

*The Comprehensive Guide to Marketing in **Uncertain Times***

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Foreword

Who would have known when we sailed into 2020 that three months later we would be facing the biggest, global economic and sanitary crisis many of us have ever experienced. Those days seem far behind us yet here we are, early June 2020, and life as we knew it suddenly looks very different.

Heads of global businesses, CMOs and marketing communications agency owners have found themselves caught in the unwelcome headlights of an uncertain future and everybody is asking themselves the same question: “Am I going to be okay?” The truth is, nobody knows. It’s hard to make decisions when you can’t see the road ahead clearly and when you feel like you’re navigating something you have no power over. While we can’t control the world around us, we can control how we respond, how we lead and how we manage our teams - who also want to hear that everything will be okay. I do believe good leaders will be remembered in years to come for how they handled this crisis and how they supported their staff over anything else.

There has also never been a better time to clarify what your organisation stands for and why it is relevant. This includes being open to a new business model. Taking an honest inventory of your brand and business and deciding where you can deliver more value might be one of your wisest decisions this year. At times like these, you don't want your company to be competing with itself and wasting value resources. Focus your talents in areas where you have a clear advantage and pass on everything else.



Winston Churchill is quoted as saying: “Never let a good crisis go to waste”. This may be right but a US consultant recently told me something that I found even more profound: “The quality of the business decisions you make in a crisis has a far greater bearing on the success of your firm than the quality of your work.” I think this has never been more true.

Emma Keenan

ICOM - Executive Director



**This is an
ebook** for all
businesses.

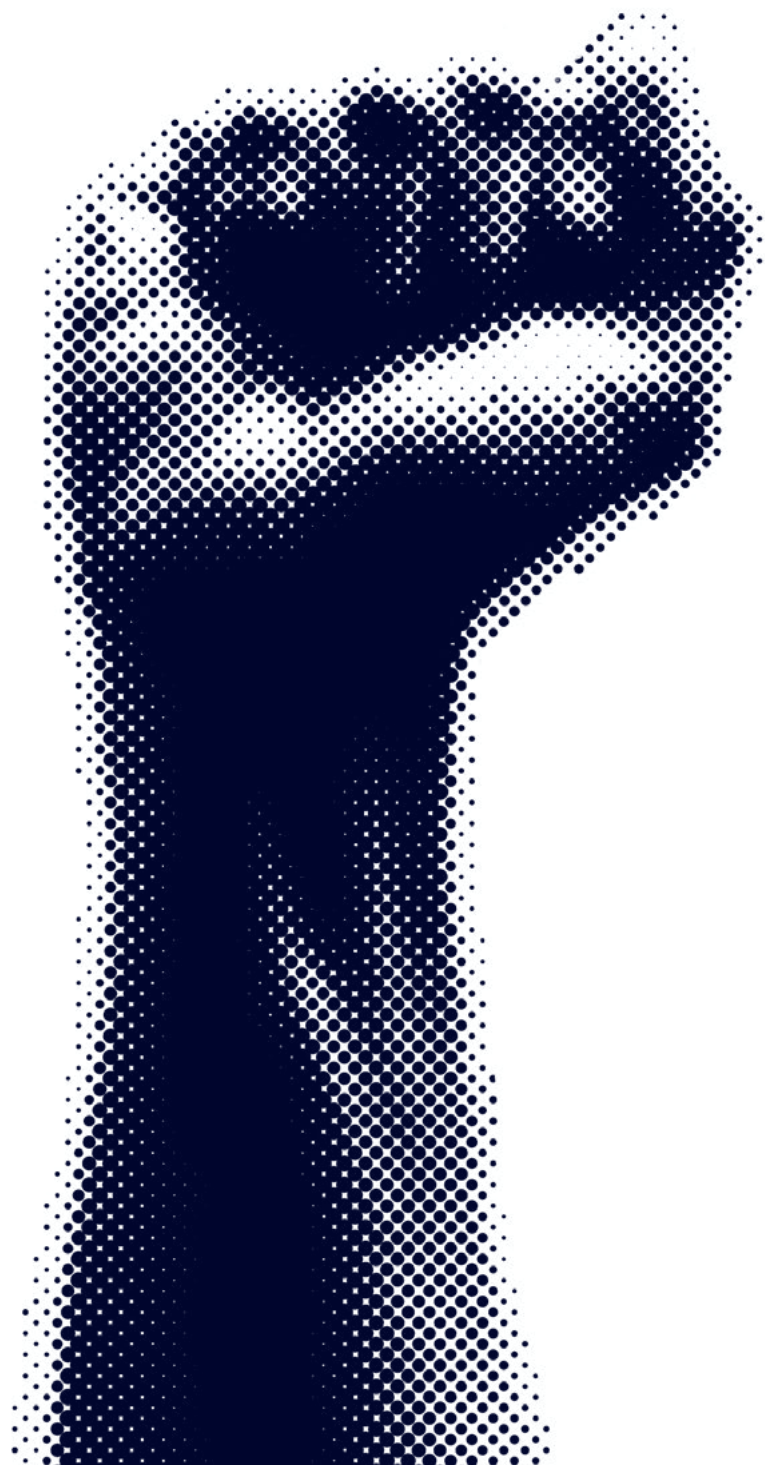
We've researched, written and designed it to help everyone get through this period of protracted uncertainty. I could write about the specific crisis that triggered the need for this book, but, honestly, since then it seems like the only thing we know about 2020 is that it is going to be hard to predict what's coming next.

We started the year with crises that seemed massive in scale. The world adapted, the world reacted and the world moved on. We kept getting wave after wave. News cycles looking like the introduction to a dystopian future. Riots in the streets across entire continents, a global pandemic that killed hundreds of thousands and that brought the world economy to its knees, a subcontinent that burnt millions of acres of flora and fauna.

We feel that we have a responsibility to take all this and to make the best of it. How are we going to predict a future in which it is not just more, faster, cheaper. How can we create a future in which norms were challenged and in which we had to come out stronger, because the alternative was to fail.



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We always remind every brand we work with (and anyone who will listen to us, really) to communicate like they would communicate with their best friend. And in times of uncertainty, you should definitely be there for your friends.

Uncertainty allows us to test, and hopefully to cement, relationships. If we use the opportunities well, we can show the world that we care, that we matter, and that our audiences matter to us.

This is our opportunity to forge relationships that will last a lifetime, in an era when relationships with brands can last less than a few seconds.

The whole agency has worked on this book. It's a guide to navigating through times of uncertainty, but, as one of us so succinctly put it, it's just a collection of best-practices that are Switch canon. We've just taken

the time to put them all in one place given that it's even more important than ever to batten down the hatches.

Whether you're a client, a competitor or a client's competitor - here's our call to arms to take this as an opportunity to define ourselves as brands that are resilient. As brands that can navigate through uncertain waters and come out stronger.

This is our time to shine. Our time to grab the opportunities that are presented to us and to make sense of what's coming with the benefit of a cultural reset.

But we need to get off our sad horses and we need to push ourselves up and out (not physically, please) into the world with renewed vigour.

This is a call to arms.



Humans

2020 has been a year riddled with challenges and uncertainty for human beings all around the world, especially with the onset of a new, global virus that changed the way people think about and live their lives almost overnight.

Living in the digital era, most of our relationships have already been changing and developing alongside technology and shifting global mindsets. They're likely to keep shifting throughout this particular year and for a long time afterwards, whether it's our relationship with ourselves and other human beings, entities like the government or businesses, and the technology we use on a regular basis.

One thing we can say from observing the world around us is that change on a large scale causes people to re-evaluate how to be, how to act, and what they value, and the patterns of behaviour that emerge during uncertain times are likely to keep their hold for the foreseeable future, as people adapt to changing routines and lifestyles as best as they can.

How much of our life can be lived online?

The extent to which human beings' lives can become virtual is a question that's been toyed around with for many decades, being taken to different extremes (most often in science fiction), depending on who you ask. The idea of living most of our lives online might have been regarded as a dream without enough momentum to become reality. It takes an event like a global pandemic to drive change so radical that it makes such imagination come to life.

Most people already lead a lot of their lives online, starting with social media usage as a form of creating online communities, to video chatting tools that remove the need for commuting to face-to-face meetings, as well as ecommerce platforms that remove the need for brick-and-mortar shopping and the need for a physical retail space.



Despite the availability of the tools needed to conduct large parts of our lives online, a lot of people still show a [resistance to diving deep into virtual spaces](#) and integrating them into their normal lives. That is, up until the point where social distancing, quarantine, and other safety measures (that became a new normal for most) reframed this move to a larger virtual sphere of daily living from an option to a necessity.

This also cultivated the need for even more online spaces that many businesses and institutions weren't prepared for, be it to create online work spaces where people can work remotely and remain in touch with their colleagues and clients, online platforms where people shop for their groceries and necessities without having to leave their home, or for e-learning and home-schooling for students of all ages.



The power of the demand that rises out of change in people's day-to-day can even spread into industries where it can feel unlikely that radical change and a need for digitization will occur at such a fast pace. With the threat of contagion and the high risks associated with human contact, even interactions traditionally conducted in person such as [doctor visits started requiring their own virtual counterparts](#).

Redefined personal interactions

The way people communicate reflects who they are, as well as their time. From telegrams to text messages, technological advancement has changed the way people relay messages and information to each other. However, this is about more than technology, and encompasses the way in which change affects people's interactions, which in turn has an impact on how and what they share with others.

It's inevitable that after a period of physical isolation, many people who have been locked indoors will seek a physical community with whom to interact, and turn to this as a way of relieving the stress

that has built up during the events of the pandemic. Others might not have it so easy, and feel the effects of prolonged quarantine as a mounting psychological pressure which will take them time to get over, with [researched quarantines showing that 29% of those quarantined showed signs of PTSD, and 31% had symptoms of depression following isolation](#).

After a long period of adopting the belief that face-to-face interactions and human touch are dangerous threats of infection, returning to a normal where these physical exchanges are viewed in a more benign light might be a difficult transition. In such cases, keeping the facts in check and having social support from the rest of the community are crucial to moving forward and moving on to better days. However, the point remains that for some individuals, using the virtual spaces they have available will become a form of psychological germ-free comfort zone (especially when learning how many meetings could have been just emails after all).

In addition to it being a point of relating to mental health and recovery, it's also a question of people re-evaluating their options after experiencing a different style of living. When faced with options that are more comfortable and convenient than previously known - and establishing a new status quo - most will find it hard to go back to things that took more of their time and energy to do, and might even refuse to go back altogether. If meaningful enough, temporary changes in people's way of life can have long-term effects on their choices and behaviour.

How have political priorities shifted?

Priorities shift with changing needs, on all levels and aspects of society. From the most obvious aspects of their lives to the most discreet, people's priorities, their values, and their perspectives have shifted in light of recent events, and will likely continue to do so.

Local produce and artisanal products have experienced a rise in social value.

When change happens, people look up to those who can keep up and lead them through it. In the realm of politics - which is closely intertwined with society at large - people are likely to use their right to choose leaders more responsibly, and favour those who can deal well with a crisis, those who have their country's well-being in mind, and those that are able to take actions that will benefit the community.

Tough times are a lesson that [there's more to politics than meets the eye](#), especially when people's lives are at stake. With a clear dependence on the government and other public authorities to guide a country through change and crises, the need for honest politics also becomes more relevant than ever.

[Fake news can spread fast and cost lives](#). Experts and believable sources trump rumours and any "alternative facts" used to justify actions that don't serve society's best interest. In the case of the coronavirus pandemic, the experts in the medical field giving reliable and relevant information were viewed as beacons for advice and direction, updates, and reassurance (which is especially sensible given that this was a health crisis after all). What this goes to show is that, in being honest with the public, the medical and scientific communities set the example for others in power to follow, and this is something that people are increasingly coming to expect from their leaders.

Has people's relationship with local economies evolved?

Viruses and other natural disasters don't discriminate. They do, however, initiate a destructive dom-

ino effect of diminished demand, diminished services, diminished spending, and a downsizing of the local economy.

From a [staggering amount of layoffs](#) due to a lack of financial resources enabling companies to retain their staff, to temporary unemployment caused by infection or the necessity for quarantine, a crisis like the coronavirus pandemic has made people realise how tightly linked and interdependent we are as a society, and has made them realise what their part in this social chain really is.

This awareness has led to a myriad calls to action for people to shop local and [support smaller businesses within their own countries](#), rather than shopping from stores based overseas or choosing massive global retailers such as Amazon. Local produce and artisanal products have experienced a rise in social value. Some of this is probably owed to the associations people have of shopping local with a sense of solidarity and support, which is also connected to making sure that people within the community can keep their jobs and stay afloat during rough times.

What this also means is that people's perception of value and their relationship with luxury has inevitably developed as well, especially when you consider the plethora of [free resources were shared online for all to benefit from](#), which would have only previously been available only to those who could pay for them.



Will this change our spending habits?

The shift to shopping local and seeking online shopping platforms for purchases usually made in-store are signs of an observable shift in people's spending behaviour. We've also seen what consumers are likely to purchase in abundance and what they might willingly pass on.

Let's take the stockpiling situation, for instance. Following the news of increasing local cases of bulk-buying during quarantine, we witnessed a short-term change in consumer spending behaviour - [the sheer volume of household products purchased per customer in an attempt to gain control over an unpredictable situation](#). In addition, people also spent more money on things that would keep them entertained, whether that's through [board games, personal care products, or just more food to indulge themselves in and have some fun with](#). This points to a very human aspect of why people buy things in the first place; in addition to being a way of trying to meet their physical needs, people shop for emotional reasons.

As panic buying subsides and the threat of the virus decreases (through habituation), spending and consumption have a better chance to continue being seen as avenues for self expression. Of course, while this might not be the case for everyone - especially those that are more severely affected financially from the crisis - the advent of [revenge spending](#) might rear its head, as was seen in China when restrictions on shopping malls were lifted.

