



2020

Ariad

Digital & Workplace

Trends Review

Insights from Ariad's experts in the field

Ariad

Through the maze of change.

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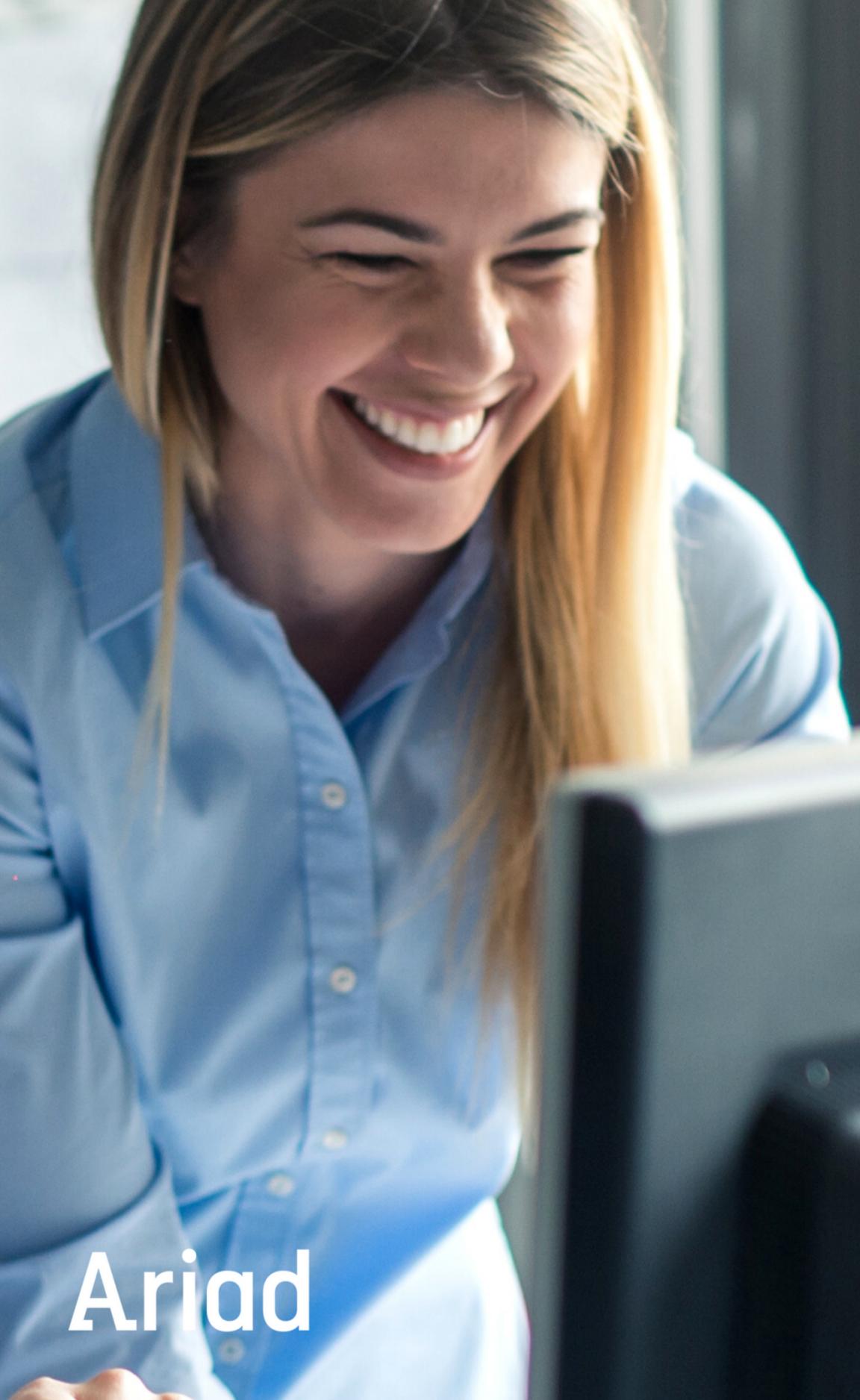
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A closer look

We took the biggest trend predictions of 2020 and offered them up for judgement to the most qualified minds we know: our consultants and team, the people working hands-on with these topics every day for leading European brands.





