NOW

2026 Digital Forecast

Trends in technology

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In 2026, several key digital and technological trends are expected to shape industries and society.

For many organisations, 2026 represents the tipping point where automation, intelligent CX, and data-driven prediction move from innovation to necessity.

Those who adopt early will unlock efficiency, create competitive advantage, and build digital experiences that feel effortless, intuitive, and truly human.

Topics

Hyper-personalisation powered by generative AI

AI search overtakes traditional search completely

Autonomous commerce

The emotional layer becomes a mandatory UX standard

Predictive everything: Pre-emptive CX becomes the norm

Human + AI reasoning hubs replace old operating models

Digital twins for people not just systems

The rise of AI agents as the new digital workforce

Digital forecast highlights

Hyper-personalisation will be powered by generative AI that understands you in real time. Every interaction, behaviour, preference, and context feeds experiences that adapt instantly.

Autonomous commerce sees the shift from guided journeys to self-running purchases. AI predicts needs, compares, times, and executes transactions automatically. Customers set preferences and budgets, and the system handles the rest.

AI-powered conversational search becomes the dominant interface. Instead of keywords into a search bar, users ask full questions, describe intent, upload images, or speak naturally and receive answers instantly.

Customer experience is **predictive, preventative, and pre-emptive**. AI continuously analyses behaviour, context, history, and signals across touchpoints to anticipate needs, remove friction before it appears, and intervene at the right time.

The emotional layer becomes a mandatory UX standard, with digital experiences expected to recognise emotional context, adapt tone and interaction style, and respond with empathy.

Operating models built around hierarchy, workflows, and static approvals give way to **human + AI reasoning hubs**. The power is combining AI's ability to analyse vast data sets, simulate outcomes, and surface insights, with human judgment, ethics, creativity, and accountability.

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Hyper-personalisation powered by generative AI

In 2026, hyper-personalisation will be powered by generative AI that understands you in real time. Every interaction, behaviour, preference, and context shapes experiences that adapt instantly. Content, offers, services, and interfaces will be generated uniquely for each person when they need it. This marks a shift from mass digital experiences to true one-to-one engagement at scale. Customers will expect brands, governments and service providers to know who they are and personalise interactions without friction. For organisations to take advantage, they will need clean data, ethical governance, real-time integration, and to develop trust by design.

Impacts

- One-to-one digital experiences at scale

- Real-time decisioning across the full journey

- Stronger trust through ethical personalisation

- New operational models for marketing, CX, and service

AI search overtakes traditional search completely

In 2026, AI-powered conversational search will become the dominant interface for discovery. Instead of typing keywords into a search bar, users ask full questions, describe intent, upload images, or speak naturally and receive complete, context-aware answers instantly. Search shifts from finding links to delivering outcomes. AI search engines and embedded assistants will summarise content and recommend actions for users. Organisations that optimise for AI-driven discovery, structured data, and conversational retrieval will become the new digital front door.

Impacts

- Traditional SEO gives way to AI discovery optimisation.

- Websites shift from destinations to data sources:

- Accelerated customer journeys

- Loss of visibility for unprepared organisations

- New compliance, trust, and accuracy requirements

Autonomous commerce - From shopping journeys to self-running purchases

Commerce shifts from guided shopping journeys to self-running purchases, where AI systems predict needs, compare options and execute transactions automatically, with human approval. In 2026, customers set preferences, budgets, and rules, and intelligent systems handle the rest. This redefines the relationship between consumers and brands. Loyalty is gained by which platforms and providers integrate most seamlessly into a customer's autonomous purchasing ecosystem. Trust shifts to the machine that buys on the customer's behalf.

Impacts

- The move to a single automated decision loop
- Platforms and data integrations become more valuable than branding.
- Loyalty and competition become algorithmic.
- Operational gains and margin pressure simultaneously increase.

The emotional layer becomes a mandatory UX standard

User experience is judged on how it makes people feel. In 2026, the emotional layer becomes a mandatory UX standard, with digital experiences expected to recognise emotional context, adapt tone and interaction style, and respond with empathy. Interfaces evolve to sense frustration, confusion, urgency, or confidence through behavioural signals, language, pace, and cues, then adjust in real time. As AI becomes the first point of contact across service, commerce, healthcare, and government, emotionally unaware digital experiences will feel cold, transactional, and untrustworthy. Organisations that fail to embed emotional intelligence into their UX will struggle with engagement, and adoption.

Impacts

- Emotion-aware interfaces become a competitive differentiator.

- New expectations for service quality.

