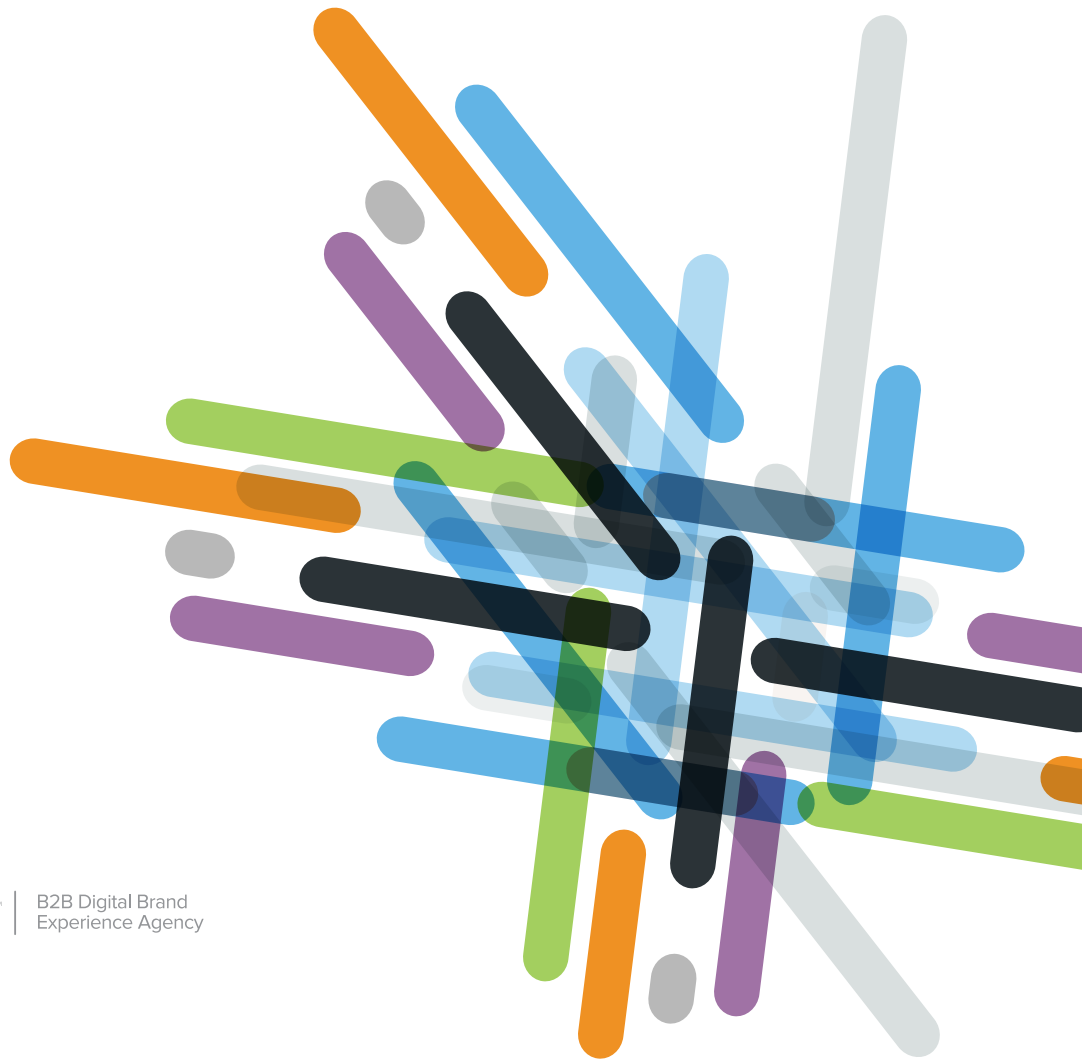


WHITE PAPER | 2021

The Key Industry Trends Reshaping Web Design and Development for B2B Tech in 2021



WebEnertia™ | B2B Digital Brand
Experience Agency

What to Watch for in Web Design and Development for B2B Tech in 2021

In the B2B technology industry, we're accustomed to navigating rapid changes in our marketplace. Still, even for the most forward-thinking firm, 2020 demanded an assortment of far-reaching adjustments.

