

TA #178: ✓ ✗ What's In, What's Out in 2025

1 message

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TOTAL ANNARCHY

BY ANN HANDLEY

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- ✓ Lasting impact
- ✓ First-party data
- ✓ Creative consistency
- ✓ Emotional B2B
- ✓ Content for brand building
- ✓ Comments written by people
- ✓ Thoughtful beats
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- ✗ Vibes & hunches
- ✗ Building audiences
- ✗ Social algorithm
- ✗ Dark patterns
- ✗ Always-on
- ✗ Extremely online
- ✗ No Oxford

@annhandley

Welcome to Issue 178 of Total Annarchy, a fortnightly newsletter by me, Ann Handley, with a focus on writing, marketing, living your best life. Was this email

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Sunday, January 5, 2025

Cheers, Chickadee!

Let's jump right into it today (and cheers to a new year, by the way) and look at 2025 trends shaping marketing, writing, our lives.

This is my annual list of What's In, What's Out for a new year. (The [2023 version](#); the [2024 version](#).)

There's a lot I left out for this year: More pages, fewer screens. More civil debate, less rage-baiting. Generative A.I. as a tool... not talisman or magic wand. Fewer "hook frameworks" which teach you how to hack your way to attention when all we need to do is simply connect. (Revolutionary!)

But life is about choices. So here we go.

P.S. The In/Out 2025 Honorable Mentions are listed at the end.

2025 IN / OUT

✅ **IN: Craft**

❌ **OUT: AI slop**

Spam has morphed into *slop*: Garbage. Excreted waste. A generated image of a hand with 7 fingers. The cut/paste soulless text.

The only antidote to AI slop is more and more powerful language models that write for us so we don't have to... *HAHA! No, no I'm kidding you!* The antidote is craft.

Craft is from the Old English *cræft*, which meant *physical power or might*. The *æ* in the middle of the word was later ejected from the alphabet. *Cræft* became *craft*; the definition of the newly svelte word expanded to include

the mental power of a special skill or dexterity or the thing itself: *something built or made*.

Slop is generated. Craft is built and made.

Craft has hand prints, footprints, bite marks. Use AI, if you want, to enhance your writing—I do. But do not use AI to generate it. Choose your player. Choose your *cræft*.

✅ **IN: Lasting impact**

❌ **OUT: Fleeting attention**

Earning the attention of specific people in your audience was zee name of zee game last year. This year is about what happens *after* you've stopped their scroll; after you've earned a glance your way. We need to create a lasting impression on those who care whether we show up. (Or not.).

You wonder: *Does that make our content more niche and focused? Does that make our cræft more critical?* Yes! What you said.

✅ **IN: First-party data**

❌ **OUT: Third-party tracking**

Email, physical addresses, or other info offered willingly is way more valuable than third-party tracking. Note the word *willingly* in that sentence —as in *not coerced*. No sleight-of-hand maneuvers like forced opt-ins. No trickery like relentless popovers.

Marketers like us love such tactics because... sure, they work. But they don't exactly start a relationship off in the best way, do they? They don't nurture trust long-term, do they?

✅ **IN: Creative consistency**

❌ **OUT: Creative chaos**

Nutter Butter is a cookie that makes (wait for it) *nutty* videos and social memes. Yeah, on social media.

Yet that first sentence is from the brand's website homepage—a masterclass in how consistency builds a recognizable brand. Chaos comes when we don't create recognition and affinity through voice, messaging,

and visuals—across any channel you own or don't. Or said another way: When your TikTok looks gloriously relatable but the homepage looks like Legal wrote it.

✅ **IN: Emotional B2B**

❌ **OUT: Rational B2B**

"I want both," my friend Carole said, when I showed her this list. *Fair enuf*. To clarify: What's OUT is B2B marketing *without* any emotional resonance. Your buyers have brains AND they well up watching that final scene in *Wicked*. Remember that this year.

✅ **IN: Content for brand building**

❌ **OUT: Content for MQLs or traffic**

90% of B2B buyers buy the brand they already knew before they began searching for *solution* or *tool* or *doohickey*. In an age of AI, the brand that is remembered is the brand that is bought. *P.S. to leaders in the room*: Adjust your performance metrics accordingly.

✅ **IN: Comments written by people**

❌ **OUT: AI-slop comments**

"I completely agree that collaboration with Sales is key in Marketing! What ways do you find most valuable in collaborating?"

We see you, AI commenters, but we will no longer acknowledge you. Try harder. Make cræft.

✅ **IN: Thoughtful beats**

❌ **OUT: Hot takes**

When the news broke that President Joe Biden unexpectedly pardoned his son Hunter, political analyst Molly Jong-Fast [was asked on live television](#) for a "fast and furious" reaction. Jong-Fast paused for a moment. Then she said: "I just heard it. I have to process it. I don't have a take. I'm sorry."

Some news outlets ran with that story—not about Hunter. But about how Molly was "speechless," and her hesitation to comment on the fly was a failing.

She failed because she had to process? WTH. Maybe the pressure to spew out a hot take undermines us—not just in politics. But in social media, in business, in relationships, in life.

✅ **IN: As Slow As Needed**

❌ **OUT: As Soon As Possible**

Maybe we do ourselves dirty when we don't pause to consider: *Which serves us better...? The reflexive hot-take delivered ASAP? Or the considered, thoughtful one? The one that takes time?*

Reflective consideration is sacrificed when we are reflexively rushed to a decision. But often that rush is artificial. We aren't on live TV. We just feel like we are.