On the other hand, [others choose to employ more conservative spending habits](#) due to the fear of recession resulting from this global crisis, making them prone to becoming more price-conscious consumers.

What about the way we work?

Redefining what work means to us and how it's done is not something that's new, especially in a world where digital transformations and societal changes have had an impact on many aspects of our lives. [The threat of the coronavirus might just have accelerated the rate of change](#) of how we work, that would have otherwise taken longer to come into effect.

Before governments decided that staying at home when possible was the best course of action for people's safety, up until 2019 there was already a [year-on-year increase in the number of companies offering flexible and remote working](#). While some types of labour will still require people's physical presence (such as factory work, construction, and those minding physical stores), a lot of digital and tech work could be shifting to being conducted online even more regularly.

Despite these conditions being ripe for such opportunities, [after more than a century of investing resources into optimising office work environments, more changes need to be implemented](#). For remote work to become an ordinary occurrence, organisations need to create a culture of trust, and put in place work practices structured around keeping employees' productivity, sense of connectivity, and psychological safety in check regardless of where that work is taking place.

Humans change. Their needs and wants remain largely the same. We help you focus on what's real, and on what's important for your brand. Talk to us to help you find out how.

In summary



1. **Social distancing necessitated an increase in virtual spaces and availability of tools for leading more of our lives online.** People will do anything to get their needs met, especially when these are some of their most fundamental needs. These don't change when the world changes; they are simply adapting to current circumstances.
 2. **The presence of uncertainty enhances the need for stability and reassurance, especially from those in power.** As a result, people have higher expectations of their leaders, public entities, and service-providers (including businesses). These need to step up and show that they're acting according to public interest and provide some form of certainty during tough times.
 3. **Solidarity starts at home;** with a decreased income being experienced on a global level, the economic focus in many countries has shifted towards smaller local businesses as a way of supporting the community.
 4. **Purchasing behaviour is not always rational, and people shop for emotional reasons especially when tensions are high.** After excessive purchasing of everyday staples dies down and panic subsides, luxury brands and retailers of non-essential items can expect a slow recovery thanks to revenge spending and a desire to reclaim normality. However, they should be aware of uncertainty making other individuals more conservative with their money.
 5. **The shift from working outside of home to a home office might be a reality for some industries, but it's not a luxury that all sectors can afford.** In addition, removing the presence of a common workspace for all employees to share does not remove the need for the appropriate structures ensuring psychological safety and connectivity among workers.
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Communication is Human



Within hours of stricter restrictions rolled out globally to combat against COVID-19, one of which included the complete lockdown of countries where this was deemed necessary, QuarantineChat went live. Initially an art experiment for lonely insomniacs, the creators repurposed it to connect people with people as the virus continued to shut down schools, daycare centres, coffee-shops, and anywhere else where large gatherings could appear.

The Case for Mental Health Procedures in Crisis

Humans are social creatures, and as social creatures, isolation does weird things to them. People who already have mental health issues - [as of 2017, the widely-underreported number is 10.7%, or one in ten people globally](#) - can struggle with social distancing and isolation, hence the creation of QuarantineChat and the sudden uptick in the use of social media. With nothing else to occupy their minds, and bombarded constantly by a news cycle rife with trauma and anxiety, the side-effects of a lack of social connection are problems that people need to deal with now: depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress, including the longer term effects on medical staff at the front-lines. For example, with SARS, a similar case to Coronavirus, a survey of 129 patients in Toronto brought these figures to light: [28.9% of patients had PTSD from the lockdown alone, and 31.9% had depression.](#)

Brand Backlash in the Time of COVID-19

Brands who opt to stay silent during a crisis are opening up their doors to criticism, which will only get worse once the crisis is over. We've seen it with COVID-19 and the riots in America: people on social

media are keeping a very close eye on how brands react to bad news, and social media news travels fast and always comes to light.

Consider Wetherspoons, the most recent scandal related to the coronavirus: within 3 days of its policy about staff coming to light, [Twitter racked up over 500 tweets with the hashtag #boycottwetherspoons, and over 7 million impressions.](#) Whether or not COVID-19 goes away, this is not going to go away for Wetherspoons, as the Internet has a long memory, and brands that go viral like this will struggle to play it back down.

Human Brands: Moving Forward

More than ever, people want their brands to be human. They want to feel understood, and heard, and to have someone else help them lift the burden of isolation and worry, even temporarily. Brands that help - [Uber, for example, pledged food to front-line workers in hospitals in the US, a move which was very well-received](#) - and that keep up positive communication without a direct link to profit are rewriting the conversation around themselves, and steering their connections.



What we need now is brands to understand, and to be human: to connect and share and make people laugh, and to lift their spirits.

And, right now, people want connection. They were alone, frightened, and stuck in a situation that will get worse before it gets better. Now they're trying to see what comes next. It's no surprise that the things that are getting most traction on the internet right now are positive, spinning towards a greater connectivity: people snapchatting their loved ones from outside doors, applauding healthcare workers, and Chinese quarantined citizens shouting 'keep going!' from their windows.

Brands that advocate for connectivity, positivity, and help are going to cement themselves in the post-COVID-19 reality, whatever that may be. Marketing efforts geared towards humanising their brand and helping out will write the narrative

for them, especially as lockdown stretches out without an end, riots crop up in the United States, and people succumb to isolation. All that's left beyond that is to market it.

But you need to work yourself into the story first. You need to know your brand, to monitor your audiences, to know they're suffering, and to want to help because you want to help, not for profit or good publicity (that can be a side-effect).

The world doesn't need more me-too brands telling you that their product is the best, or that your life is going to be improved by this addition to your life. What we need now is brands to understand, and to be human: to connect and share and make people laugh, and to lift their spirits.

We help brands build relationships with customers by speaking to them on a human level, not like a stuffy brand. It's more effective than you'd think. Speak to us, we'll be human about it. We promise.

L'Occitane

Luxury skincare brand L'Occitane created a twofold approach to its purpose in a time where skincare brands, and specifically luxury skincare brands, are facing an unprecedented dip in sales. Besides sending hand-creams to the NHS to support its staff, they also ran an offer giving NHS workers 30ml bottles of hand-cream for their own personal use, which the workers could pick up while their stores remained open. Beyond that, they're also manufacturing hand-sanitiser to deliver to health-care workers, with some 70,000ml already delivered to front-liners in France.



National Geographic

National Geographic took to Twitter to announce that all of its current and future COVID-19 updates could be accessed free - no paywall in place. One of the resources that people will struggle to obtain most during this time is information: accurate, up to date information about what's going on that can be selectively chosen. National Geographic's approach is to provide that information to people eager to understand what's happening, without the lens of politics or fear-mongering that can sometimes accompany the News.

Case studies

In summary

1. Brands that go viral now due to bad publicity will struggle to start relevant marketing communications later.
2. Increased social media usage can provide a greater platform for connectivity.
3. Successful brand communication is picked up by social media users and spread through word of mouth.
4. Isolated people have a greater risk of relapsing into previous behaviours so brands that provide an outlet or solution to lockdown-related problems can create a loyal audience.
5. People are keeping track of which brands to support post-crisis, and it's important to get on that list now.

Trends

Let's look at the broad strokes trends that are emerging at this point. While we're caught up in coping, and while everyone around us reinvents themselves, what should we be doing to avoid missing the boat completely?

When it comes to trends, bigger shifts are easy to predict. However, it's significantly harder to see how the shape of a trend will emerge following a societal shift. We've seen this before with other trends, such as the climate crisis that epitomised late 2019 and early 2020.

Big shifts in trends happen every 12 months or so. However, while some peter out within about a year, others completely change the way the world works. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we're looking at trends which, although previously monitored, have suddenly come to the forefront and seem unlikely to recede once the COVID-19 pandemic has passed. These are trends which have been around for much longer than the crisis, but previously considered as a factor that would come into play later.

The unprecedented reality of COVID-19 changed that greatly.

Virtual Experiences

Just because the world has stopped doesn't mean that people have to too. The human drive for connection is stronger than ever in a crisis, and with tech capable of facilitating both intimate and wider reaching communications, there's never been a better time for virtual experiences. What's more, now that people have been forced to try virtual experiences due to necessity, the chances are that they'll keep coming back to them because of the increased practicality which they offer.



e-Sports and videogame conferences have dabbled in virtual experiences on and off; development conferences such as Nintendo Direct are typically broadcast or live-streamed to a global audience, and so the technology and the capacity for its usage have been in play for a while. What we're going to see during a crisis is a greater emphasis on the virtual experience platform to advertise for other services not intrinsically tied to livestreaming.

Think of festival organisers, most of whom have been forced to postpone their events and create online 'clubs' to better connect with their audiences.

Keep in mind: Don't worry about whether or not you have a set-up to support continuous live-streaming. The tech is the least of your concern: what matters to consumers is creating an experience that beats isolation blues, whether it's a live-streamed activity, a virtual museum tour, or a Twitter hashtag they can take part in.

#MuseumFromHome crowd-sources information from museum workers on Twitter about their exhibits.

For brands that rely on customers making use of their services in-store, a crisis could spell a struggle for the business to continue with the status quo unless there is a temporary plan in place. Consider museums: their entire livelihood and continued funding depends on how many consumers they can get in through the door, which was previously considered their only source of word of mouth advertising. However, when a museum has to shut its doors indefinitely, what should you do? The COVID-19 pandemic is a good example of what you can manage if you desperately want to communicate. Museums have a slightly more complicated problem with communicating with their audiences: they don't offer a product or service that can be packaged up neatly, and so with many museum workers out of the museum and at home, staying relevant becomes more difficult. Big museums

which can afford it have gone completely virtual, offering online tours of the displays that anyone can access; others are taking communication in a more direct approach. The Twitter account MuseumsFromHome started as a way of keeping conversations around the museums alive; over time, it's become a popular hashtag that museum workers can co-opt to talk about their favourite exhibitions. Besides keeping conversations going, it's an interesting way of getting people to talk about an institution that has, until recently, been seen as something outdated.

It's also helping to foster new conversations, and introduce a new audience to their brands - which is particularly impressive considering that the only vehicle for introduction and experience is social media.

Case studies

eCommerce expansion

This isn't a trend so much as a continuation of a trend, but recent figures from countries who experienced a complete lockdown during COVID-19 have shown an increased opportunity for ecommerce retail to carve out a larger chunk of the profits. Over 31% of Italian consumers have turned to ecommerce more frequently. [Over 50% of Chinese consumers have said the same.](#)

However, it isn't just the wholesale avoidance of retail stores that's becoming an issue. [Stores which have not yet set up ecommerce websites are now facing the possibility that it could be a while before people turn back to brick and mortar stores without fear.](#)

In Malta, we saw this happen with Bolt Food. [Initially only gaining around 31 searches a day at the beginning of March, it had risen to 100 searches daily by the 21st of the same month.](#) Grocery store delivery apps in the US also showed a marked uptick in usage, with an over 218% download rate for app Instacart for March alone.

Keep in mind: Update your website now, and make sure you have a stable ecommerce platform to see you through until normality returns. It's unlikely that the increase in the use of ecommerce will die down, so it's especially important that your website is functional on both smartphone and desktop browsers. Have you thought about social media ecommerce platforms?

BigDropBrew's 'virtual pub quiz' goes live on Youtube for people to take part in

Alcohol-free beer company BigDropBrew had no way of connecting with their consumers offline: with pub attendance down, and ecommerce rising, the only meaningful conversations that BigDropBrew could hold with their audiences would have been completely geared towards their product; conversations which wouldn't have changed much from the pre-pandemic era, and might have isolated their clientele. Instead, they went a step further and created the Living Room Pub Quiz, a free-for-all live-streamed event that takes the spirit of the pub quiz and makes it virtual. Despite there being no prizes, and no real reason to connect, the first edition of the Big Drop Living Room Pub Quiz attracted over 14,000 attendees, and has since become a weekly feature.

Case study

eCommerce in China helped to control the Coronavirus

At the peak of the outbreak, China had over half its population on home lockdown, however Chinese ecommerce infrastructure was built to fulfill orders in a matter of hours, not days. Chinese rival to Amazon, JD.com, is capable of delivering 90% of its orders within 24 hours - which Amazon is still short of the mark on - and deliveries for groceries and KFC in China could be as little as 20 minutes in transit before appearing at their door. While Chinese companies had their share of delivery logistic issues, most Chinese consumers were already shopping via apps - making it that much easier to support increased demands on the system itself. Over 35.3% of consumers shop via apps; in addition to this, ecommerce apps already had the warehouse automation, delivery drones, and unmanned delivery robots to withstand a sudden shortage of labour.

Case study



Corporations have always been looked at to step in and provide solutions where governments have failed, and in any sort of crisis, an extra level of urgency emerges.

Crowdsourced Solutions

Collaboration is the name of the game right now, though we wouldn't exactly say that this trend has been quiet in the preceding years. Corporations have always been looked at to step in and provide solutions where governments have failed, and in any sort of crisis, an extra level of urgency emerges.

There have been a wide range of brands engaging in solution-seeking communications with their audiences. Some offer free content for entertainment, while others have simply redistributed their

resources to support their employees. By helping out, they're fostering conversations about what it means to be a human brand, and putting themselves forward as brands that truly care.

Keep in mind: Focus on what your brand can do to help, and do just that. While you should still do good, now's the time to start thinking about profiting from the new normal to bring your business back in a better state than it was pre-crisis.

Kraft Heinz Co donate \$12 million in cash and food to struggling grocery stores.

Global conglomerate Kraft Heinz Co rolled out a number of initiatives worldwide to help out its consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides donating \$6.6 million to Feeding America foodbanks, and supplying them with \$4.7 million worth of products to be distributed from the foodbank itself, Kraft Heinz Co is also working on similar initiatives abroad with entities in Italy, Spain, Australia, and the Netherlands.