As we plan for what the future has in store, your ability to remain nimble in response to market conditions remains crucial. Some norms that shifted in response to the pandemic look to impact the way you do business for the long-term. Elsewhere, technological advances will soon shift conventions for marketers and designers.

From digital strategy and development to design and agency-client collaboration, we look at the trends to watch in four areas crucial to your business



Adapting Your Strategy to Market Shifts Remains Crucial for B2B Firms

In the past year, B2B technology firms lost many traditional channels that were crucial to marketing success. Forced to shift focus toward digital, many firms explored new measures to promote their offerings and capture new prospects. Even as vaccination rates have restored a measure of normalcy to the industry, the tactics B2B firms have embraced over the past year are likely to remain. But volatility is woven into the digital marketplace. To remain competitive, firms must be ready to adapt to shifts in both technology and the business climate. Looking ahead, three developments stand to impact the strategic focus of your business.

The Pivot to Digital Is Here to Stay

“Digital First” has been a buzzword for many years. When the pandemic forced many companies to focus primarily on the digital audience, the natural response could have been, “What took you so long?”

Though born of necessity, digital will continue dominating your firm’s marketing efforts for the foreseeable future. Once you’ve opened your business to the expanded possibilities of virtual experiences, the ROI is simply too high to ignore.

Virtual Events and Consulting Continue Delivering Rewards

Once a core area of focus for many firms, industry conferences evolved during the pandemic to accommodate both virtual presentations and audiences. Rather than incurring the costs for travel, lodging, and purchasing a small booth, companies have found considerable value in virtual events.

Though conventions will eventually come back, their digital counterparts that were once seen as stopgap measures will continue to expand both in their use and potential. By focusing on delivering a unique virtual experience, your firm can reach a wider audience than an in-person event could have offered.

In much the same way, B2B firms are also finding faster, more efficient results by engaging with their customers remotely. Instead of relying on phone calls or face-to-face meetings for product support, your firm can offer consultations through Zoom and extend the reach of your business.

“Last year’s necessary shift toward digital underscored that your website is the most powerful sales and marketing tool in your arsenal.”

Websites Offering Rich User Experiences Increase Conversions

In the past, many B2B firms depended on person-to-person interactions to close sales. Last year’s necessary shift toward digital underscored that your website is the most powerful sales and marketing tool in your arsenal.

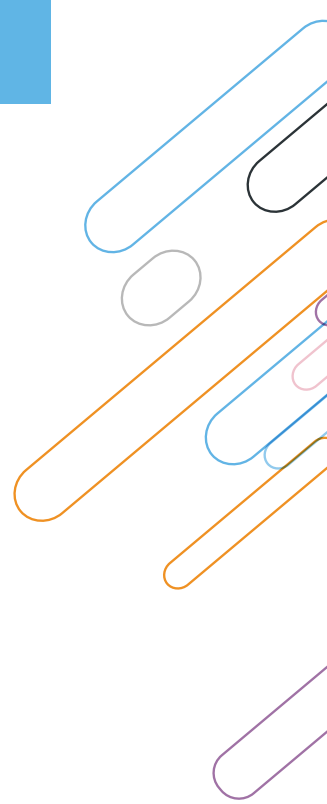
Firms need to focus on ensuring that their website delivers an engaging and informative user experience. When optimized to [attract the right audience](#) through search, your website can resolve your prospect’s issues and provide a rewarding customer journey.

Anticipate a Cookie-Free Digital Future

For the past 20 years, companies have relied upon targeted advertising based on the personal information gathered from cookies. With digital privacy an ongoing concern, Google Chrome will join Safari and Firefox by phasing out third-party cookies that track users across multiple sites by next year.