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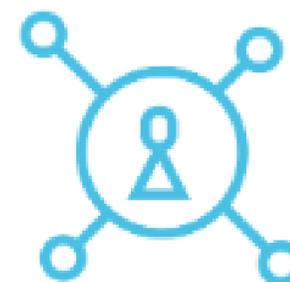
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About us

Ariad offers consultancy and staffing in digital customer experience (CX), operating in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain. We're active in the top five brands per industry, counting with 85+ active consultants working on in-house projects at clients, as well as staffing of digital specialties and executive roles.



Consultancy



Outsourcing &
project staffing



Direct & executive search

With a goal of growing and optimizing business, we work with the top digital experts who can make real impact. But just as important as expertise, we highly value culture fit and never forget to focus on the human side of change management.

What path **A**re we taking?

The trends everyone is talking about for 2020 are still just that, talk. It's impossible to know exactly which ideas will dominate—in other words, **which steps your company must take to get ahead** in the market. Moreover, some ideas, like personalization, can also be applied in so many different ways that the possibilities can seem overwhelming.

How can we proceed? We can **take note from our successful clients** who repeatedly push the envelope of innovation and deliver thrilling customer experiences. Across all sectors, they tend to have these things in common:

- They have a **mentality that welcomes challenges** and wants to evolve.
- They complement their teams with **the right specialists** who can drive real change.
- They **listen to their customers** (almost obsessively) and anticipate their needs.
- They **react to evolving consumer expectations** proactively and look ahead at potential opportunities before customers even realize they need it.

The one bet we're making for 2020 (and beyond) is on something less temporary. At Ariad we have seen one idea prove crucial year after year: making sure you have **the right people in the right places**. Be it the expert for a project, or the just-right person who can lead your organization into the future, it's a proven recipe for success. Beyond knowing the trends and their bigger implications, we know **what it takes to make digital change happen**—the team—and the skills and attitudes that make up a winning one.

Jeroen Gelyen

Ariad Finance and Operations Director



What's in this report

Some of the most predicted 2020 trends have been evaluated by a variety of Ariad's digital consultants. We asked them to rate the trend from 1 to 5, 1 suggesting that the prediction was way off, and 5 meaning they wholeheartedly agree.



One predicted trend is described on each page, followed by the Ariad consultant score, which is the average of all rating from Ariad digital consultants. Each trend and rating is also presented with discussion about the viability of the trend, with quotes from the consultants.

Read on to find their comments and what other trends they think should have made the list!



Digital marketing trend forecast for 2020

Ariad

What are the big trends that will shake up the digital marketing scene in 2020?

There are plenty of articles making predictions, but what is one voice compared to many? We rounded up some of the top digital marketing trends predicted to be huge in 2020, and brought them to our network of consultants to get their take.

The following five 2020 digital marketing trends have been evaluated by a variety of Ariad's digital consultants. We asked them to rate the trend from 1 to 5, 1 suggesting that the prediction was way off, and 5 meaning they wholeheartedly agree.

Read on to find their comments and what other trends they think should have made the list!

Digital marketing trend 1:

Web is dead

Social media will be the greatest focus for companies when communicating with their customers. Websites will not disappear, but social media outlets will be valued over website and other channels.

Ariad consultant score: 2.82



Our consultants have mixed feelings about the idea of social media taking the main stage, with their average opinion being slight disagreement.

On the con side, it's noted that social media often has low conversion rates making it less attractive to businesses, or questionable material skewing into fake news that make users wary. There is also a large part of the world that are just getting online now, and they are unlikely to be heavy social media users any time soon.

However, those who do believe social media to be the future, see it as a medium more pervasive than ever. "Social media will grow from a web supporting medium to a stand-alone web platform for customer engagement and sales in the future," says Anthony Stabourlos. Etienne Gonsette reminds that we must look out for "not only social media, but connected media also (watch, personal assistant, fridge, car...)".