✅ **IN: Morning journal**

❌ **OUT: Morning doomscroll**

Four or five years ago I shifted my morning routine to include 15 minutes of writing down things in a notebook: Things that delighted or dismayed me from the previous day. Stories, interactions, conversations.

My daily writing habit tunes me into my life differently. It's made me more creatively productive than I have been in my entire life.

It's a bold claim. But will you try it for 90 days? See what I mean. If you need a template, [here's a simple and fun one](#).

✅ **IN: Handwritten notes**

❌ **OUT: Templated messages**

"Why do you get so many handwritten cards and notes?" my son asked me the other day. He was looking at a few of them on the kitchen windowsill, propped up like flowers in a vase.

I thought about it for a minute. Because they're rare? Because reading someone's handwriting feels personal? Because it's less immediate than a text... yet more lasting?

"Maybe because I send them, too?" I finally said.

I've never kept any email that someone sent me.

✅ **IN: AI that folds laundry**

❌ **OUT: AI that composes symphonies**

Why can't AI be *actually* useful?

✅ **IN: Actual thought leadership**

❌ **OUT: Barfed-up copycat content**

Actual thought leadership has a clear voice and perspective that could come only from you. Barfed-up copycat content is what we've seen elsewhere. It's what the cat already ate, regurgitated on the carpet.

✅ **IN: Data storytelling**

❌ **OUT: Vibes & hunches**

Should the "In" here be storytelling alone, without the "data" qualifier? No. Because storytelling in a business shows up in all its real-world, data-driven glory.

Stories make your products and services come alive. They put them in the context of people's lives. Data gives you credibility and proof. It intrinsically answers the question: *Why should I care?*

✅ **IN: Building relationships**

❌ **OUT: Building audiences**

For years I talked about building audiences. But the world has evolved. I have, too.

List size? Follower count? Who cares? Not us. It's more important to speak to someone you can visualize in your head.

A simple shift... But it changes the way you unfurl your fingers on the keyboard. It means someone opens your email, because your From Line matters more than your Subject Line. ([Who is your Doris?](#))

✅ **IN: Newsletters**

❌ **OUT: Social algorithm**

This was on my previous In/Out lists. Repeating it here... because

newsletters have not peaked. Not by a long shot. New ways of growing and monetizing audiences have emerged.

You can fight for attention with a social media algorithm that is not your friend. Or you can use social platforms to grow your own list of people who will read the emails you alone *cræft*.

✅ **IN: Personal agency**

❌ **OUT: Dark patterns**

A year-end is a good time to go on an unsubscribe spree. (It's especially diabolical when a brand sends me a holiday greeting in email, thereby reminding me I'm on their list and I promptly unsubscribe.) (Just me?)

Anyway—it's astounding how many Unsubscribe buttons are hidden. Also crazy: Hidden cancellation buttons. Difficult navigation. Confusing pricing structures. Customer service loops when all you want to do is exchange a sweater. Dark patterns and tricks that intentionally confuse customers. *Infuriating.*

If your goal is to build trust (spoiler: It is), then this year is about give your customers personal agency: Give them control, transparency, autonomy.

✅ **IN: Boundaries**

❌ **OUT: Always-on**

You don't need a paragraph explaining this. Just set them.

✅ **IN: Touch grass**

❌ **OUT: Extremely online**

Touch grass. Get outside. Disconnect from the digital world. Be surprised when a herd of deer crosses your path 20 yards ahead of you and your dog goes nuts.

It's so easy to absorb the whiplash of the constant pings and claims on our attention. But the deer were huge and gentle, like big dogs with long legs. I think Augie smelled them before he saw them.

✅ **IN: Oxford comma**

❌ **OUT: No Oxford**

The most controversial thing on this list. Nothing ignites fire in the gut of the righteous more than the use/no use of serial—AKA Oxford—commas. Nothing invites more hot takes. But I said what I said.

IN/OUT HONORABLE MENTIONS

IN / OUT

Civil debate / Rage-baiting
Skills-based hiring / Degree requirements
Sustainable growth / Growth hacking
Meaningful resonance / Hook frameworks
Community-led / Influencer-led
Metrics that matter / Vanity metrics
Actual people / Buyer personas
AI literacy / AI hype
AI tools / AI magic wand
AI SEO / Trad SEO
Use / "Utilize"

and finally...

Do the thing / Delaying the thing

You've got this.

DEPARTMENT OF SHENANIGANS

When the holidays are finally, finally over.

BYE 2024: DRAMATIC TIL THE END

...And happy new year, from me and the dog who always knows where the camera is.



The sun setting on 2024

Thanks for reading this far..

Thanks for your kindness and generosity.

👉 See you January 19!



ANN

P.S. If you like this newsletter and want to support it, there are 4 WAYS THIS WEEK! PICK ONE right now before you forget:

- 1) **Buy a book.**
- 2) **Forward this newsletter** to a friend with an invitation to subscribe right here:
www.annhandley.com/newsletter
- 3) **Hit reply** and say hello.
- 4) **Bring me into your company to speak** (either in person or virtual).

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**Ann Handley is the author of Everybody Writes and other books.
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