

# 2014 outlook: The next wave in digital transformation is breaking

 By [Kevin Meltzer](#)

17 Feb 2014

A combination of maturing technologies and cheaper, more pervasive connectivity helped to spur massive growth for digital commerce, self-service and customer experience in South Africa during 2013. But 2014 has the potential to be even better.

A range of interesting innovations and renewed international investor interest in the web and mobility could set off the next wave in the digital transformation of the ways organisations and consumers interact and transact.

Meanwhile, cheaper Internet access devices and cheaper data costs are helping to put the web and mobile apps in the hands of more people than ever before. Here are a few trends we expect to shape the digital space in South Africa over the next year.



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## Digital powers real-world experiences

The divide between the digital and real-worlds has always been vague, but we are beginning to see them blur together. It's no longer about digital service or physical retail - it's about blending different channels and services from different providers in a manner that offers the most seamless and convenient customer experience.

For example, look at hailing taxis. There are many apps for that - like Zapacab, Uber and SnappCab - that aim to make it simple to request a taxi or car service from your mobile phone, pick you up at the right place, and pay easily for the service. Meanwhile, in stores, your customer service reps will talk to you with a tablet in his or her hands to check stock or show you a feature of the product you want to buy.

And your physical or digital loyalty card will span your favourite retailer's website, smartphone app and point of sale in a way that is transparent to you.

## Mobile keeps growing

Smartphones are changing the digital space more quickly than even the most optimistic forecaster would've predicted a couple of years ago. Cheap smartphones - \$100 or so - are now available and offer a surprisingly decent user experience. They're fluid enough for social networking, transacting on the web, and more, giving poorer consumers access to digital services wherever they are.

And of course, the traditional mid-range and high-end consumer is becoming increasingly dependent on his or her smartphone for a range of everyday tasks. The smartphone is quickly becoming the front-end of the customer experience - so organisations need to be thinking very deeply about how their digital strategy caters for mobile consumers via apps, the web and social media.

## Responsive web design

We're seeing a rapid move towards responsive web design (RWD) in South Africa as companies try to cater for the many devices their customers use to access digital services and platforms.

RWD is all about building sites that look good, load quickly and navigate well, whether you're accessing them by a smartphone, desktop or tablet. It's an essential discipline to master if you're going to offer a consistent experience to each

customer, whichever device they use to interact with your business.

## **New money, new confidence**

Happy days are here again for digital entrepreneurs. We recently heard that Facebook wanted to buy Snapchat for \$3 billion - but the chat service felt that it could hold out for a better offer or an IPO of its own. In 2012, Facebook bought Instagram for \$1 billion, while Twitter is valued at over \$30 billion after its successful debut on the New York Stock Exchange a couple of months ago.

Cynics might question whether we're in a new dotcom-style bubble, but the important point is that investor confidence has returned to the digital space. There will be casualties if (or when depending on your view) the bubble bursts, but for now, there's a lot of money being pumped into digital innovation. Who knows where that could take us over the next three to five years.

For now, 2014 will be a digital year for far more consumers than ever before and companies now have significant opportunities to get closer to their customer.

## **ABOUT KEVIN MELTZER**

Kevin Meltzer is the co-founder of Consology and has been the Business Development Director of the company for over ten years. After graduating from UCT Kevin spent three years in the UK where he gained contact centre experience and managed customer care teams. Kevin went on to pursue his passion in Self-Service and e-billing by co-founding Consology.

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