In China, where most of its factories are located, Kraft Heinz Co donated over 4,000 boxes of infant food, which were distributed through the hospital in the regions which were most affected. Similarly, in the UK, the company's teaming up with breakfast charity 'Magic Breakfast' to secure over 12 million free breakfasts for children who have been deprived of their free school breakfast.

Case study

Health Fan(at)ics

Right now, everyone's still obsessed with their health: reaching for their hand-sanitiser at every opportunity, washing their hands to a selection of 20 second-long songs, and increasing their vitamins and supplements to boost their health. While we are looking at the after-effects of a health crisis, this focus on health and well-being isn't strictly new, and has been previously predicted as one of the key industries to watch in the coming years.

What is new is the sudden push for telehealth and online health. As a crisis can place restrictions on gatherings and face to face connection, more and more people will turn to telemedicine and e-health to fulfill their needs, whether physical or psychological.

In China, where the greatest concentration of the virus was focused, newly-launched e-health apps are inundated with requests for consultations: [We-health doctors gave over 1.5 million consultations by the end of February, while Alibaba's health platform saw an increase in consultation requests - over 3,000 per hour. In America, the CEO of On-line Therapy saw a 30% increase in new clients in just one week.](#)

Keep in mind: when this is over, consumers will not let go of their health-related preferences, and therefore brands that want to woo consumers back to their brick and mortar stores will need to continue the same rigorous approach to public health as has been the case so far.

App launches to determine whether or not you have the symptoms.

Developed to track the symptoms of COVID-19, the app gained over 750,000 downloads within the first 24 hours of going live as people downloaded it in a bid to both track their own symptoms and support their local NHS hospital. People are encouraged to use the app to self-report their symptoms, which can help researchers and doctors determine how the disease spreads.

Case study

Global Connection

Houseparty. Zoom. Whatsapp calls. Facebook Rooms. In the age of lockdown and social distancing, tech companies stepped in to provide alternative solutions. Originally the stuff of remote work and Silicon Valley start-ups, the sudden escalation in the use of live-streaming programmes isn't going anywhere. Another side-effect of this? Livestream learning has never been so attractive, or so powerful. With everyone from multimillion-dollar universities to small businesses offering up respite from the long hours of lockdown, there's room for everyone who has something to teach.

While this does limit audiences to the ones savvy enough to understand how to work this new technology, it isn't a bad thing - brands that can offer something in the way of improvement and entertainment get shared around the internet through word of mouth at a minimum of the cost.



Live isn't a new shift for many businesses, however COVID-19 has triggered an unprecedented desire for live video that even tech companies are taking notice of. According to Facebook, [people watching live-streams have increased by 50% in the regions hit hardest by COVID-19](#) - and that's only talking about the United States, where quarantine measures were still lax at the time of publication.

In China, where quarantine measures were strict, [live-streaming service Tao-bao Live grew by over 110% in the month of February alone](#) as companies rushed to keep afloat by digitising their offering to attract customers that were staying home.

Keep in mind: lockdown and quarantine has shed light on the need for connection for future crisis management, and brands interested in boosting their relationship with their audiences should consider live-streaming, regardless of industry.

Canon switches to livestreaming in order to announce new products.

Canon held a virtual press conference to announce their latest products, which was livestreamed on the Canon USA website. This allowed them to advertise their products without running the risk of infection, both for themselves and for their consumers. Canon also made the full recording of the livestream itself available on their website, to reach the audiences that were unable to tune in at the precise time.

Case study

Strategy



Review all your current assumptions - personas, behaviour, market segmentation, purchasing power, how much of an essential/want you are, position, value proposition... And make sure that you define them and create a new strategy for the new normal. While working on your strategy, also choose which products and services you want to be pushing most at these times.

There's usually a situational template we can use as a starting point when developing a strategy, a series of previous events that look exactly like the ones we're going through now. Regardless of how unique a situation appears to be, there is always a way to make things work if you watch out for the shifts taking place around you and focus on what's truly important. In war, brilliant strategies often come out of the simplest environmental factors that a commander notices and takes advantage of, much to the detriment of the opponent.



Understand your new playground

Before the battle of Agincourt, the French army planned to meet the invading English army, led by King Henry V himself. They chose a terrain that was perfect for cavalry charges: a downward hill towards the English army's position. This favoured the French army's position and the types of units fielded. The French outnumbered the English two to one, and it was set to be an army of mounted, heavily armoured knights against a smaller army of (mostly) archers. Their strategy was sound, the French planned it brilliantly. Except for one thing: It rained the night before the battle, turning the slope into a swamp too deep for mounted knights to cross. Rather than re-evaluating their new environment, the French just stuck to their plan and charged down anyway, confident that their numbers and superior force would win the day. Well, the rest is history, and the magnificent knights found a very inglorious ending as they were shot down like fish in a barrel. They had ignored this environmental shift and forged ahead with their original plan anyway.



It may feel like a time of uncertainty, but the one thing you can certainly bank on is change.

In times where the reality of our environment changes completely, we should stop trying to force things that simply do not work. We need to take a step back, assess the situation and accept it as our new reality. We are experiencing massive shifts in behaviours and expectations, all in a very short amount of time. It may feel like a time of uncertainty, but the one thing you can certainly bank on is change.

Change will not just take place externally, it is manifesting inside your organisation as you read this - it's changing people's priorities and accessibility. Change also needs to find its way into your strategy.

Your environment is not limited to the number of sales, requests and engagement on your social media channels. It is made up of a whole lot of different humans who are acting differently than we all predicted when we were formulating our 2020 strategies and goals.

Re-evaluate your position

The value your product and brand has to offer will most probably change in this new context as the human needs and wants change, particularly in their hierarchy. This does not mean that your brand should change what it represents. However, it does mean that if you are to portray yourself and behave correctly in times like these, you need a radically different strategy. Let's examine human wants and needs and the way that our current environment is causing them to be actively re-evaluated.

- **Self actualisation** needs and wants generally take a backseat during survival mode. However this does not mean that they've disappeared entirely. If your brand could find a way to foster this kind of gratification in a way that's more accessible in this new context, you'll be on the right track. Consider the large number of people who are taking downtime to improve on their health and their knowledge.

Here's an example: Your brand can support consumers who are using this time to learn and grow in a number of ways. Be the brand that doesn't shy away from sharing its knowledge and sources. Give your followers a source of growth, and wherever possible, reward loyalty with exclusive offerings to create a sense of achievement for those who benefit.

- **Esteem** needs and wants will become more important as time goes by and humans start craving their former selves and lifestyles. The more one-size-fits-all solutions we come up with to save our businesses, the deeper the craving for individuality becomes. People will look to brands that offer them the chance to satisfy their purpose, or to help them discover a new purpose that is aligned with their new reality.

Here's an example: Volunteering is a great self esteem booster. With so many people feeling altruistic and so much need for help everywhere, it is the perfect environment to find volunteers for your CSR projects or other additional services you need help with. Tap into the power of crowdsourcing and ask your community/consumers for help when needed.

- We can feel a need for **belonging**. In uncertain times, humans will look for support, a community they can be a part of to support one another and have the sense that we're in this together. Rather than feeling like an individual in a target audience, consumers will find it more attractive to be a part of a community. This means that they will reward brands who offer support to the community as a whole, rather than solutions for the individual alone.

Here's an example: You can extract valuable feedback on a range of subjects, from product development to a more light-hearted subject like "tell us your funny lockdown stories". Offer to pick up the shopping for members in your elderly cohort, or support those who are on lockdown by offering an awesome reward for subscribing to your newsletter. Have their backs, show them you're in this together.

- With so much uncertainty and job security becoming virtually non-existent, people need to feel **safe** again. How can your brand be a beacon of hope, or an anchor during chaotic times? Brands that re-dimension themselves to offer a sense of stability will be an asset to their audiences.

Here's an example: Supermarkets experienced a rush of consumers bulk buying long lasting products and toiletries in fear of being on lockdown with limited access to supplies and potential financial pressures. By understanding the consumers' current limitations



in purchasing power and accessibility, one can re-design their product offering and buying experience. Preparing weekly or monthly subscription boxes at affordable prices, offering the necessary supplies for households depending on their size and lifestyle is one practical application of repurposing the existing supply chain. Supermarkets have already redeployed cleaning, check-out, and stacking roles to shopping for those ordering online. [In the UK](#) some supermarkets committed to specific hours where the store is open exclusively for elderly customers.

- The **physiological** needs remain as important as ever, except they won't be taken for granted. Even if resources remain abundant, accessibility may be

an issue both logistically and financially. Understand these disruptions and find ways to address them using your current resources.

Here's an example: If you're a furniture company with a reputation of being on time and your furniture imports and demand stopped completely, you have an entire fleet of delivery people that are standing completely idle. Can you re-purpose this department and contribute towards your customers' need for deliveries of other goods? Can you start offering a temporary courier service at a price that's reasonable (or a subscription pricing model perhaps) to those who need it while being true to your purpose and values?

⊖ No matter what strategies you decide to adapt, make sure you work on making your organisation agile.

Change is the only constant

You might have planned for lockdown, and now it's all over. Make sure you are ready for as much of the unexpected as possible, make sure your changes are either long-lasting and immune to some major shifts in the environment, or easily re-diverted as required.

Do consider the possibility of new norms having a lasting effect, especially around the accessibility and sanitary needs. Take this time to understand the true driver for these new norms, and whether you can still tap into this demand as things continue to change, perhaps by addressing it in a different way. We've listed a few ideas that could be relevant to your business later on, in the chapter on [Experiential & Event Marketing](#).

With things changing constantly around us, no matter what strategies you decide to adapt, make sure you work on making your organisation agile.

Be nimble and resourceful enough to achieve those quick wins through new opportunities that present themselves. Openings can fade away if you're slow to react. Others can be seized by competitors that have more resources or are allocating what they have in a way that's more current. Understand that this is not a case of sitting down for a day, remapping your strategy, and running it through to the end. This process will call for constant re-evaluation of your priorities and strategy. That is the only way to remain relevant against the constant flow of disruptions taking place.

“Surely finance is most important.”

Wrong. It's Brand.

Whatever your motivation or new goals are, always act and react in a way that is true to your brand's purpose. Read more about this in the [chapter on Brand](#). Strategically, this is a must if you intend to emerge from any situation stronger than ever. It is

A personality shows its true nature when it goes through a crisis. Brands are no different.

said that a personality shows its true nature when it goes through a crisis. Brands are no different. Now is a time for truths to present themselves, which means that those with sneaky intentions will be caught out. In a time when stability is something we're all seeking, brands need to remain obsessively true to their nature, and build equity that will last way beyond a crisis.

Developing your brand in a different direction essentially means investing in a new brand. If this was your intention from the start, go ahead, but if you intend to go back to who you were before the crisis after it's all over, that's a bad idea. It is expensive to untell your story so far, tell an entirely new one, and then go back to your original one even before you address your market. You need your entire team to be fully on board first, then start the arduous task of convincing the market. It will also erode your credibility. You've been telling your story with

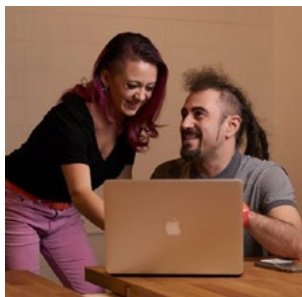
apparent honesty for a long time. What would your audience think if you suddenly pivoted and showed a new set of values?

Strategically, brands ought to take this time as an investment. A sound investment usually involves a hefty capital outlay that is rewarded by significant, long-term rewards. Do this to your brand. Exude your purpose and your values now, even if it has no impact on your flatlining sales. You will reap the benefits of this in spades when your audience has you as top-of-mind for authenticity and integrity when you're back to your original ability to sell. They will remember actions that touched their hearts and minds but they'll forget your 50% off.



In summary

- 1. Understand the new environment you're operating in, and accept it.**
 - 2. Re-define your goals, not objectives.**
 - 3. Identify your business' disrupted links and understand the new norms.**
 - 4. Brace yourself for a cycle of disruptions (an agile Strategy Review cycle).**
 - 5. Brand, Brand, Brand: Consider your Brand to be your most valuable resource.**
-



Expert Insights // Genius Steals

We caught up with Rosie Siman & Faris Yacob, founders of the nomadic creative consultancy Genius Steals, to pick their brains about strategy in the new normal - both for the long term and short term. Here's what they had to say:

S *The binary between short and long term isn't really binary. Strategy informs, and companies must operate, across different cycles of time, simultaneously. Inherently, the work of strategy begins in prioritization, based on a sober assessment of the business, brand, and bottom line, adapting to competitive conditions of uncertainty.*

*Balancing sowing and reaping - or brand investment which stimulates demand and creates defensible price premiums over time and performance marketing, which captures existing demand. The standard recommended split is something in the region 60/40 towards brand but it of course depends. Investments take time, and so we need to consider the long term, but **sticking to a strategy in rapidly changing circumstances isn't strategic.***

Should a company take a short-term strategic decision that might affect its long-term vision if it is the only way it can survive?

Investing in the long term is irrelevant if you are existentially threatened in the short. The context matters. Is it a seasonal business? Is it part of a conglomerate? What access to credit can it reasonably expect? Should it discount prices? And so on. But ultimately, survival is the sine qua non - without which there is nothing. As an additional layer of complexity, individual clients themselves are also facing challenging circumstances, and they each need to manage short and long term pressure on their KPIs and roles.

How much of an impact will short-term deviations have on the long term goals of a company?

Limited, depending on how short term. Brands entrench themselves in culture slowly, many of the biggest have taken decades. Any short term deviation at this point will be reflecting the shift in tonality needed in communications, activating the brand actions that help the community in relevant ways, but primarily about managing cash flow.