It's not just social media. Big players will try everything to keep people in their own ecosystem and hold their attention: Facebook is building e-commerce capabilities on Instagram, Google is expanding its new Shopping experience with a single cart checkout for all items sold through Google Shopping, Google SERP are getting more relevant with added information and features, Amazon is always offering new benefits for Prime users, etc.

- Samuel Caink
Marketing Specialist

Digital marketing trend 2:

Full circle

More than ever, it will be critical for companies to focus on fully owning the customer experience from end-to-end. This is will be a great differentiator among brands in the near future.

Ariad consultant score: 4.36



No doubts about it here--everyone agrees on the importance of owning the customer experience!

“UX is key and is getting stronger year after year” is a sentiment shared by our consultants. Not controlling the full customer experience is missing a huge opportunity, and the brands that really do it well have the chance to quickly become standout favorites in the market. Anthony Stabourlos states it clearly: “If companies don't own the customer full-funnel, they will lose them to the competitors.”

It's important to understand the full customer journey and research it well, in order to meet customer need--or ideally exceed it. Reducing cognitive load, reducing frustration, increasing delight, and weaving in branding elements are the name of the game for 2020 and beyond.



Making sure there is absolutely no friction in the relationship between your brand or product and your customer, and additionally offering them these small extra features will transform customers into brand lovers.

- Jovi Verheyen
Customer Experience and UX/UI Expert

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Digital marketing trend 3:

It's a bot time

Chatbots have been a growing feature for many online spaces, but the use of chatbots will skyrocket like crazy in the near future. Companies must build one or bust!

Ariad consultant score: 2.91



The general consensus on chatbots could be considered cautiously optimistic. There is agreement that the use of chatbots is growing, but a lot depends on how they are implemented. There is a need for structured, accessible data, and there's a lot of intelligence to build. As Terry Jacques puts it, "The use of chatbots will grow. Definitely. But grow 'like crazy'? I'm not so sure."

Jovi Verheyen has a similar take, doubting that the use of chatbots will grow as much as some sources predict. "The technology is too immature to build chatbots that end-users can use without friction. The chatbots that are being developed right now generally lack depth. These chatbots focus on only one user journey and alienate all other users with different questions/problems who cannot be helped and need to contact a brand via different channels."

That said, the majority of consultants do believe that chatbots will become more common in the future, we just might have to wait beyond 2020 to give technology and understanding the time to evolve. The focus should be on guiding customers, actually helping them, in the best way possible.



Direct communication is important so that the customer can feel he/she is being helped or guided, although it is more important to build something that works instead of just providing the possibility.

- **Stijn Haesendonck**
Product Owner and Project Manager

Looking for expert bot-builders? We can help! [>](#)

Digital marketing trend 4:

Brand demand

While the features of a product used to define a company's power and consumer interest, this will give way to the strength of their brand instead.

Thanks to this, influencer marketing will steadily rise as it helps define brands and build communities of engaged fans.

Ariad consultant score: 3.00



Ok, so maybe this one won't be the trend of the year! While the power of brands is growing, influencer marketing is less than exciting. Our consultants generally had no strong feelings about this trend, and a lot of them, like Terry Verbiest, are simply "getting sick of 'influencer marketing'".

It's not that simple to leverage a strong influencer. While they can add a lot of value, being able to connect them to a brand is no simple feat. The community they have built is theirs, and they worked hard to grow that following. A brand would need to seamlessly be part of the influencer's own brand in order to feel authentic.

This doesn't mean that we won't continue to see influencer marketing! It's clear however that not everyone with a social media following will earn the *influencer* title.



Influencer Marketing is already stagnating into a new standard, but the requirements will be bigger before calling someone an Influencer.