For businesses that relied on harvesting this information, their loss of third-party cookies constitutes a major blow. However, much like when Europe’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was implemented, companies will adapt and programmatic advertising will go on. Along with ensuring regulatory compliance, your organization can still gather personal data through other avenues.

Rather than focusing on individuals, your website can also monitor and target wider groups of users with similar interests. By evaluating what cookies your website is storing and whether their information will remain useful in 2022, you can shift toward KPIs that focus on group behavior and data segments.



AI-Driven Web Experiences Evolve Toward Customization

Just as ecommerce and streaming services recognize user patterns and surface related content accordingly, you can use AI to provide more personalized experiences for your website users. Once only available to large companies with deep pockets, more machine learning solutions have been entering the market to bring the technology within reach.

If your users are regularly using certain search terms, AI and machine learning allow you to engineer results more true to their interests. In addition, if users are interacting with specific site features like product pages, your site can respond to those patterns with related content.

“Rather than waiting for your design team to alter the position of a CTA and evaluate the results, AI will automatically implement changes based on automated testing.”

Machine learning is also being applied to A/B testing tools so firms can quickly implement design changes. Rather than waiting for your design team to alter the position of a CTA and evaluate the results, AI will automatically implement changes based on automated testing.

By anticipating and embracing some of these expected shifts to marketing strategy, your business can better respond to unexpected changes. That flexibility, ultimately, is the linchpin for your marketing strategy.



Steve Ohanians

Co-founder, Director of Digital Strategy



Are Your Developers Ready for the Future of Data Privacy Protection?

When Europe's GDPR was enacted in 2018 to protect the personal information of website users, many unprepared organizations had to scramble. To remain accessible to EU users, firms had to ensure their sites asked users permission before storing cookies. Not long after, California adapted its own consumer privacy act (CCPA), underscoring the reality that consumer demand for digital privacy wasn't going away.

Even if your organization isn't located in California, you need to investigate whether your site is in compliance with CCPA guidelines. Whatever lies ahead for digital privacy, future standards will most likely incorporate restrictions outlined in CCPA along with further consumer protections. Failing to respond now will only leave your business further behind.

Organizations need to prepare for the next wave in privacy protection, which has been spurred by some of the biggest names in tech. Where earlier regulations asked users permission to be tracked by third-party cookies, Google has announced it will no longer support them in its Chrome browser as of 2022.

As marketers, your goals are dependent upon your ability to remain a step ahead of a shifting business landscape. With the coming loss of third-party user data, does your B2B firm have a plan for the changes ahead?

Navigating Website Personalization and Regulatory Compliance

Though GDPR and CCPA both constitute shifts to the way businesses gather user information, they are both consent-based privacy changes. With the decision to deprecate the technology associated with third-party cookies, Google, Firefox, and Apple have closed a vital data stream to marketers.

With third-party cookies out of the picture, you have to ensure your site asks visitors for their permission to accept cookies with your site's domain (or, first-party cookies). Once you gain your customers' approval to monitor their behavior on your site, that first-party data takes on even greater importance.

Find the Insights You Need Without Third-party Data

Though focused only on your site, first-party data illustrate valuable patterns in your users' browsing behavior. With those insights, you can identify shortcomings in your marketing funnel performance. Plus, by understanding the areas of your site that draw a user's interest, you can offer a more personalized experience in its design by highlighting your products, services, or supplemental content that are related.

“Before third-party cookies are lost in 2022, your development teams need to evaluate the types of information your site is storing and whether it will still be useful.”

Before third-party cookies are lost in 2022, your development teams need to evaluate the types of information your site is storing and whether it will still be useful. Though Microsoft will be the last remaining browser to support third-party cookies, you limit your site's audience by adhering to expired technology. However, in the near future, you can look to new tools that will provide similar actionable insights.