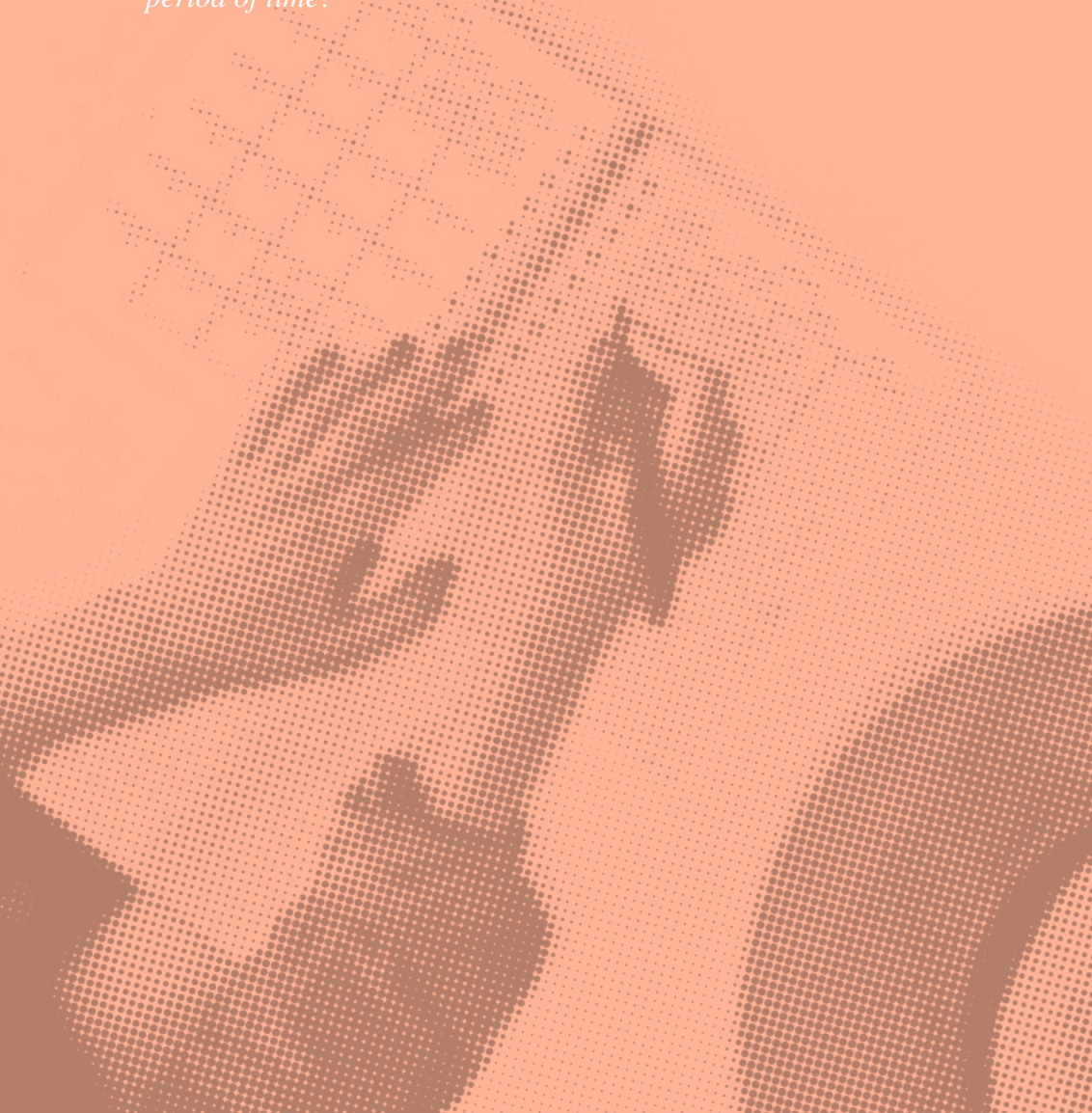
Is this an opportunity to take strategic decisions that would normally be too risky to take?

As always - it depends. Liquidity is the biggest issue for the foreseeable future. For instance, publishing creative work that is designed to generate PR is strategically sound. Pivoting to new SKUs, products or services might be necessary because of the conditions, but before taking on long term strategic decisions, the uncertainty needs to be mitigated into manageable investment risk. Until we can reasonably estimate the next normal, it's hard to make long term decisions well.

Communications without a strategy are usually just a series of random blips on a radar. Speak to us to help you build, and stick to, a strategy that will help you reach your goals.

Planning

Even if you don't know how long a crisis is going to last, it is important to consider your planning framework. Is it viable to create a crisis management plan for just this period of time?



While crisis planning is definitely one approach you could take, a more long-lived reaction to sudden changes can be a rewarding adjustment to your regular planning framework. Increasing your flexibility with movable KPIs can provide a business with a plan that can change, allowing you to increase or decrease the effort depending on external factors.

“I have a plan!”

Think about the number of times you've heard that phrase (whether in movies or in real life) referring to a detailed time-bound plan you should follow and execute to the letter. In most cases it refers to a solution that addresses a specific situation, an idea, an agenda.



For the purposes of this chapter, think of a plan as the following set of iterative tasks:

- 1. Analyse the situation you are in and revisit your goals.*
- 2. Understand which tasks need to be done in light of your re-defined goals.*
- 3. Articulate a set of events that need to happen in chronological order to execute those tasks.*
- 4. Evaluate each action and the way you will measure its performance*
- 5. Reassess the situation and repeat.*

Your plan has to feel more like plotting your way around a map with blind spots rather than getting orders done on time.

As you perceive changes to your external environment or implement changes to your tactics, keep track of all possible metrics.

The shifting goal post

Even as the world changes around us at a pace that's hard to keep up with, macro behavioural shifts are emerging and demonstrable with remarkable clarity (you've read about this in more detail within the first few chapters). These behavioural shifts are developing and, as they do, their effects on your business develop with them.

As you keep an eye out for the multitude of factors that the external environment is having on your business, you ought to plan for update meetings, or daily updates to centralised documents, about the ongoing situation so that your team is all on board and up to speed.

You can expect the main changes to fall into one of two categories: Consumer behaviour and public policy. Once you are aware of the specific shifts in behaviour or policy that are having, or will have, an impact on your business, you should adjust your events and actions to accommodate these shifts - baking in KPIs as you do so. As you perceive changes to your external environment or implement changes to your tactics, keep track of all possible metrics.

Tracking KPIs gives much-needed agility in a time where your ability to pivot quickly can make or break your business.

This is a time for wise decisions

No matter the financial health of your business entity, this is time to be resourceful. Slashing all costs at all costs is not being resourceful - you want to make the most efficient use of resources available to you with a cost-conscious attitude. While shifting into

resourceful gears, determine the clear next steps for your business and focus on achieving them.

Your priorities might have to change in this context. For example, now you might be operating in survival mode rather than aiming for growth, or you might want to shift your efforts and capitalise on brand marketing rather than take the original sales and growth approach you had planned for 2020. In any case, it is not time for any risky strategies you had in mind before the world changed. There will be time for fun later on.

If you decide that your priorities do not, in fact, need to change, it is still time to revisit your plan. While your endgame might be the same, the route to reaching it will surely be affected.

Resource optimisation

Consider this situation similar to a siege: it's vital to know what resources you have available and how long they will last. While the greatest concern at the moment revolves around financial resources, it is not the only one to look out for. Consider:

- Morale and motivation
- Ideas
- Distribution channels
- Human resources
- Brand

Identify your own list of resources, understand their new role or how they should be performing during this period, and set KPIs to monitor the specifics of every resource. Intervene when something isn't going as expected. You can also include this calculation in the initial examination of your environment.

No plan, no reward

Once you've understood which resources you have at your disposal, you'll be in a better position to understand the amount of risk you can afford to take per resource. Remember, not every risky action needs to be an "all-in" move. Risks should be calculated and strategic and traditional wisdom expects it to generate greater rewards than the risk itself.

Plan around the resources you can afford to dedicate to your strategic risks and make sure some risks are closely tied to innovation (i.e. allocate resources towards the ideal process for serendipity and [mindful experimentation](#)). Innovation is key in a crisis. We've entered a new reality with new dynamics, so we need to understand the cycle and ride it rather than break it. Humans adapt, a form of

innovation in itself as it applies familiar processes to new scenarios to make things work. Sometimes this process isn't so intuitive, which is why we need to plan for time and resources around innovation.

This is not the end

There is life after every crisis and we have started moving into it, so make sure your plans do not jeopardise your future. Avoid knee-jerk reactions such as severe price cuts that will only serve as patch work for your current situation. Remember that you should not destroy your brand's equity and reputation for the sake of a short-term gain right now. [Refer to the chapter on brand for more](#). Do not destroy your brand in the process. Make plans that are in line with your brand's identity.



We take strategies and turn them into effective and actionable plans that help you achieve, and exceed, your targets. We've done it for dozens of brands, why won't yours be next? [Speak to us today.](#)

In summary

- 1. Your plan should be a sequence of events based on current priorities.**
 - 2. The situation may be changing by the hour so check in often and keep yourself up to date.**
 - 3. Get your priorities in order.**
 - 4. Take stock of your resources and set up KPIs to monitor their efficiency and contribution.**
 - 5. Plan for risk and innovation in life after a crisis.**
-

Brand



How should brands react to a crisis - a local one or a global one? Is it prudent to keep going like nothing happened, even as the world around us reacts in a thousand different ways? Will this crisis end having separated the weak brands from the strong ones?

The purpose of every brand is to create long-term, value-based relationships. Let's break that down. A long-term relationship goes beyond a transaction. It means an ongoing conversation, a relationship that can last a lifetime. And a relationship that is value-based means that both parties, the brand and I, feel that the relationship has added something valuable to their lives.

Is this the right time to think about your brand?

Now is perhaps the most valuable time to do so.

But first, a little story.

Jeff is a marathon runner. He's not a pro - he works all day and spends his evenings and weekends with his wife and two sons. But his running is extremely competitive so he eats well and wakes up before the crack of dawn to put those precious miles in. Ask anyone about Jeff and they'll say he loves his boys and enjoys making them laugh, that he isn't ashamed to tell his wife he loves her when he's on the phone, and that he really, really cares about running.

Then this virus turns up and we don't see Jeff any more. We're at home, he's at home, we're not in touch. Six months later, when the whole crisis is declared over, what do you think we'll see when we meet Jeff the first time?



Your continued existence depends on every person who represents the brand feeling like their respect for it is being rewarded.

Those of you who figured he'd have left his wife, abandoned his kids, and gained 30kg are probably not the right audience for this ebook. I'm with those who think Jeff would have been true to his personal brand. He still went running, perhaps finding less popular trails. He stepped up his game at home, too. He emerged a better version of himself by being true to himself. Being true to his values made sure our perception of him could only improve.

And what is a brand if not a set of values and perceptions? This is the time to look inwards, to spend some time assessing what it is you represent to your audiences, and to be sure that you now emerge from the crisis having been true to who you are.

Be like Jeff. Look at what matters to you and double down on it. Start with your immediate surroundings - the mental and physical wellbeing of your team. Your continued existence depends on every person who represents the brand feeling like their respect for it is being rewarded. With your people feeling like they've made the right choice to dedicate their working hours to your brand, they will make sure your values are expressed faithfully even during difficult times. There's much more about this in the next chapter.

With your team on board, let's reassess our brand's core. What is my brand's purpose? Why does it exist? Of course, there is a commercial benefit. But that is not a brand's purpose. We could make money in a million other ways. The brand's purpose is what makes it wake up in the morning, what makes it better than any other on the market, and what keeps it going forwards through thick and thin. Make sure your actions are consistent with this purpose.

Revisit your values. Restate them to yourself and to your team. Remind everyone that these principles, along with your purpose, are what make the brand unique, what give your brand **focus** and **differentiation**. Your next actions are important and they are being watched by your audiences like a hawk. Be true to these principles.

If this is something you have been meaning to work on or revisit, now is the time to do so. It might seem counterintuitive but when you visit your brand during what is essentially a humanitarian crisis, you will inevitably build a more empathetic, and thus more human core. This will serve you in good stead in the future. The brands that are loved longest and that garner most loyalty are those that treat their audiences with respect for their humanity.

If you've had any downtime during the months since this started, you've had time for introspection, for asking tough questions about the very existence of your brand. Work with external consultants to provide an unbiased context that can help you with making tough decisions while unburdened by the unusually elevated emotions that are the hallmark of a crisis.

Keep in mind that relationships you build with your audiences during a time of crisis will run deep and last long. Your brand needs to be in its best condition yet for these relationships to be forged in a way that's enduring.

On this topic, we swap out advice for a gentle warning. If you change what it means to be you during these times, you will tell the wrong story to the wrong audience. You will form relationships out

of panic with audiences you don't normally relate to. Coming out of the crisis, this will be the new shape of your business. Ask yourself whether the business you try to attract during these times is the business you want to engage in for the rest of your brand's useful life.

Just because the lives of your existing and desired audience has changed dramatically, it does not mean you should go out and seek a new set of audiences. You should adapt your brand's offering to better suit the new needs of your current audience.

Finally, we deal with communicating your brand. This topic is dealt with throughout the document so we won't dwell on it too long. In terms of your brand's behaviour where communication is concerned, you may take one of three broad approaches. The first is silence. This is a bad move. Of course, brands should not speak because they want to say something. They should always speak because they have something valuable to say. So, having taken the time to understand the fundamentals of the brand and have chosen loyalty to your voice and to your audience, the essence of your message should be clear, instinctive even.

The second possible approach is to speak like nothing's happened. There are very few circumstances where this could be a valid option. In most cases, this will come across as being detached and self-absorbed. Humans don't react well to either.

Then there is the course of action where you speak in a manner that displays genuine empathy. It's evident that this is the most desirable position to take. Be true to your brand, be kind to your audiences, and keep in touch regularly, even if your messages are not promotional in nature. We want brands that fit in our lives in a space similar to the one we reserve for friends. These are times that show who our friends are. Make sure your brand isn't the one that ghosts us when we need it.