- Stronger inclusion and accessibility outcomes

- Tighter governance around emotional data

Predictive everything: Pre-emptive CX becomes the norm

In 2026, customer experience is predictive, preventative, and pre-emptive. AI continuously analyses behaviour, context, history, and signals across every touchpoint to anticipate needs and intervene at the right time. CX shifts to preventing problems from occurring. For organisations, this marks the end of static journeys and segmented interactions. Every customer, citizen, and member now moves through dynamic and adaptive journeys that change in real time. Organisations that master predictive CX will feel effortless to engage with; those that don't will feel slow, repetitive, and disconnected.

Impacts

- Issues are resolved before customers are aware of them.

- Friction is eliminated across the entire digital journey.

- Conversion, retention, and loyalty increase simultaneously.

- Service demand and cost-to-serve decrease materially.

- CX performance becomes a real-time competitive weapon.

Human + AI reasoning hubs replace old operating models

In 2026, traditional operating models built around hierarchy, linear workflows, and static approvals give way to human + AI reasoning hubs. These hubs combine AI's ability to analyse vast data sets, simulate outcomes, and surface insights, with human judgment, ethics, creativity, and accountability. Decisions will be continuously refined in real time. Instead of relying on slow reporting cycles and opinion-driven decisions, leaders operate in live environments where evidence, prediction, and human oversight converge.

Impacts

- Decisions shift from opinion-led to evidence-led.

- Strategy, service, and operations move in real time.

- Risk is surfaced earlier and managed faster.

- Human judgment is strengthened, not replaced.

- Organisational agility increases across all functions.

Digital twins for people, not just systems

In 2026, digital twins will evolve beyond infrastructure to model people: customers, employees, patients, and citizens. These human digital twins dynamically represent behaviour, preferences, needs, risks, and life context in real time. Powered by AI and continuously updated by live data, they enable organisations to simulate outcomes, personalise services, and intervene proactively at an individual level. This unlocks a new era of personalised service, care, learning, and engagement at scale. By predicting customer churn, tailoring education, financial guidance, and workforce support, digital twins for people shift organisations from reactive service delivery to anticipatory human-centred design.

Impacts

- Personalisation moves from segments to individuals.

- Proactive interventions replace reactive service models.

- Risk, well-being, and performance are predicted earlier.

- Service design becomes continuously adaptive.

- Ethics, consent, and trust become mission-critical.

The rise of AI agents as the new digital workforce

In 2026, AI agents move beyond tools and chatbots to become a fully embedded digital workforce. These agents plan, reason, execute multi-step tasks, integrate across systems, and operate continuously with human oversight. For organisations facing talent shortages, cost pressure, and rising service expectations, AI agents redefine productivity at scale. Entire functions now operate as hybrid workforces, with human teams focusing on strategy, ethics, and creativity, while agents handle execution at machine speed.

Impacts

- Productivity scales without proportional headcount growth.

- Operational costs reduce across core service functions.

- 24/7 execution becomes the default operating state.

- Human roles shift toward strategy, creativity, and oversight.