Event Conversion Measurement API

Third-party cookies allowed organizations to recognize when a click on an ad led to a conversion. While upcoming changes to Google Chrome will limit this ability, the browser will soon offer an alternative through the [Event Conversion Measurement API](#).

Though still in its early stages of development, the API is built to measure conversions in a way that preserves the user's privacy. Instead of recognizing a single user across multiple sites like a third-party cookie, it connects whether a user clicked on an ad with their subsequent action on your site.

As Google adds more privacy protections to the API during development, it could offer valuable information about ad performance for your B2B firm.

Privacy-Preserving Ad-Click Attribution

Now in development for Apple's Safari, [Privacy-Preserving Ad Click Attribution](#) provides another means to gather user data without third-party cookies.

Rather than uniquely identifying users across multiple websites, this tool monitors ad interactions. The page hosting the ad will store click data and then matches clicks against any resulting conversions on the linked website.

Though still a work-in-progress as part of Safari's Experimental Features, Privacy Preserving Ad Click Attribution will allow your firm another avenue for tracking ad performance.

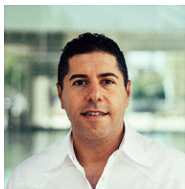
Personal Online Data Stores (Pods)

Further in the future, users may be able to control their data by storing personal information in secure, decentralized data stores called "Pods." Developed by one of the inventors of the World Wide Web at MIT, [the Pod project](#) looks to improve user privacy by allowing greater control over the information they share.

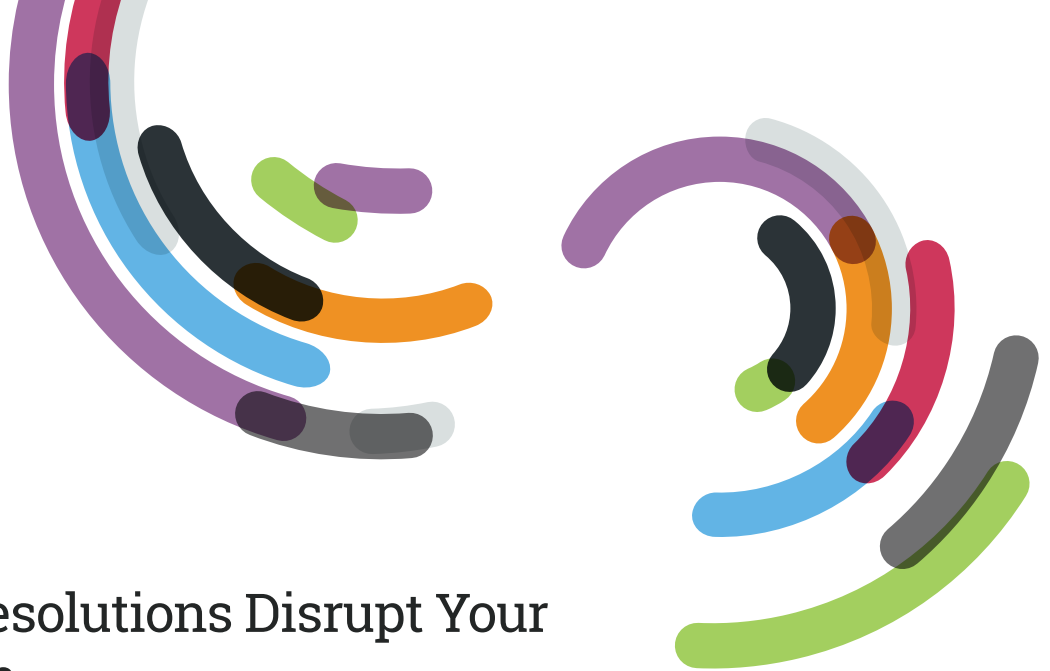
“Users can use multiple pods to store specific kinds of data and grant or restrict access to any organization.”