In summary

- 1. Revisit your fundamentals - recall your purpose, your values, and your promise.**
 - 2. Communicate with those responsible for your brand first - bring the team on board.**
 - 3. If you're revisiting your brand, now is a time to humanise it further.**
 - 4. Be true to your brand - don't sacrifice a lifetime of work for a knee-jerk reaction.**
 - 5. Maintain and strengthen your relationship with your audiences - keep in touch and on brand.**
-

Nike

Nike says that I'm an athlete and that you, reading this book, are an athlete too. If you have a body, the brand claims, you're an athlete. And all you have to do is, well, just do something with your body today for it to be better than it was yesterday. It's an encouraging and inclusive purpose, one we can all get behind.

Their response to the virus was simple and effective. They encouraged all of us to play anyway, just to do so inside. Suddenly, fitting within Nike's 'Just do it' narrative, the whole world was playing the same game and every

one could participate by staying indoors and playing indoors. That's one way of making the world a hero in a single statement. Then they resumed their regular stream of content. As they shut down retail stores and manufacturing operations around the world, they keep a brave public face and treat their audiences to more of their stories of heroic athletes they support and of the hip-hop related origins of one of their Air Max range. They acknowledged the crisis. They responded to it by turning every one of us into a hero. Then they resumed their conversation with us. It's not that hard really so just do it.

**IF YOU EVER DREAMED OF PLAYING
FOR MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD,
NOW IS YOUR CHANCE.**

Play inside, play for the world.



Case study

**You cannot communicate
until you've identified and
articulated your purpose and
vision. We'll help you do just
that. Talk to us now.**

Internal Communication



How do you lead a team in a time of crisis? That's an important question. And yet even once you've figured out the what and the why - how do you communicate with them in a time of uncertainty? That is something that your team is looking at you to do, and do well.

We're currently living in a time where rules and regulations change rapidly and without notice. What was right yesterday may not be right today, as we slowly adapt to a new normal.

It is crucial to make sure that everyone has access to clear information and that a rapidly changing situation is communicated as quickly and efficiently as possible. The last thing you want is for people to get their information from the office grapevine before they hear it from you. Are You Leading Through the Crisis ... or Managing the Response?

Your marketing team can help here. They are the people who are in charge of your brand voice, and they are the communications experts. Earlier on in the book we spoke about the importance of [brand](#), and the same holds true here - your method of communication should be intricately tied to your brand. Now is not the time to be going off track. Being true to your brand is key to making sure that nobody freaks out. Hold a meeting, send an email, a video, a song - just get the story out as clearly as possible and remain true to your brand.



[We found this article particularly useful in articulating how to be the leader your people need right now.](#)

Set up a schedule for updates, so that people know when to expect them. When everything else in the world is in chaos, you want to be a point of reassurance and stability. Bear in mind that living with constant change can be a source of great frustration for people, but let them know that you need to keep up with changes as they happen.

What you are saying may be hard to say - you might have to ask people to place themselves in what they perceive as a dangerous situation, you might be letting people go or you might be asking people to work less or more hours as you adjust - yet you need to find a way to be as sensitive as possible whilst still being as transparent as you can, and stay true to your brand - yes, we know we're repeating ourselves, it's important. We hate to say it but... rip off the bandaid, don't wait to communicate bad news, you want people hearing this from you in a manner that is as controlled as possible.

Everyone is keen to get back to normal, but we're dealing with a "new normal" now, and the way we communicate this news will have consequences.

Ok, so we're slowly trickling back to the office. Some people never stopped going there to begin with. Some people are still not allowed out. We're dealing with multiple humans in multiple unique and difficult situations.

How do you handle this? Set up channels that allow people to have as much flexibility as possible in the way they communicate, give them options and set up systems that are flexible and allow people to work from where they feel most comfortable. This is a marathon, not a sprint, and you want your people to have as much normality as possible in their day-to-day.

This means that you need to find a way for people to work efficiently wherever they are, while also keeping the team together as they spread over multiple locations. They need to work, but they also need to have a space to chat about the shows they watched last night, and how John in accounts got dumped by his girlfriend again.

The medium doesn't matter: Asana, Trello, Slack, and G Suite are just a few of many good options. Find a system that works for your organisation and get everybody on it. You want to make it easier for people to collaborate without being in the same room, so you need to think macro and micro. People need to have a way to work on big group projects but also have a way to quietly remind Karen that it's her turn to pull the report this month, and so if she could get on it that would be great.

We might be stating the obvious, but you're not seeing everyone in person. Make sure that you keep track of everyone, whether they are in the office or not, as in these situations it's easy to forget about quieter or more independent people if you're not seeing them at their desk every day.

Set up weekly meetings with the team and get them to talk about what they're working on. Keep an eye on workflows to ensure that nobody is snowed under, or at the other extreme, bored because no work is coming their way.

Remind people that what is important is not always urgent, and that they need to respect other people's work process and situation. Once they get back to the office, people are going to forget that they themselves were working from home just a couple of weeks ago and fall back into old habits. This is a good time to remind them that working from home is still "working from home" and not "holiday from home" - and also remind them that working from home does not mean that people are always available. Find ways for your remote colleagues to catch up with the rest of the office so that they are not sidelined.

When everything else in the world is in chaos, you want to be a point of reassurance and stability.

An important note to make is that this is an extraordinary situation. You are dealing with people who have had to make difficult decisions, who may feel pressure one way or another from multiple sources.

They are also juggling the emotional burden of dealing with a very scary and ever changing situation. This may affect their work, their patience and their communication; understand this and give them help when you can - and give them the space to vent when you can't.

Update, update, update. You're probably very worried about how to communicate with your clients at this time, and there's more about that in the next chapter. Right now though, you should be just as worried about your employees.

Look at it as internal marketing; as we gear up to fight our way into this new way of working, the way you treat your employees will be reflected in their work now and their commitment in the future.

In the opening chapter of this book we spoke about cementing relationships with clients and showing you care. Double down on this for your people. The bigger the company, the more complex the communication, but it's not impossible. Break it down into a well-defined pyramid to ensure that everybody has someone they can go to for updates, questions and advice.

We're all about communication (it's kind of what we do) so it comes as no surprise that our key takeaways on this matter are these: internal communication is always important in a time of crisis, it is absolutely vital remember to stay true to your brand.

When everything else in the world is in chaos, you want to be a point of reassurance and stability.



In summary

- 1. Remain true to your brand.**
 - 2. Communicate clearly and quickly.**
 - 3. Set up clear guidelines for internal communication.**
 - 4. Update, update, update.**
 - 5. Appreciate this is a difficult adjustment for everybody.**
-

Hotjar

The wonderful people over at Hotjar have some great advice about this, they have a team of over 100 people who work from home, and they grew rapidly within two years, going from a team of 20 to over 100 between 2017 and 2018 - so they had to put some systems in place in order to manage such a widely dispersed team. No big surprise is that the first thing they needed to do was get everyone in line with their brand values, but they also needed to tackle the way they managed people. What works for a tiny team does not work for a group of 100+. So they started with an internal survey, and from the results they developed new guidelines for working collaboratively:

- *Pitch ideas on a shared document and platform.*
- *Always assume that what is written in a chat is temporary.*
- *Do not give project status updates on large calls.*
- *Always think you can replace a call or meeting with asynchronous collaborative work instead.*
- *Every meeting requires an owner and the following points:*
 - *An objective and an agenda*
 - *Relevant data and required reading shared in advance*
 - *A clear output and action list at the end of the meeting*

If you'd like more detail about the tools they use and their methods for organising the team here's a handy link: [Effective Team Collaboration: Tools, Principles, Cheatsheets](#)

Case study

A happy and efficient team is the cornerstone of every successful business. We'll help you cultivate the culture that will be the envy of your employees' peers. Get in touch.



Expert Insights // Hotjar

[Hotjar](#) have always worked with a remote team, so they were more than ready once the crisis hit. With so many businesses currently adjusting to working remotely (including our own), we reached out to them for some expert advice. Marc Von Brockdorff, Co-Founder and Director of Engineering, gave us his thoughts on the matter:

As a team that's always remote, how do you make sure that people do not get lonely when working from home?

We actually have a [blog post](#) that covers this topic in some detail. However, besides everything that is mentioned in the post, we also have a specific budget in place for all team members, allowing them to travel to a colleague's town or city and work with them at the company's expense. Of course, this isn't happening at the moment due to COVID-19.

Do you track people's time? How do you ensure that everyone carries their weight?

We do not track time. We feel strongly that the key to running a successful remote company is to operate with full transparency (we share all financials and key metrics) and trust (we trust them to do the work they are hired for).

In terms of making sure everyone carries their weight, we end every week with a company release update – this is a call in which all teams (from all departments) can show off the work they shipped during the week. This has the side effect of making team members want to get work done to have something to show off at the end of the week. Of course we also have performance management and performance reviews in place, which allows us to follow up and act when team members are not performing as expected.

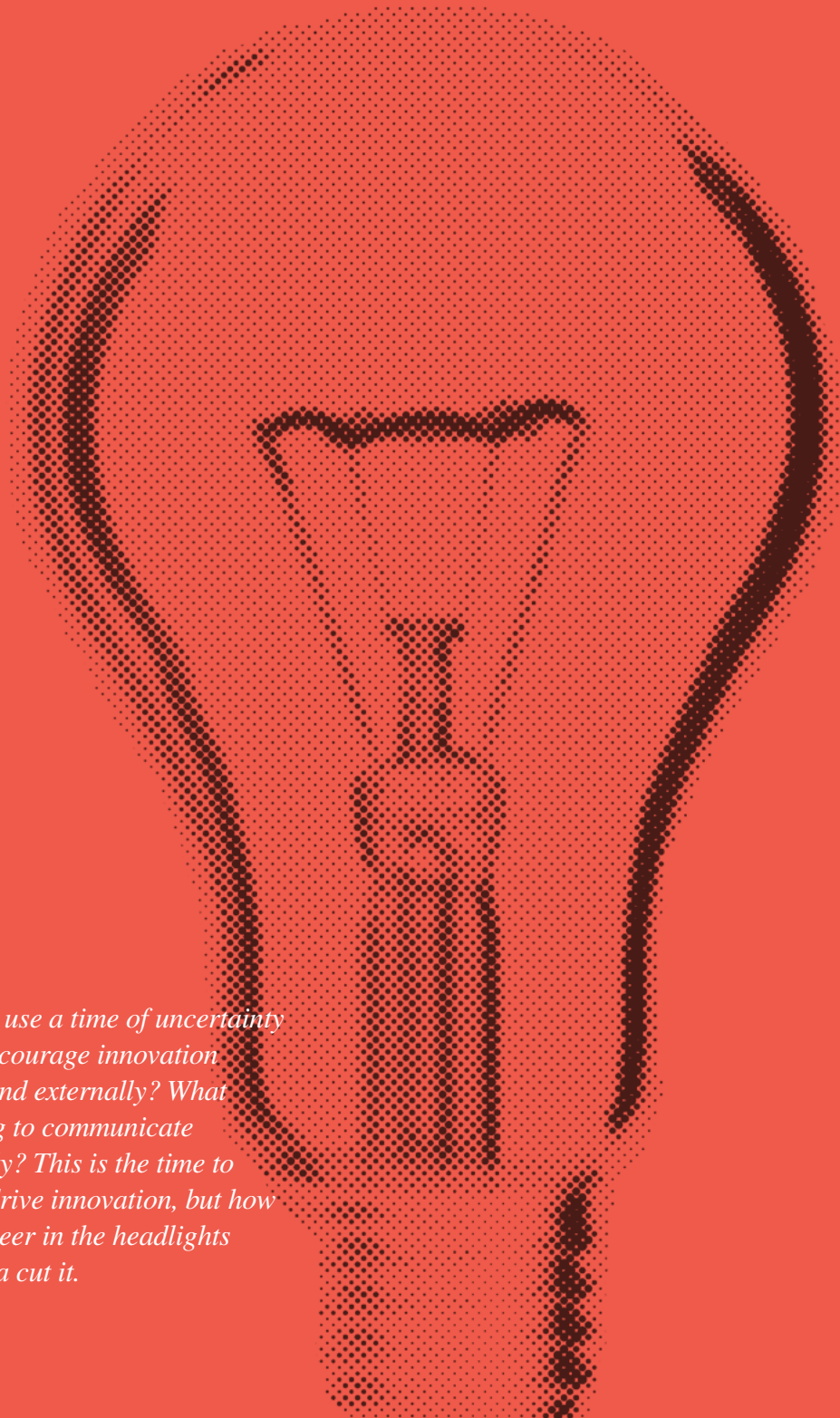
Do you have regular team-wide calls or updates? Or how do you keep the whole team aligned?

Yes. Besides the weekly release update I mentioned earlier, we also have monthly company update calls in which the whole team reviews the status of many of our projects, and gets an insight into our primary metrics and financials.

For alignment, we have started to use OKRs this year – these have already helped immensely with getting all teams on the same page. Each member of our senior exec team has monthly syncs with each team to align on their OKR progress and help eliminate bottlenecks when needed.

Innovation

How can brands use a time of uncertainty to enable and encourage innovation both internally and externally? What will you be doing to communicate more innovatively? This is the time to encourage and drive innovation, but how can you do it? Deer in the headlights mode ain't gonna cut it.



Innovation is rewarded in the form of highly effective solutions. However, few of us consider the high failure rate of innovation. Innovation is a process which typically has many more failures than successes, and utilises those failures to bolster a better product in the end.

There are two ways in which innovation can happen:

- Serendipity or instinct
- A documented and iterative process of trial and error

In essence, your options are simple: either rely entirely on luck, or be ready and okay with making mistakes. This latter approach is preferable and it will lead you to a process that has a little bit of both.

