Ten Brands to Watch in 2017

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Brand-building consultant Denise Lee Yohn has released her annual “Brands to Watch” list for 2017. There are 26 companies on the list, with retail and social media brands accounting for 10 of the spots. Here’s a review:

Barnes & Noble. The venerable bookstore chain has let its CEO go, lowered sales expectations, and shrunk its footprint by dozens of stores. Meanwhile Amazon Books is opening stores. Is 2017 the year B&N’s death will become imminent?!

Chipotle. No one thought it would take this long for Chipotle Mexican Grill to recover from its food borne illness crisis. Recovery plans for the coming year include a new store design, desserts, and digital ordering.

Home Depot. Competition between The Home Depot and Lowe’s has been one of the quintessential retail rivalries. Currently The Home Depot is growing sales faster and enjoys higher profitability, and at the time I’m posting this, it was popping up as an analyst choice for holiday season sales. Let the game continue.

J.C. Penney. J.C. Penney’s ability to execute a turnaround has been a crapshoot and its performance in 2017 will probably as unpredictable. The company is making all the right moves but consumers are spending less on apparel.

McDonald’s. The fast-food chain will finally leverage its core brand equities in speed and convenience by launching a mobile order-and-pay app and digital kiosks in 2016. But who knows if it’s enough to produce sustained growth for the struggling chain?!

Amazon Prime. Amazon has been aggressively signing up new members to its Prime service and, according to some speculation, has been losing money just as fast. In the company’s latest earnings report, the company missed estimates by a wide margin. Will Amazon raise the membership fee above the $99 rate it’s offered for the last three years? Probably not, but it’s always interesting to see CEO Jeff Bezos convince investors to be patient.

Ralph Lauren. 2016 brought signs that Ralph Lauren’s new CEO, Stefan Larsson, is successfully returning the company to financial health. Let’s see if the momentum continues in 2017.

Twitter. It’s do or die time for Twitter. Either it figures out how to attract more users or it shuts down. If Trump continues to use the channel the way he did during the campaign, it just might have a chance.

We Chat. WeChat, the Chinese messaging app owned by Tencent, is rapidly closing in on 1 billion users and seems poised to give Facebook Messenger a run for its money…and lead the ascendance of Chinese brands in the world.

YouTube. It looks like YouTube is almost ready to launch its new live TV streaming service dubbed YouTube Unplugged. It just signed CBS and is in talks with FOX, Disney, and NBCUniversal. Let the mass cord-cutting begin.

To see Yohn's complete "Brands to Watch" list, click here.