With this model, users can use multiple pods to store specific kinds of data and grant or restrict access to any organization. If adopted, companies could be allowed access to select personal information through a secure link, but not store it. However, the Pod project is likely years away from large-scale adoption.

By the time 2022 arrives, third-party cookies will effectively be legacy technology. In the years ahead, user privacy will remain an ongoing consideration. But your firm can both satisfy your customer's concerns while still gaining access to the information you need.



Valod Amirkhanian
Co-founder, Director of Technology



Don't Let 4K Resolutions Disrupt Your Website Design

With ongoing developments like [mobile-first indexing](#), most B2B firms remain rightly focused on providing an equitable visual experience for site visitors who are using phones or tablets.

But for as much focus as the mobile audience has earned, desktop users cannot be overlooked. In the B2B tech industry, desktop platforms are still preferred by customers evaluating a purchase decision. And, with the advance of high-resolution 4K monitors, businesses must navigate a new design problem.

Driven by a combination of lower technology costs and more people working from home, the adoption of 4K monitors expanded in 2020. After applying so much focus to ensuring their websites offer a compelling experience on smaller screens, firms have to ensure their site designs can also expand.

How 4K Monitors Break Website Designs

Though 4K monitor sales have spiked, B2B firms clearly can't afford to view their mobile users as an afterthought. However, you have to allow for the shifting design specifications required to ensure your design remains responsive to higher resolutions as well.

On larger, 4K monitors, the most well-considered designs can look or feel broken without the right accommodations. When 4K users navigate to a site that hasn't been designed with responsiveness in mind, font sizes are drastically reduced, which can hinder readability and navigation. In other instances, images and navigation bars can stretch far across the screen and break the user experience.

To ensure your site delivers a consistent experience, your design needs to take a flexible but firm approach.

Accommodate Higher Resolutions with a Responsive Design Grids

The increased adoption of 4K stands as one of the [core design trends of 2021](#). But your firm's website doesn't necessarily need to deliver a high-resolution experience. A 4K site requires users to load massive, 4K images into their browsers, which isn't practical for the majority of internet speeds.

Most desktop displays accommodate high-definition, 1080p resolution, which has been the standard for most website designs. Your design should be flexible enough to take advantage of the wider possibilities of high resolution.

“Your website should have an established cut-off point where your site's design reaches a hard stop rather than continuing toward the edge of 4K resolution.”

Though your design should be scalable, it should also provide limits. Your website should have an established cut-off point where your site's design reaches a hard stop rather than continuing toward the edge of 4K resolution. And, to keep from disrupting your design, provide appropriate limits on how far your design will go.

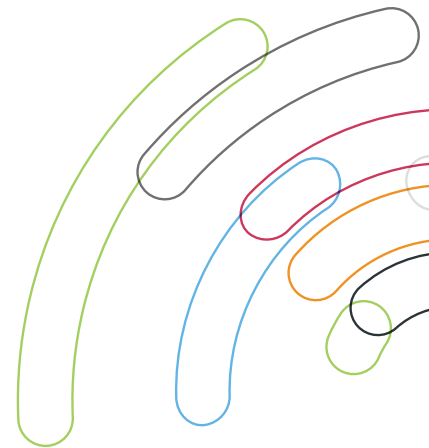
Know Your Audience to Establish a Framework for Your Web Design

Rather than adopting a larger framework for your site at every resolution, you should acknowledge where most of your site traffic lies. If the bulk of your users remain at 1080p, you can focus your design efforts toward that viewport, which refers to the visible area of a web page.

But with a design grid that's responsive and also establishes a hard stop, you can set limits for how far your design will expand. A website that floats within a constrained framework at its highest resolution still offers a good user experience. In the end, that's your focus for every platform.



Danny Halvorson
Partner, Creative Director





Agency-Client Communication at the Emotional Level Remains Critical

When you work with an outside web design agency, the success of your project has always relied on communication. From the beginning, both sides of an engagement need to understand a project's terms and expectations.