Innovation starts with a mindset. The period immediately following WWII brought a sense of unity and solidarity, and the trend was to be resourceful and frugal, opting for basics over luxuries and a whole lot of collaborative efforts to make sure no one was left behind. Will we experience this paradigm shift?



Focus places the collective effort behind the most successful ideas.

Lab work needs a lab

The process of idea generation needs to be defined within your organisation. In most cases, the following stages can help provide structure to what may appear as an initially unstructured process:

- Idea generation
- Collection of these ideas
- Analysis and feedback
- Testing
- Focus

When pursuing innovation, it's easy to get lost down a rabbit hole, or multiple ones for that matter. The difference between successful and unsuccessful processes is the constant reminder and the will to focus. Focus places the collective effort behind the most successful ideas, and permits them to reach fruition by garnering as many resources as are necessary, without splitting your time and money across other ideas that might not lead anywhere useful. Here's a guide to achieving focus in innovation:

- Complete **transparency** and unhindered flow of information across the whole organisation. In the unknown, data is king and it is far more likely for your organisation as a whole to have more data and understanding of the situation than any one employee. Share what you have and nurture an environment where everyone else does the same. If you're operating in the dark, have everyone light a match and describe what they're seeing, before you know it, you'll start understanding the new dynamics around your industry and brand.
- **Clarity** on where the organisation is going and what you need. If everyone knows that your sole purpose for the next month is to find a way to make your brand stand out, then everyone will fo-

cus on generating ideas that will take the organisation there, rather than waste time with ideas that try to generate sales for instance.

- Finally it will require **drive** and **discipline** by everyone in your organisation. These two words tend to be closely correlated to emotions like fear and exhaustion, but it doesn't need to be that way. Make sure you keep your employees' morale in check so everyone understands that while we are in an unprecedented situation, we WILL get out of this stronger than ever (more on this in our Morale chapter).

On Disruption

Clayton M. Christensen describes disruptive innovation as "the innovation which helps in creating new market and value networks in place of the existing market and value network which leads to the disruption of the market-leading firms, alliances, and products that had already been established earlier".

By that definition, a crisis like COVID-19 for instance, did not destroy our current markets and value networks, but it definitely disrupted the flow between all entities. It affected purchasing power, productivity, and most known and established distribution networks on a global scale. This inevitably implies that the world has been abruptly put into a different reality, with different limitations and different levels of resources. Human wants might have been affected, but human needs remain the same.

Some needs remain constant (like the need for nourishment, hygiene and shelter), but some others become more and more starved as time goes by (like the need for entertainment, security, socialisation and belonging). So the question is, how can your brand be relevant within a new need dynamic?

Not all innovation needs to be disruptive when the situation already is. Try incremental innovation. Start small, speak to your audience, make them feel heard and attended to, understand their new hierarchy of needs, and find ways to address them.

Where to start?

If you're mining for ideas, your best bet is to mine an area that is rich in insight relative to your business. The best place to start is with your fans.

Fans can be employees, customers, and community members or brand lovers - a collection of audiences that are close to you and that can help shed light onto the new needs dynamic. Employees are especially valid as they are humans too and are living the same situation as your cus-

Not all innovation needs to be disruptive when the situation already is.

tomers. In general terms, your fans' spoken and unspoken communication can provide insight into what they are truly craving right now. It will quite often be something you never expected.

Reach out, gather insights, and analyse your information. This will give you a good starting point towards an innovation cycle that has a better chance of success.



In summary

1. **Nurture an environment where you're okay with making mistakes, and documenting the failure.**
 2. **Not all innovation has to be disruptive.**
 3. **Your fans are your best source of ideas.**
 4. **Revisit your product's relevance in the current scenario. How would you be conducting business if this was always our reality?**
 5. **Think long term, cater for innovation beyond the crisis.**
-

Parfois

Parfois is a Portuguese jewellery brand which over the past couple of years has expanded globally. As a brand they aren't reactive except for when the seasons change and a new fashion trend is on the horizon, and the majority of their content is photography based showcasing their products. Parfois as a brand is usually not reactive to current events.

But this all changed when the Covid-19 pandemic reached Europe. For most probably the first time, Parfois reached out to the public with a black on white typographic campaign called #stayhome. The campaign centred around a number of different, basic home activities which we tend to forget about during our fast-paced life. They created Spotify playlists targeting specific home-bound tasks like cooking, time with children, relaxing, working from home and cleaning. They are also uploading simple recipes that can be done by anyone despite their culinary learning level, such as banana bread and simple pasta dishes. They've also called in on their brand ambassadors to share what they have been up to during these times. Not to mention other streams such as uploading sudoku sheets and other game material.

Something particularly interesting though, especially for Parfois which is usually such a private brand, is that they are conducting visual interviews with their head designers and other important personnel and sharing this intimate information with their followers. Parfois opened its creative doors to their followers, even though they did not need to. It's probably not even a part of their brand guidelines, and it's no mean feat when you consider that all the content was created in just a matter of days. However this is a clear example of a brand turning to innovation when it feels the need to give back to its followers in a small way.

Case study

Uncertain times see people resorting to what they've always done instead of innovating. We can run projects with you to kickstart innovation with creativity and acute business acumen. Let's do this.



Expert Insights // EBO

On the topic of innovation, we were curious to hear from Dr. Gege Gatt - digital entrepreneur, IT-Law specialist and CEO of EBO.AI - an artificial intelligence enterprise. Here's what he had to share in answer to our questions:

Is this the right time for innovation, or is it the time for conservative consolidation?

*Immediate and effective responses to COVID-19 will be vital to the survival of any enterprise. First efforts should focus on that. However the immediate tactical actions should not stifle long-term measures which always turn out to be more relevant to the company's positioning. Reimagining the 'next normal' must eventually take strategic precedence and **the toolset for that transformative journey is innovation.***

An old English proverb states that 'necessity is the mother of invention'. In times of crisis the need for business survival becomes a top-agenda item and an enterprise is understandably forced to find new ways of achieving growth and dynamism. This results in a form of 'forced innovation' which although less controlled than innovation by choice, still has a positive impact on business activity and aids the reinvention process.

What are the best ways to keep your company innovating in a time of prolonged crisis management?

Change is not the problem. The problem is resistance to change. When faced with a crisis, our natural reaction is often to battle it with all that we know and have learned. Yet a supple and graceful stance is more desirable.

We can innovate during a crisis by demonstrating 'quick wins' in non-core initiatives which we prototype rapidly and test in the market. To do so, we need to be clear about the objectives we're trying to accomplish and how we will measure success. In many cases, such an innovation doesn't return the immediate ROI we hoped for, but opens a route to market (or product) which is itself pregnant with possibility.

A core ingredient (often ignored) of innovation is collaboration. In a prolonged crisis, we should communicate and collaborate across functional groups within the enterprise, as this brings all the perspectives, inputs, intellect and ability into the central activity of growth.

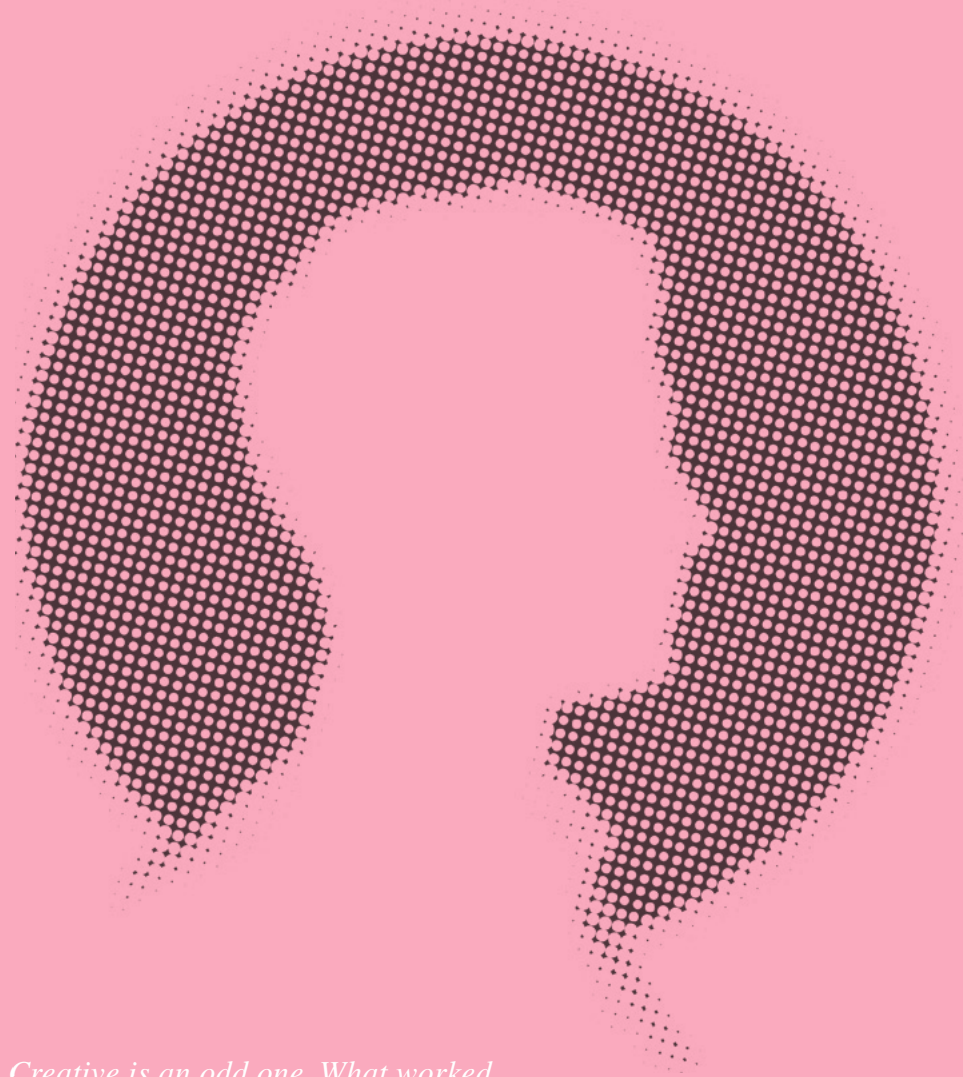
Do you see any specific areas of innovation that will benefit from the Coronavirus/Covid 19 crisis?

There is no doubt that COVID-19 will fuel the next wave of innovation. Disruptive events like this change the trajectory of societies, economies and governments, leaving an indelible mark in human interaction for years to come. Business behaviour has already jolted: the disruption of supply chains is getting us to rethink principles of resilience. Remote work necessities are driving a new work ethic and a set of supporting (technical) tools. Artificial Intelligence, and its amazing ability to automate, is standing-in for many human tasks which can't be performed by employees in quarantine.

The cross-sector acceleration which technology is driving is significant. Online education is being reinvented in weeks (as opposed to years) in many countries. AI-driven prediction models are innovating the way we predict which healthcare centre requires which resources, and subsequently what form of Governmental intervention. Manufacturing firms are pivoting their workflows to address new societal needs.

*The real disruption however is not that which manifests itself in physical products (although those are great too), but in the minds of millions of entrepreneurs worldwide who have understood that **capitalising on the changes brought about by the crisis is the only way to avoid being disrupted.***

Creative



Creative is an odd one. What worked today won't work tomorrow. But is that not the permanent creative conundrum? How does creative work during times of crisis? Let's take a walk back in time and then see how this could affect our future.

After the second world war there was hope and loss and a community that was closer than it had ever been. But that feeling of unity took just a decade to dissipate before the Cold War gripped the world and imbued it with fear. At the same time, all the technology that had served the war effort was being repurposed - faster airlines so we could travel the world, better cars, and we even had the promise of man on the moon!

Creative was broadly split into two. Some of it portrayed fear of the bomb, and some showed a wild optimism about a modern future. One did not replace the other. They coexisted and spoke to the audiences that identified with each side. The pessimistic mostly engaged with the scary stories while the optimistic gobbled up the tales of a space-faring species.



How do we tell the story of our brand or product during a time of collective concern? Which side would we like to take? What really matters is that you pick a direction and create remarkable creative. This is not a time to be silent.

We start by looking at our audience. Who are we speaking to? What's on their mind right now? What's the collective sentiment? And what stories are more likely to resonate?

And be sure to keep a finger on the pulse. The world went through different stages of reaction in the first days, weeks, and then months of this crisis, with each period dominated by a different public sentiment.

Creative themes, also considered storytelling archetypes, that work well during times of collective anxiety include:

Heroes

Heroes, even fictional ones, give hope and serve an aspirational purpose. Your heroes need not be the stereotypical ones from the canon of historical heroes like Thor and Odysseus, St Francis and Martin Luther King, or even the unknown soldier from the frontlines of the Great War. They could be the regular girl who, through actions consistent with what is best practice for the community right now, demonstrates exemplary behaviour.

Distraction

This is a collective one that groups within it all the messages that entertain us - the stories that take our minds off things and make us laugh or react with wonder and amazement. This is why #challenges are popular at the moment. We love to see others take on a funny or tough challenge and apply themselves to it in earnest.

This is not a time to be silent.

Collective sentiment

Many have much more time on their hands. In effect, the world has slowed down, it has time to breathe. We are taking a break from a society that had reached a fever-pitch and that was rushing along at a pace that is the most manic in human history. Our industry was battling with the knowledge that unless we seize the attention of our audiences within four to five seconds, they're onto something else. This ought to be the time for longer, more pleasantly drawn out interactions with our audiences.

What can your creative look and sound like given the extra time that our audiences have on their hands?

What worked yesterday won't work tomorrow. How should you analyse your creative and what are you going to change in your creative approach to deal with the virus?