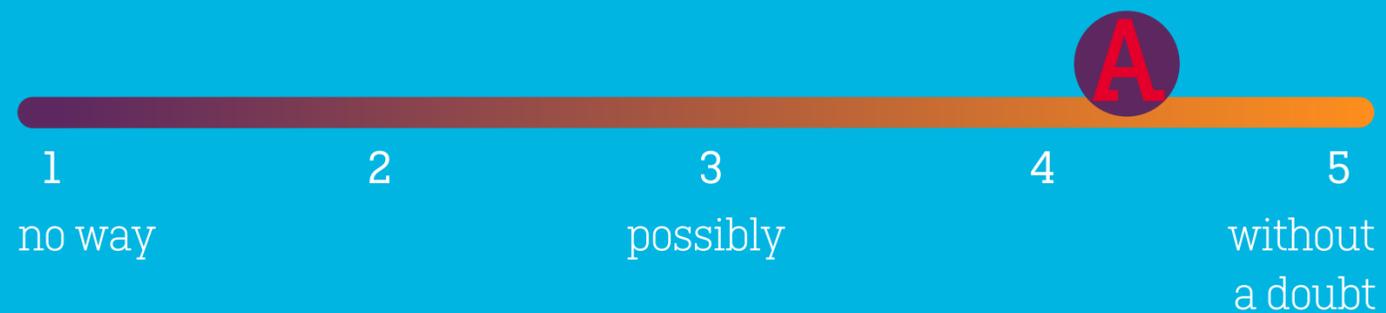
- Anthony Stabourlos
Social Media and Marketing Strategy Specialist

Digital marketing trend 5:

"Big Capabilities" reign

There's been talk of *personalization* for some time now, but it's about to get real. Leveraging data and analytics to understand context and personalization will become the norm for smart companies.

Ariad consultant score: 4.18



The personalization outlook here is very positive! Gathering smart data is sure to be an important focus of 2020, along with even smarter interpretations of that data. Even more so than the collection of data will be the application, and the ways in which it can enhance user experience and customer value .

As Anthony Stabourlos puts it, personalization “is a must. We don't have another option anymore than adapting.” Of course, in order to be successful, this means knowing how to interpret the data. Companies need to make sure that they are using data to serve their customers’ needs--not just using it to make a profit.



Personalisation is tricky. In a post-GDPR world, customers are more and more aware that their data are used and they will tend to avoid overly personalised offers. I think the real benefit here is to be able to really identify your theoretical targets with actual data and improve your targeting. It's more a one-to-few than one-to-one.

- Samuel Caink
Marketing Specialist

Looking for personalization and automation experts? We can help! [>](#)

What else we're watching in 2020

What did the reports miss? Our consultants see other trends building for 2020, from a rise in digital assistance, to a deep commitment to social responsibility. These predictions of trends to watch in 2020 are just a few examples of what might be defining points for digital marketing into the future.

What digital marketing trends could (or should) emerge in 2020?



Social Performance; buying online directly on social media will grow massively

- **Anthony Stabourlos**
Social Media and Marketing Strategy Specialist



2020 will be the year of voice (Google Duplex is already available in the US) and this will once again make the barrier between physical and digital even thinner.

- **Samuel Caink**
Marketing Specialist



Since data and analytics are becoming more and more important and the person itself has data-related value, the key will become the regulation on this data. If at some point people feel that boundaries are crossed, regulations will be changed and the value of data might get lost because companies will no longer be allowed to gather and use or sell this data.

- **Stijn Haesendonck**
Product Owner and Project Manager



AI & IoT will be more and more present in our daily lives, so I'm convinced that personal assistants will disrupt the way we'll communicate in the next 5 years (third party principle).

- **Etienne Gonsette**
Digital Transformation Strategist

Workplace trend forecast for 2020

Ariad

What are the big workplace trends that will make or break the employer scene in 2020?

There are plenty of articles making predictions, but what is one voice compared to many? We rounded up some of the top workplace or employer trends predicted to be huge in 2020, and brought them to our team to hear their opinions.

The following four 2020 Workplace trends have been evaluated by the team here at Ariad. We asked them to rate the trend from 1 to 5, 1 suggesting that the prediction was way off, and 5 meaning they wholeheartedly agree.

