have basic security measures on their web applications.

Now, we're not talking about employing security specialists who will make your security airtight (though that would be nice). We're talking about the basic steps.

For instance, implementing security measures like 2-factor authentication are both easy and effective. Yet, many businesses haven't done this.

What is 2-factor authentication? Two-factor authentication adds a second level of security to an account log-in. Rather than identifying users with a single factor (user name/password), it adds a second identification factor to the login process—usually a pin number delivered via sms to the user's mobile device.

"Security is becoming more and more important to businesses that want to protect their intellectual property, customer information, and business data," says Taylor Toce, CEO, [Velo IT Group](#). "Further, a lack of security, even in business without regulated data such as HIPPA, SOX, etc will lead to unnecessary business interruptions over the long term. Simple, cost effective technologies such as two-factor authentication (2FA) can prevent attackers from using common attack methods such as password breaches and brute force attacks to gain access to your business technology systems. Two-factor authentication allows business technology users to enter a password and then a code from their mobile device in order to gain access to critical business systems. This is an end-user friendly, and very cost-effective way to protect your data in 2018."

Of course, 2FA is just one basic security measure, but there others you should have in place. For more information, check out this article entitled, "[Solving the Top 10 Application Security Threats](#)."



10. Data Integration Tools

Let me ask you a question: How does data move throughout your system? Is it manually entered into various systems, or is it automated?

Unfortunately, too many businesses still rely on manual data entry and re-entry. Employees spend precious time entering data into their system. Oftentimes, they must enter the same data into multiple systems.

Why is this so bad? This practice not only wastes time, it creates data errors. The average benchmark for data entry error rate is generally acknowledged to be 1%. If your employees are manually entering a lot of data, it's scary to consider how many errors that creates.

The fact is, modern businesses need data integration tools in place to move efficiently and avoid data errors. Now, we're not saying every business needs top-of-the-line integration tools. Your needs really depend on your business. But, if you're still manually entering data across different systems, you need tools to automate the process.

"If your business still uses data entry as a way of moving data from one place to another, you're sadly far behind the times," says Jessica Thiele, Marketing Manager at [VL OMNI](#). "Data integration — the method by which you can automate the movement of your business' data between potentially all sources, from supply chain to end customer — comes in many forms that suit almost all businesses. From low-end plug-and-play connectors that are simply install and run, to point-to-multipoint integrations that allow for real-time data movement with your business' specific rules applied directly to the data transformation from portal to portal, there really isn't any excuse for manual data entry in 2018."

Summary

If you read the tech news sites, you'll see many of the hot trends we've heard a lot about recently, like blockchain, AI, VR/AR, IoT, etc...

Now, there's no doubt that these trends will have a big impact on the business world in the near future. But, let's be honest: The average business isn't going to adopt trends like AI, blockchain, and virtual reality in 2018. These are trends you should definitely research and prepare for, but most will only impact the larger companies in the coming year.

Now, these cutting-edge tech trends will eventually turn into business necessities. But, what former trends are now necessities for today's business? What technologies should businesses be using in 2018 if they hope to remain competitive? In this paper, we explored 10 such technologies that businesses should already be using in 2018. To recap, these technologies include:

- SSL Certificates
- Self-service development/reporting tools
- Mobile-friendly websites and web applications
- Tools to automate manual processes
- Basic BI/reporting
- CRM Software
- Web-based applications
- Collaboration Tools
- Basic Security Measures
- Data integration tools

Technology is evolving faster than ever, and plays an increasingly important role in the business world. Is your company keeping up?

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