Let's break down some of the components of your creative:

Tone of voice

Tone of voice seems to follow a continuum, from very formal and corporate voices all the way, to the boisterous and the irreverent. This is one of the components of creative that could benefit from a tweak during these times if your brand is on either one of the extremes we mention. The dry and the corporate will inevitably come across as insensitive during these times, as will the hysterical and the irreverent. If your brand tone fits within the slightly safer middle ground, you're fine. If not, move towards the centre a little.

Of particular importance is **sensitivity**. You need to be in constant touch with the public sentiment. Humans are in an unusually anxious state and will react very emotionally to a voice that does not

show empathy to their state. If, six months into a crisis, the public is feeling financially insecure, it is time to dial down displays of excess.

Visuals

Brand communication has visual consistency as a cornerstone. We are ruthless in our application of logo, typography, colour palettes, and all the other components that define your brand's visual language.

Let's consider all these defining characteristics as a framework, a container that tells its audiences who it is that's speaking to them. This is the bit that, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, we will never violate.

The contents, however, need to be revisited. Just as we can adapt our tone of voice slightly to suit a population-wide crisis, we ought to think about the contents of our creative. First, we must display empathy. Creative that seems to ignore the situation will be viewed as insensitive. Similarly, creative that overtly tries to capitalize on our audience's anxiety is a suicide mission for a brand.

Design

Once again, we can look at history to learn a few lessons. The excesses of the Art Nouveau movement during the glittering 20s quickly gave way to the more restrained Art Deco style that was considered more appropriate to the Great Depression. The 1950s, a decade that we keep drawing design inspiration from to this day, was a period of great optimism sandwiched between the crippling effects of WWII and the grip of fear of the Cold War. It gave us bold colour, optimistic product design, an unusually rich spread of typography, and the feeling that all will be forever good with the world.

Of particular importance is sensitivity.

This applies to our new reality - one where our home has suddenly become the majority of our surroundings. How does it impact the sweeping tide of minimalism that has been rearing its head for a long time now, aided and abetted by the likes of Marie Kondo? While we were captives in our own home, design had the opportunity to focus far less on pure utilitarianism, and had the duty to bring joy and comfort into our lives. We've mentioned empathy plenty of times so far and design is one area where it should show plenty of empathy and have the ability to do the elusive - 'warming the heart'.

Design for good. Design what's useful.

There are many ways of going about this. Design that will be remembered will be the design that's useful. [Distancing parts of your logo](#) is all well and good but it won't be an enduring symbol of how a brand helped out.

If data visualization is your thing, it's time for you to shine. We are a species that is hopeless at comprehending large numbers or data sets that include multiple variables. Help out by [showing complexity in a way that is easy to understand](#).

If your specialisation is closer to art and illustration, give people consumables. Make consumables more consumable and join the legion of artists that are putting their work into downloadable colouring books. Are you more interiors/spatial/product oriented? We have so many humans stuck inside their cages - they'll gobble up your advice on how to improve their space.

And even as measures keeping us at home are relaxed and social interaction resumes, it will not be the same as before for a long while so the home as a living space for longer hours than usual will continue to have relevance. For some, this reality could be attractive enough to be permanent. How would we design spaces to account for that?

As a member of the design community, we are expected to think differently. After all, being creative means making unexpected links between bits of knowledge we have access to. The design world has already leapt into [delivering unusual and useful products](#). How can your specific skill-set combine with your knowledge to create what people need? And don't think 'my client's business is boring' because even the NHS in the UK, as 'boring' an institution as we need right now, have come up with a [clever twist on their logo](#) that really helps their current situation.



There's more!

- Handy with a camera? [Shoot recipes.](#)
- Prefer pen and paper? [Draw recipes.](#)
[Or help with visualising useful tips.](#)
- 3D Printing/modelling? [Share what's useful.](#)

JUDY

Established in 2019 and launched this year, JUDY claims that “In a world where natural climate disasters are on the rise, only half of American adults are prepared for an emergency.”

“Our brand system, from the name and illustration style to the iconography and organizational design, works to transform emergency preparation from an intimidating task to a point of pride and reassurance.”



Case study

In summary

1. **Use your voice.** This is not a time to be silent. Show empathy and embrace the zeitgeist or condemn it - just don't ignore it.
2. **Your voice during these times will have a lasting presence.** Use it wisely since this is when entire creative movements are made.
3. **Tap into the core storylines that are at the very foundation of human behaviour.** Your work will resonate with more of us that way.
4. **Be a voice for good.** If you're using your talents for commercial purposes, respect your audiences. If you are helping the recovery efforts, be supportive.
5. **This is the time for your creative to be useful.** Relevance to these days means that your audience can relate and learn or take action based on your work. Even if it makes one person happier, your work has been useful.

**Creative ideas are what help
separate the wheat from
the chaff in uncertainty.
Which do you want to be?**

Social Media

Social media's role during uncertain times is much larger than it is on a regular day. It's where people go to get news updates, look for other people's first hand experiences and opinions. Social media shapes narratives and forms opinions. In a world where we rely on peer-to-peer communication as much as we rely on traditional sources, SoMe takes over as the go-to form of communication.

For brands, this has simultaneously meant that audiences are now more captive than ever but also currently less interested in being marketed to over these platforms. How can marketing content be more relevant in times of uncertainty? Some brands will adapt and surf the wave and some will sink. Which will yours be?

When the COVID-19 crisis hit and social-distancing measures were enforced globally, people inevitably shifted even more of their time online - web traffic grew by 20% week on week and FB app usage alone was up by 70%. The shift lingers, and it means that there are many more eyes to target, but will they want to interact with your brand? How can you speak to your audience in a way that is beneficial to your brand without coming across as tone-deaf?

Should I change my social media strategy?

Yes, but let's pick that apart. Firstly, no matter what product you're selling, you should definitely take the time to look through your editorial calendar for the next few months, and make sure that your subject matter is constantly realigned with current realities and that there is empathy and compassion in your tone going forward. Anything that might sound tone-deaf can and will bring you the backlash that you definitely don't need at this time. The rest depends on the type of product you're selling. If you're an ecommerce brand, evaluate your offerings and only continue with the social media content that is sensitive and relevant to your audience. Don't aggressively push sales, but continue to clearly communicate the problem and how your product solves it. Marketing is always about how a product will improve people's lives. This is still true now.

Social media makes for a great digital customer service platform and helps you guide customers to virtual marketplaces once you've set up your process to fulfil orders. Use social media to communicate changes to your hours, ways of doing business and any updates about how they can reach you. Make sure you're on top of your game when it comes to response time, because people want answers now more than ever.



Get creative! How can you create value online? Can you take your knowledge and teach? Can you offer product reviews? Can you start live video broadcasts with Q&As? Can you find ways to educate your audience about your field? The goal is to add more individual, customised value versus what someone could find online themselves.

Whatever you do, don't stop talking, otherwise you'll be forgotten.

Remember that your content has to be in context with where your audience is. If your audience's house is on fire, now isn't the time to educate them on fire safety. For instance, if you're in financial services, a financial crisis might not be the best time to educate people on maximising their savings for retirement. Rather, you might provide useful and comforting advice about what's really going on in

the markets or about which financial measures they can undertake to help short-term saving and cut down on spending.

Should I post more or less?

Behaviours change fast and consumers are wide-open for new products and services that can help them cope with uncertainty. Keep a close eye on your social media analytics and look for changes in how social media users are engaging with your content and your channels.

- you might need to decrease the frequency of publishing if you see that people are simply not engaging with your content.
- perhaps your content could be a little more creative and in-tune with current affairs.
- you may want to shift time and resources to keep in better touch with your current customers and understand how to serve them better.



At this time 'quality over quantity' is truer than ever.

In a time of uncertainty, 'quality over quantity' is truer than ever. And, as we said earlier, it might be a question of posting different content as opposed to changing the frequency. For example, you might have seen the meme about how it took a global crisis for people to start using Instagram Live. People have more time and willingness to consume video and explore new platforms than ever before. How can your brand capitalize on this? For example, although named 'live', Facebook allows you to premiere pre-recorded videos as if they're live which will help you reach your audience in a way you might not have thought about before.

Build a Supportive Community

During a time of uncertainty, people look for support and reassurance whilst trying to adapt to a new way of living, communicating and working. They will be turning to online communities for this purpose.

In a time of crisis, when people's regular lives are significantly disrupted, people feel the need for support and connection the most, and online communities help filling this void.

Here are a few pointers to get you started:

- Ask engaging, open-ended questions that will allow you to connect with your community on a deeper level.
- Look for ways you can be of service through valuable content. This can take the form of informative posts, product review videos or e-learning.
- Stem the flow of false news by ensuring that you are only sharing content from credible sources.
- Look for cooperative and collaborative opportunities with brands that compliment yours. Connect with specialists in the field to create content to help your community.

By relevant we don't mean that every post should reference the crisis - there's enough of that going around.

Facebook Groups provide fertile ground for long-lasting connections with your audience, especially at a time of uncertainty.

- Creating a group that deals with a subject you are an expert in helps foster trust and establishes you as an opinion-leader in the field.
- Though this group, demonstrate your expertise and dedication to your customers by publicly answering any questions they may have. You'll inadvertently be helping others out with the same issue.
- Time spent helping to assuage worried consumers will show you as a caring and selfless brand.
- Groups enable the connecting of a loyal and highly invested community on a more 'exclusive' platform, which creates a stronger sense of belonging.
- Brand loyalty is the end result here - the holy grail for all brands.

A consideration stemming from this will be how such interaction extends, especially beyond a crisis period. You would expect that the longer a crisis goes on, the more reliant people will become on such groups, and as that happens, that could lead to significant interactive shifts, moving more and more of our community engagement into digital realms. Now is the time to invest in building your brand's digital realm.

How can you change your content to be more relevant?

By relevant we don't mean that every post should reference the issue at hand - there will be enough of that going around. Relevant content will help people get through tough times by being sensitive, helpful and distracting whilst adding a sense of normality. Think inspirational, educational, useful or simply fun and uplifting.

Here are some examples:

Inspirational

- [*Vogue - Naomi Campbell's workout - inspiring people to stay fit*](#)
- [*Vita Coco - Donating and encouraging their community to donate using their social media channels*](#)
- [*Viral challenges - get your community involved.*](#)
- [*Jack Daniels - just heartwarming stuff*](#)

Fun(ny)

- [*National Cowboy Museum - Tim*](#)
- [*Ikea Israel - stay home instructions*](#)
- [*The Staying Inn - fun content*](#)

Useful

- [*Jamie Oliver - Keep Cooking and Carry On*](#)
- [*Heinz - Recipes*](#)
- [*Waterstones - #StayHome Storytime - story reading*](#)



All of the above

Mercedes - they do a lot of different types of content
- printable colouring books, legitimate information
from authorities, funny memes.

Live events

Chipotle - "lunch parties" on Zoom featured
interviews with celebrity guests and the chance to
win free food.

Will your brand be a winner or a loser at Social Media?

Brands that understand the delicate balance of their position within the digital sphere have already earned the trust of their customer base by using their communication as a tool for engaging and building relationships. These already exist within the hearts of consumers and needn't change tack much as their guiding principles will already have a solution for weathering a storm.

On the other hand, businesses that use social media as a one-way promotional tool or even worse, use uncertainty in a self-serving, performative way, will have a harder time connecting to their audience to make the impression they need to convert.

Uncertain times offer the opportunity to reevaluate your social media presence, make long-lasting changes and inspire your audience through relevant content, ideas and actions. Brands that understand this and adapt first will come out as winners.

In summary

1. **Your tone needs to be relevant to the situation** - show empathy and awareness.
 2. **Get creative.** Look for alternative ways to create value for your customers, to support and educate them, whether it's about your industry or the current situation.
 3. **Quality over quantity** - don't let your brand speak because it wants to say something. Your brand need only speak when it actually has something to say.
 4. **Be relevant but not necessarily by speaking about the current situation.** Everyone else is doing that. Be empathetic but also original.
 5. **Engage with your audience by asking for direct feedback.** Uncertain times are no time for broadcasts, they are times for active conversation.
-

**We've proven, time and time again,
that our social media strategy
and execution is market-leading.
Brands that work with us get better
results. Every time. What are you
waiting for? Let's get cracking.**



Experiential & Event Marketing



What should brands do with their events budget? And what should they be doing to prepare for a long period in which their in-person experiential strategy has been wiped out? How are B2B businesses going to deal with the obliteration of sales trips?

The last few years have seen a reaction to online-only communication, a backlash if you will, as we realised that humans want more out of a brand than the isolation that an internet-only mode of communication brings with it. The efforts have been concentrated around creating more significant, real-life experiences.

We considered millennials to be chasers of experience rather than, or let's say as well as, accumulation of possessions. Following in their footsteps and amplifying this desire is a whole new swathe of Gen Z consumers.

Not only did we reach back to real-life experiences from pre-internet days, we took inspiration from online only activities and created real-life experiences out of them. Consider those prepared to pay for an escape room experience. It was ported from a video game and turned into a hugely successful commercial activity.

Then the world changed in a way that forced social distancing upon us, eschewing real life interactions and forcing substitution for an entirely online one. Luckily, we are humans and we adapt to change remarkably quickly. Many of us grew oddly comfortable with the new lifestyle and have adjusted to it as best we can.

Catch-ups at the cafe were replaced by video calls over a coffee. Games nights at a friend's house still happened - only on Houseparty rather than as a physical social gathering. Concerts, festivals, and DJ sets were replaced by sessions on Instagram and Facebook's Live features. In the meantime, the business world moved its meetings to Zoom and Hangouts and a dozen other options for bringing us closer without physical proximity.

Experiential marketing doesn't end with a crisis.

So, your upcoming event, sales trip or activation has been compromised because of the current restrictions due to the global crisis? Don't panic, there's always a solution.

This isn't the end.



Events may have been cancelled but the world has not stopped spinning.

Events may have been cancelled but the world has not stopped spinning. You don't need to stop all of your experiential marketing efforts - you simply need to re-adjust your channels.