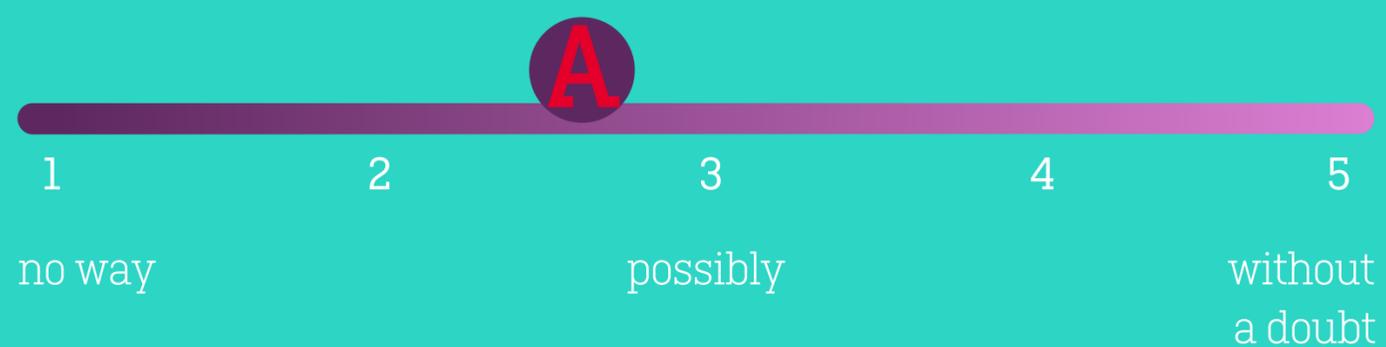
One predicted trend is described on each page, followed by the Ariad approval score, which is the average of all rating. Each trend and rating is also presented with discussion about the viability of the trend, with quotes from the consultants. Read on to find their scores and comments!

Workplace trend 1:

AI on the rise

AI will be your new coworker, and possibly even your new manager as more AI is used to coach and monitor workers.

Ariad approval score: 2.67



We're interested in this trend for sure, but far from convinced. There are already examples of AI taking over some of management-type tasks, like leveraging big data to give real-time advice to customer service representatives or sales teams. That said, there are a lot of limitations, including a high potential for bias, as with many developments in technology. And of course, we have to question the EQ of AI. Ariad's Senior UX Recruitment Consultant Javier explains "An essential quality for coaching is to be empathetic, to have a compassionate leadership attitude towards the person you're dealing with. Thus, we have to wait till we invent Artificial Intelligent Feeling Robots".

For now, it is much more likely that this technology will be used to help out a team, rather than replace one, and we doubt it will be considered mainstream in 2020.



It's cool and creepy to think about at the same time--I actually can't tell if this idea is exciting or insulting? While quality data can definitely remove a lot of uncertainty from a wide range of interactions, at this point using data predictors to personalize simply isn't personal enough. AI coaching can help at a very basic level, but (at least right now) could never replace actual human experience, truly compassionate coaching, and empathy.

- Alaina Ferretti

Content Marketing Specialist at Ariad

Workplace trend 2:

L&D for you and me

Learning & Development will be the star of HR in 2020. Training, re-skilling, and up-skilling will be the words of the year.

Ariad approval score: 4.08



Where's one we all agree on! Learning and development not only pay off immensely, but are often one of the most attractive features that employees look for when choosing an employer. As our Digital Marketing Specialist Daisy puts it, "All of us millennials working today, we don't expect to stay in the same position forever. Either our employer helps us get new skills, or another company will bet on our development."

Learning and development has been on the rise for some time, and it's clearly seen from companies that stand out from the crowd in terms of innovation and retention that evolving means upskilling your team.



Without a doubt L&D will be the star of HR for those companies that understand that HR is way more than having an operational/administrative role in the company. HR is about knowing how to unleash human capital, it's about being willing to be engaged in the business, to have the courage to have a point of view on strategic decisions. Actually, it's about influencing the strategic direction of the company.