- Workforce design becomes a board-level digital priority.
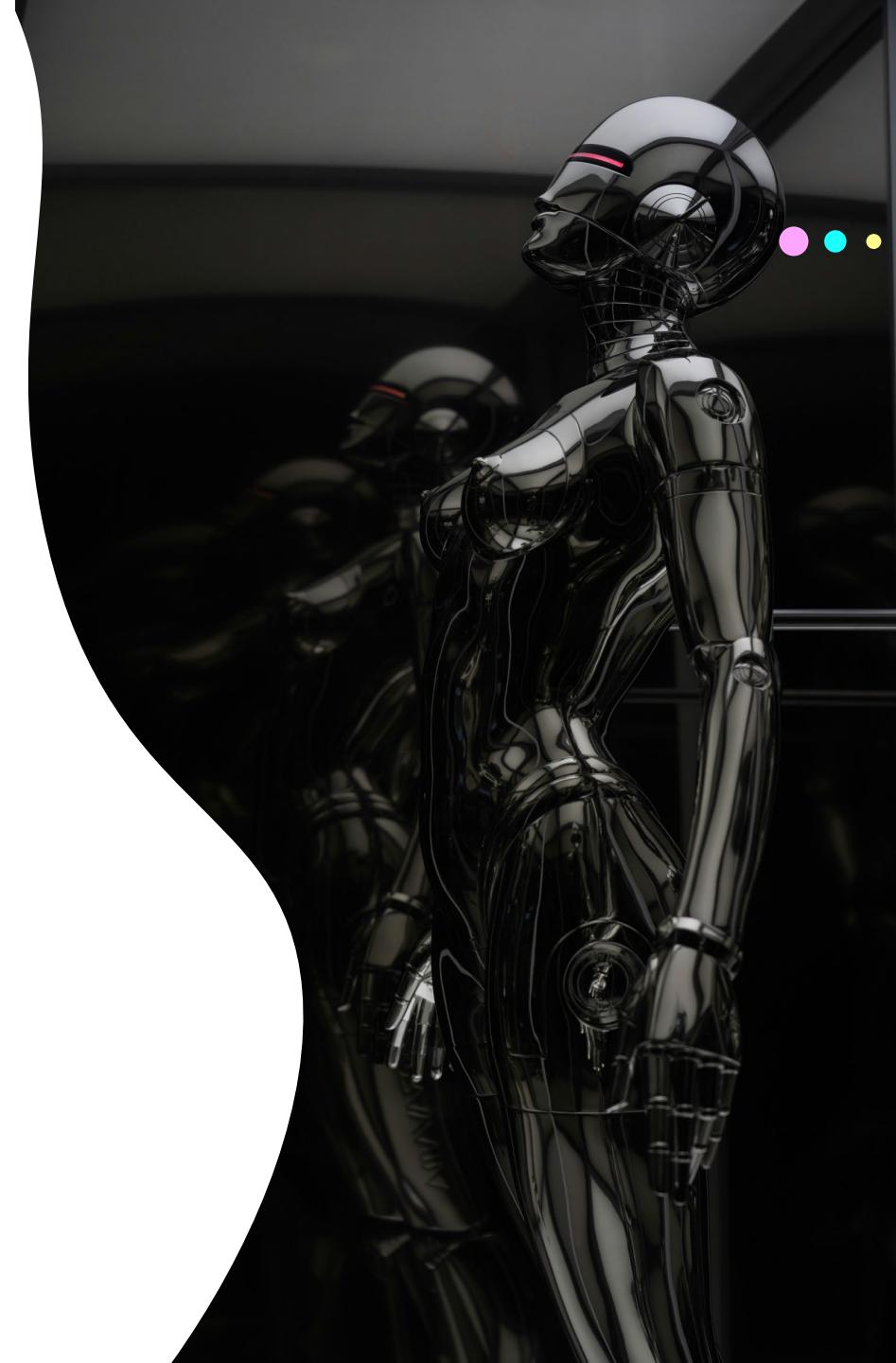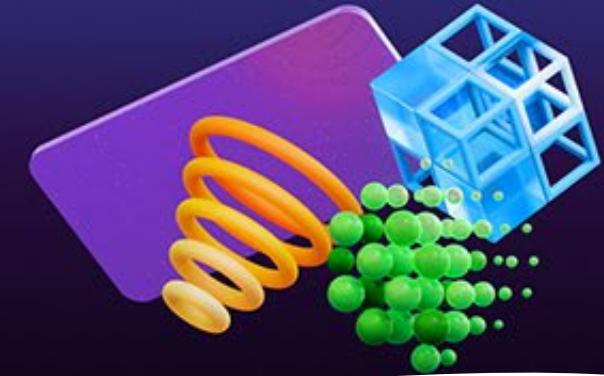
Former Google X Chief Business Officer and bestselling author **Mo Gawdat** argues that AI should be seen as a partner, an evolution toward "augmented intelligence" where human intuition and machine precision combine to create exponential value.

Despite our best intentions, people often say one thing and do another. This **"Say–do gap"** is problematic in customer research, where people's answers often differ from actual behaviours, yet businesses continue to rely on this data to make critical decisions.

The **boardroom** anticipates the future. AI is the top priority, yet many leaders struggle to act. Success means shifting from knowing everything to knowing what matters, capturing human intelligence as scalable digital assets, and creating AI "digital twins" to validate decisions.

By 2035**, Generation Beta** will be the first to grow up with AI at the centre of their lives. AI-augmented careers will define the future, where success depends on working with AI, not against it. We must innovate fast while designing for safety, ethics, and trust. The challenge is acting with purpose, demanding progress, and talking openly about AI.

Billions invested into **AI systems that have grown rather than been engineered**, evolving like digital organisms beyond full human understanding. Large Language Models now operate with billions of parameters, demonstrating behaviours mimicking persuasion, deception, and self-preservation.