But the past year required dramatic shifts to the way an [agency-client collaboration](#) functions. Your ability to form a close relationship with a design partner has grown more crucial. With everyone working just as hard and under difficult circumstances, you can't work with an agency that isn't willing to adapt to your needs.

To deliver their best work, an agency needs a set process. But you need to ensure that it's flexible enough to respond to your needs and make the engagement as easy as possible.

Personal Connection Improves Relationships and Delivers Stronger Results

When your firm teams up with a web design agency, your prime consideration is the quality of their work. But the best work inevitably results when you and your creative partner have formed a strong relationship. In the context of the uncertainty that 2020 introduced, that relationship demands more communication and connection at an emotional level.

As a client, you should expect your agency to work toward ensuring that you feel heard and understood throughout the life of a project. If an aspect of the workflow or design approach isn't working, your agency should be quick to adapt.

Production Tools Are Not One-Size-Fits-All

As an engagement begins, your agency will use a set of tools designed to facilitate communication around your project. At WebEnerTia, we use Basecamp, but our clients may be more familiar with Jira, Asana, or other platforms.

If your team is struggling to adopt a new tool, your project manager should take the initiative to find a solution. Maybe your team isn't using it properly, which means your agency hasn't provided proper training. Or, the platform serves your agency's needs but has trouble handling content and feedback.

When these issues arise, your agency needs to recognize your feedback and adapt accordingly. If your team works most effectively on Jira, then your agency should tailor its efforts to accommodate whatever provides the most seamless path to collaboration.

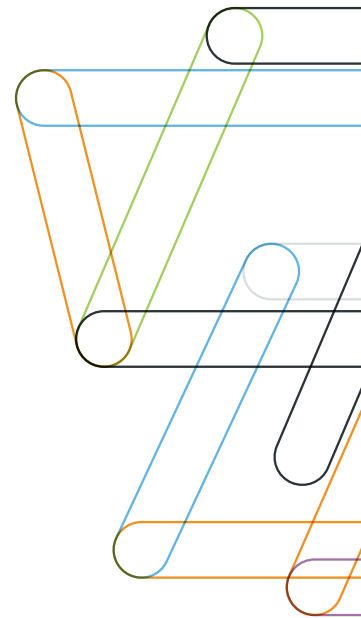
Emotional Intelligence Drives the Agency-Client Relationship

As your collaboration with an agency begins, your project manager offers a vital point of connection with your firm. By introducing a project manager to the engagement early, both you and your agency can evaluate whether you've found the right fit.

“Their ability to display soft skills such as empathy and emotional intelligence around your concerns sets any collaboration in the right direction.”

Apart from the client services director, project managers are the main point of contact between you and your agency. Their ability to display soft skills such as empathy and emotional intelligence around your concerns sets any collaboration in the right direction. As the partnership progresses, regular check-ins and quarterly [NPS surveys](#) provide further opportunities to be proactive about any potential issues.

Plus, as your project manager gets to know your firm better, they can make judgment calls about how to resolve any issues your team is having during the engagement. The deeper the understanding your agency can develop with your needs, the more successful – and sustainable – your collaboration becomes.



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Flexibility Is the Greatest Asset for Every B2B Firm

The past year underscored that there are some changes that no business can truly predict. However, when marketing conditions shift beyond your control, your firm’s stability depends on its ability to adapt and anticipate what’s next.

Ultimately, you can’t control the future. But by applying the insights available in your marketing tools and tactics, you can control how well your firm remains prepared.



Annie Raygoza
Director of Client Relations

WebEnertia is a full-service Silicon Valley digital agency with offices in San Jose and San Francisco. With a 20+ years experience in delivering award-winning results for its clients, WebEnertia specializes in building strategic digital brand and web experiences for B2B technology companies. Clients include Cisco Systems, Intel, McAfee, and Riverbed.