Talent is the ultimate competitive advantage for companies. Most executives today recognize it. As work and organizations become more fluid - and business strategy comes to mean sensing and seizing new opportunities in a constantly changing environment, rather than planning for several years into a predictable future - companies must deploy talent in new ways. In fact, talent must lead strategy.

- Javier Cuadra

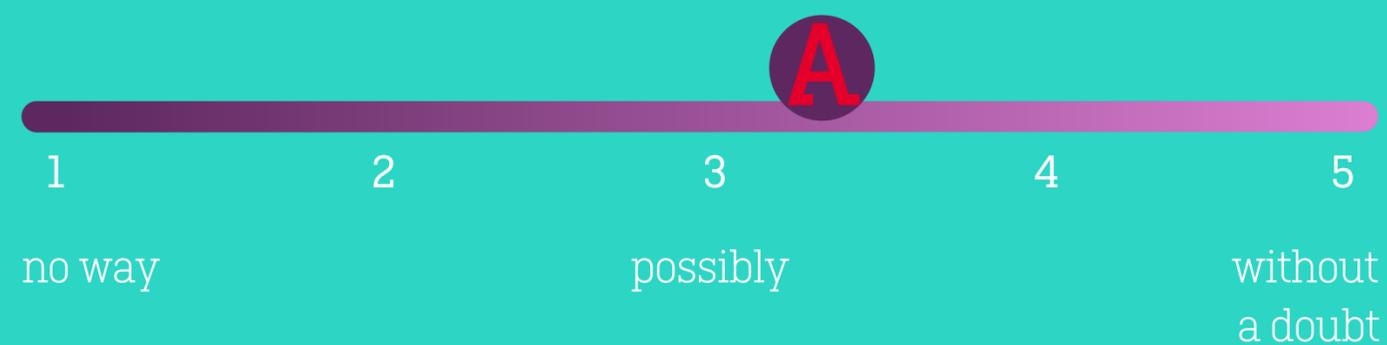
Senior UX Recruitment Consultant at Ariad

Workplace trend 3:

Employee is the new shareholder

Companies in 2020 will put their people first. This means having a clearly defined culture and putting those values above hard ROI.

Ariad approval score: 3.18



We'd love this to be true, but it might take a few more years to realize this people-centric business philosophy on a grand level. There has been some impressive precedent of this already, notably with close to 200 CEOs from the Business Roundtable ([read more](#)) announcing that their top objective is not shareholder value anymore. They claim that their priorities instead will be focused on employees, value to customers, and ethical treatment of suppliers. That being said (and what a wonderful evolution it is!), we know that profit still must be attained.



We've seen this shift happening already in many companies, as without great employees you will not see a bigger ROI. But truth be told, not all companies understand this yet.

- Daisy Kroon

Digital Marketing Specialist at Ariad

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Workplace trend 4:

Bigger picture employer demands

Remote work, flexible hours, and being able to connect one's work to a greater social purpose will be among the most important factors for job seekers and employees.

Ariad approval score: 4.38



As we talk to employers and job seekers every day, we know this trend to be one to bet on! Not only are more employers willing to offer flexible conditions, but employees are more often looking for them--with great benefits for both parties (*like these*).

That said, flexible or remote working options are hot topics, but it's the social purpose that may end up taking center stage. Employees want to feel that they are impacting an organization, and also doing good in the world. This can be more attractive to an employee than any other factor.



Employees given true autonomy and flexibility will come up with solutions that make the most sense to them, rather than trying to fit their work into a construct created by some higher up. And oh yes, to make it work, the company needs great managers that can delegate and empower their people.

Flexibility will be a key factor in the future and fundamental way to create a strong employer branding and employee experience.

- Javier Cuadra

Senior UX Recruitment Consultant at Ariad

Bring it on, 2020!

Is your organization ready to evolve? Let's plot the right course through the shifting maze of digital change. We'll help you determine what digital skills you need now, and find the right experts to bring it to life.

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