AI is reshaping marketing and advertising, accelerating creativity, hyper-personalising content, and transforming business models. **Sir Martin Sorrell** says impact spans five areas: faster, cheaper content; personalisation at scale; algorithm-driven media buying; efficiency through AI and cloud; and democratisation of knowledge across organisations.
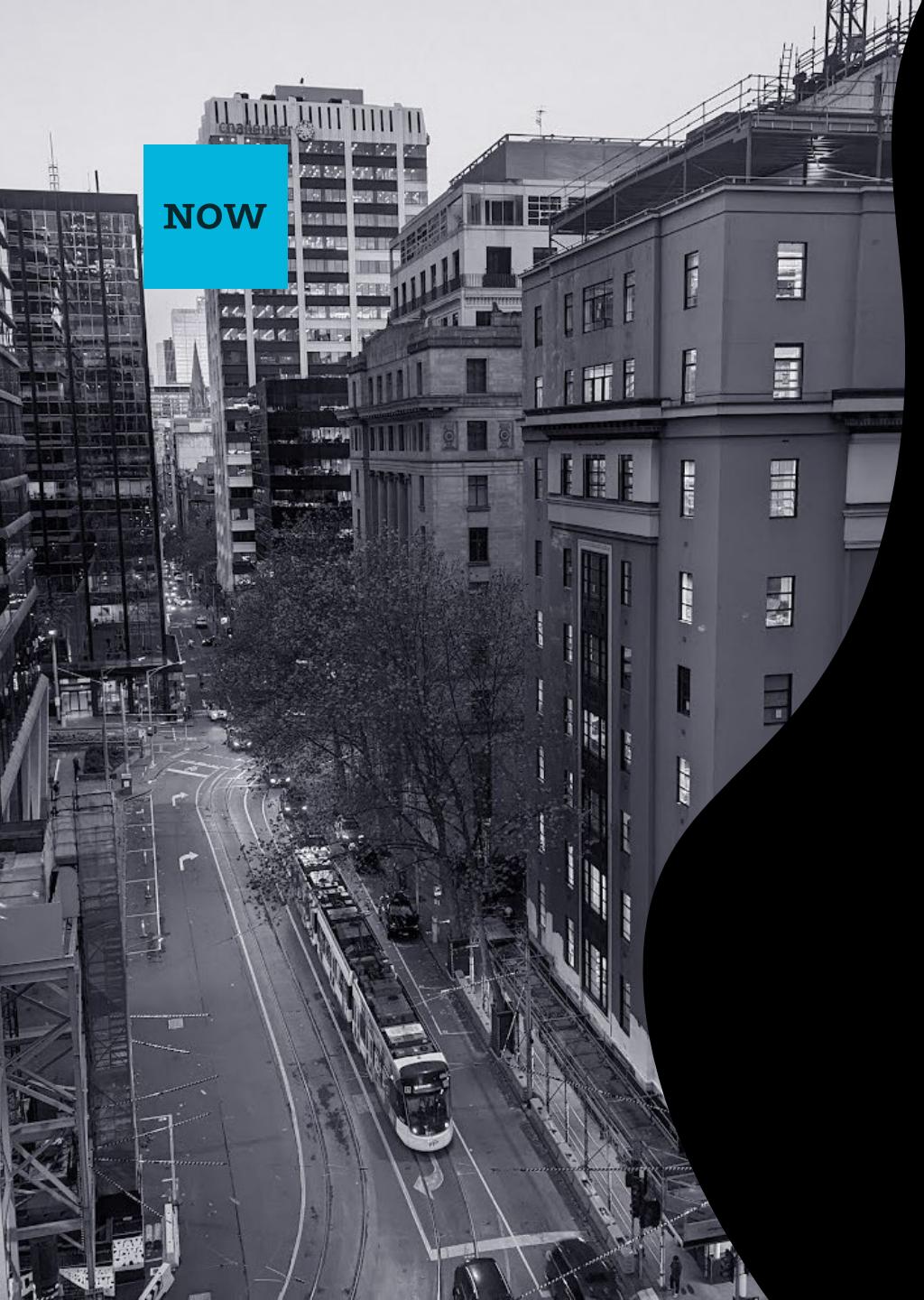
Who is NOW Digital?

NOW Digital is a renowned digital agency, recognised for its expertise in **strategic leadership** and **user experience-driven digital transformation services**.

NOW is equipped with the organisational capability to provide a full range of in-house services for the planning, development, maintenance, management, and marketing of digital-driven projects on cloud architecture, forming the core of our business.

Our team has deep expertise in usability and accessibility, with a focus on W3C and WCAG standards, ensuring we design and implement solutions that meet diverse user needs. We cultivate a collaborative culture, fostering open communication between our agency, clients, and partners.

Our integrated approach brings together agile-driven, blended teams of the best-fit staff from NOW and client third parties, maximising value for the client.

Additionally, NOW is known for strong project management, flexibility, and adaptability, using a hybrid of waterfall and Agile methodologies to deliver functionality sooner and improve the overall quality and outcome of projects.

NOW's services
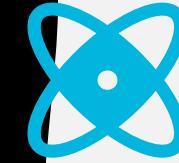
We strategise, design, build and support your digital experience. Our services are flexible to your evolving requirements with **transformation** and **delivery** foremost in our minds.

Discovery and design

- Digital strategy
- Analysis and requirements
- UX and UI
- Technology road-mapping
- Qualitative research

Technical delivery

- DXP/CMS implementation
- Web development
- E-commerce
- Integration services
- Mobile apps

Optimise and support

- Optimisation strategies
- DXP/CMS support
- CRO
- BAU services
- Infrastructure monitoring and support

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Thank you

Want to chat further?

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