The story doesn't change. What changes is the way you tell it.

Repurposing and maximising budgets

With the restrictions that have come about, it might be challenging to replicate the in-person, real life, experience - and that's okay, because there are alternative routes you can take to achieve the same goal. Just because the tool is broken, it doesn't mean that there aren't solutions. These solutions might take longer, costs might vary, but ultimately you will always be able to achieve your objective.

Let's go back to the drawing board. Ask yourself: what problem do you need to solve? What was the purpose behind your experiential marketing effort?

Visualize your goals, understand what your business needs to achieve, and come up with a [plan of action](#) that still revolves around experiences.

There are three types of experiences that we can identify during a crisis that requires everyone to stay at home.

AR and VR

Augmented and virtual realities have become the norm. Just think of all the users who use filters in their Instagram Stories, or the hype that was Pokemon Go in 2016, or the times you've used street view on Google Maps. And these are just a handful of mass-market examples. Astronomers and photographers use AR apps to predict the location of celestial bodies using highly accurate

and very specialised AR apps. Furniture, paint, and other home improvement providers all used AR apps to show users what their home could look like, helping guide purchases very effectively. In short, the world is much more comfortable with AR and VR than you think.

[The Worldwide Quarterly Augmented and Virtual Reality Headset Tracker is predicting a 23% increase in the global market for AR and VR products by the end of 2020.](#) These products include real-life as well as completely virtual 360 experiences that are being developed by mass-market brands.

Different industries scrambled to create experiences that will keep the story they tell alive, even if delivery of their products or services were temporarily suspended. Consider the travel industry creating virtual tours around the world. The industry is not about hotels and rental cars and flights, even though these tend to be the items they charge for. They are about connecting people with experiences that they could not have had at home. Filling in that gap with a virtual replacement might not be the same thing but it does provide those at home with a temporary reprieve and it keeps the notion of travel associated with the brand that provides it best.

Food is considered hard to replicate but audiences had more time to cook than ever before. F&B brands that keep their story associated with delicious experiences will be remembered for just that when their doors are open once again.

What are you doing to keep your story alive even when challenges change the way your business is run?

Different industries scrambled to create experiences that will keep the story they tell alive, even if delivery of their products or services are temporarily suspended.

Virtual Events

This is yet another exciting repurposing of existing technologies to provide an experience that will replace the conference, trade fair, sales trip, or public activation that you've been forced to cancel. We've seen a rise of these over the last few months, and this is only the beginning.

Virtual events can recreate much of the necessary infrastructure that will allow a different but equally productive experience. This is the time to ask tough questions, the ones you'd hate to answer honestly during a regular business environment. This is not a regular time.

Ask yourself:

- What do humans get out of physically attending the event?
- What low-level human need is this satisfying?
- Can that need be satisfied without physical presence and interaction?

We spoke to a book-buyer about the fairs he won't be attending and asked for the typical proceedings of the event:

Confessions of a book-buyer

As a book-buyer I attend four main annual events around Europe - the major book fairs that showcase books printed in English. My assistant reaches out to all the publishers I represent and has the harrowing task of packing two and half days with hourly meetings. Every time I attend a fair, I open my calendar and look at the first slot. In there Paula's written the name of the publisher, the name of my contact, their stand number, and their phone number. I pull up my sales numbers for the publisher and head to the stand where I sit across a desk, exchange pleasantries, listen to what's new, and in general we assure one another that we do, in fact, exist and that we want to continue doing business. The real work happens between fairs. Preview copies of books are mailed to the office, we send in orders regularly via online sales tools, and we chat over email and text.



It's something we tell our clients constantly, but is now more pertinent than ever: this is a time to try things, to test them, and to fail publicly. Acknowledge your failure and your audience will forgive you, maybe even root for you to try again and succeed.

When the process is broken down, it is evident that the entire chain of events can be replaced with a clever, virtual experience during which, for the same two days, meetings are scheduled and held over video calls. The specific experience will not be the same but the outcome most definitely will be.

Break down your event in the same way as our book seller did, seeing it from the eyes of the attendees, and divide it into discrete processes. Chances are that the tools you need to port each one into a virtual experience are already out there and highly developed.

Let's not forget about content.

A crisis like COVID-19 affected social gatherings and resulted in the rise of virtual events: webinars over Zoom, LinkedIn Live interviews, and Instagram Live collaborations. Don't just jump on the bandwagon because everyone else is doing it. This rule will always apply: if you want to stand out from the noise you need to create content that is relevant to your audience. Always keep your target audience in mind and ask: what will they gain from attending your virtual event?

Contactless Experiences

Think about your experience when ordering food for delivery from your favourite restaurant.

We have two scenarios:

- The first one, is your standard "pizza in a box" delivery. It is convenient, familiar, and relatively unremarkable.
- The second is a full dining experience delivered straight to your door. Picture an array of different dishes, each with detailed instructions on how to perform finishing touches as well as plating suggestions. Go on and add wine pairing, a custom music playlist, a candle and a pretty candlestick that you'll keep for long after you've consumed a delicious dinner. If the restaurant really wants to go the extra mile, they'll provide cutlery and crockery, picking it up the next morning so you won't even have the dishes to wash. Isn't that part of dining out?

Once again, we've looked at the experience from the perspective of the customer: the diner.

If you only define the experience you usually provide from the perspective of the provider, you're likely to encounter obstacles which seem insurmountable. Turn things around however, and approach the problem from the perspective of the customer - you're likely to solve any issues pretty quickly this way.

Here's a hard truth. As someone who has provided an experience for a while, it's going to feel strange

to step into your audience's shoes for a while and see things from their point of view. It's fine. Your audiences will do anything to help a brand that, during this time, humbly asks for their opinions. Ask a handful of your customers to describe your last event to you. Ask them to be detailed and to describe a walk-through. You might just find out that they see things a lot differently to the way you do.

Giving your audiences a complete replacement of the experience might sound counterintuitive. What if they decide they prefer this format? As the world starts to resume a degree of normality post-COVID, there will be a whole lot of folks who, starved of social contact, will quickly flock to your regular event and enjoy it like it's their first time. There will be others who will prefer the newer online format. Well, don't abandon it. You've suddenly doubled your audience.

It's going to be ok

Experiences were the quickest to be hit by the crisis and its effects were crippling. It is easy to see a rather bleak future but that would only allow others to jump in and get it right before you do. This is a time for action.

Happily, crises have proven to be a time when your audiences are at their most forgiving. Think of your relationship with a brand you consume and how you were fine with them speaking to you via unusual channels and in a way that's less polished than usual. Your audience will be the same with you.

It's something we tell our clients constantly, but is now more pertinent than ever: this is a time to try things, to test them, and to fail publicly. Acknowledge your failure and your audience will forgive you, maybe even root for you to try again and succeed. If you don't have the time or the ability to produce sensational video, grab a phone and put something quick together. This will come across as solidarity rather than being cheap - your plight is the same as theirs.

So test, test again, and be fine with going out with what's good rather than waiting until you can make things perfect. Improve as you go along and as your audience watches. An audience that grows with you will be a loyal one.



In summary

- 1. Set those goals. Define the objectives for your experiential marketing efforts for times of uncertainty. What did you want to achieve through your events?**
 - 2. There isn't one winning formula - there never was. Examine your experience in detail and understand it from the viewpoint of your audiences.**
 - 3. Repurpose your tools and your budgets. You are going to work with a new set of tools to achieve your existing goals.**
 - 4. Create experiences that match the needs of your audience. Don't blindly replicate the process you know. Assess your event through the eyes of your attendees and give them what they seek, not what you usually provide.**
 - 5. People have proven to be more forgiving, especially during this new normal. While this does not negate the importance of testing your events prior to launch, let's not forget that during a crisis people are more likely to forgive your brand for experimenting with different channels during these difficult times. Mistakes during live videos are almost expected - so don't delay your event in an attempt to achieve perfection.**
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Expert Insights // TRIMM

Too many brands and marketing practitioners shift the entirety of their efforts to digital, treating it like a single magic bullet. This ignores the fundamental human need for first-hand, in-the-flesh experiences. This crisis has, however, encouraged digital-only experience.

Marc Woesthuis is the Managing Director of TRIMM, our ICOM Partner agency in The Netherlands. We reached out to him with a few questions on this topic, curious to hear his expert opinion on the matter.

How can we translate as many of the benefits of experiential marketing to digital in times like these, and which elements can we consider to be a battle we cannot win?

In this time frame, organizations need to be very creative to reach customers and to come up with a unique proposition. It seems digital is one of the only channels - TV ads are withdrawn, outdoor signing used to be very expensive, although prices are now sinking like a submarine. The challenge we're facing is that every country is handling the situation differently. In some countries shops are still open, while in others they're closed. eCommerce stores are working around the clock to deliver. In some countries all employees have a significant income drop if they are at home from work, while others are rather stable. This means that there is no one response that will work across the globe.

What should brands do with their experiential budget? Should they be saving it up for mega experiences when we're out of this, or should they be providing digital experiences now?

What we need to focus on at the moment is experimental marketing with small campaigns. Understand the situation - Do we need to promote awareness and/or sales? Are people buying goods in a national, regional or local market? Suddenly we don't know what works and doesn't.

So the only way forward is to execute experiments that will teach us the best way forward, and help us understand how customers can be attracted to convert them into sales during a crisis.

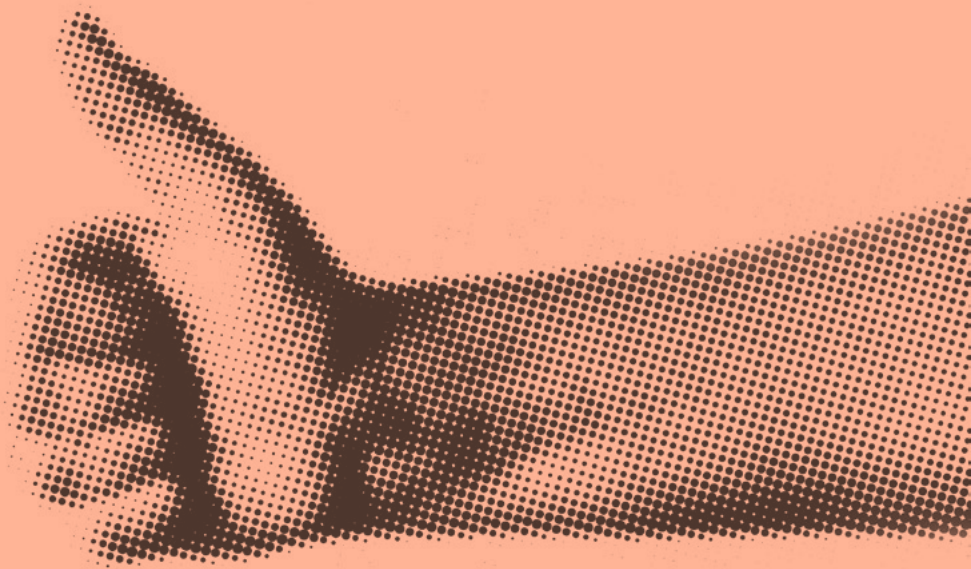
Do you have any recommendations for brands who want to start experiential marketing at times like these?

Brands, get your guts together and make sure you're the first who gets the customers once they are able to spend your money again.

We see a lot of webinars being held nowadays. During this crisis, a lot of organizations are looking for ways to get in contact with their customers. However, being in front of a webcam in your kitchen is not an experience that will impress your customers. An online event should still communicate the experience of a real event.

People remember what they feel,
not what you tell them. For years,
we've worked with brands on
experiential projects that have
created lasting memories for
thousands of people. Speak to
us to see how we can help your
brand be remembered.

Customer Experience



If you're currently focusing all your efforts on your product offering and marketing efforts, you're probably missing out on a vital step that's costing you conversions. In this new normal, your digital customer experience is a lot more important than you might think.

What are the main tenets of selling your product or service online? A quality, well-priced product, and good advertising that generates traffic to your website. That's it, right? What else do you really need?

Self Analyse

How many times has the following happened to you: you see an ad for a product you like, you're interested but not really in the mood to spend money right now, so you ignore it. Then you see the same ad again and you think about it a little more. You remember just how much you want that product, but it's still not the right time to purchase for whatever reason. Then you see it a third time being used by a friend of yours, or an online influencer. Maybe you click on the ad the next time you see it and take a look at the website.

You spend a few minutes on the website, but for whatever reason it doesn't feel right. It may feel a little difficult to navigate. The overall design may feel questionable. You don't feel safe putting your personal details into a website that doesn't make you feel at ease. Maybe shipping costs are hidden until the very end, making you feel cheated. Or some other of a myriad reasons that can be attributed to the website itself. Therefore, you tuck tail and search for the product on Amazon instead. We're willing to bet that this has happened to you at least once in the last few months.



So why didn't you purchase? The failure happened at customer experience level.

What went wrong?

That website didn't fail to turn you into a customer because of its advertising. The ad did its job. It got you to click. The product was probably well-priced and likely what you've been looking for. So why didn't you purchase? The failure happened at customer experience level. It's the equivalent of walking through the doors of a brick & mortar store. If you're not made to feel welcome by the store itself (without considering the products themselves), you'll likely not purchase anything. If the store is huge and there's no proper signage to indicate where everything is, you'll probably wind up frustrated and walk out. You'll be just as frustrated if products aren't priced clearly and, once again, you'll walk out.

The same goes for any website. This applies now more than ever, because, guess what, brick and mortar stores are closed for the foreseeable future, and whatever is online is the only thing that represents your business right now. So it's not only about having good advertising and quality, well-priced products. It's about the online customer journey and overall experience. From the ad to the after-sales email confirming your purchase, every step needs to be perfectly orchestrated to lead to the next one.

Now is the time to break down your customer journey to its very essence, and rebuild it from the ground up, with the online shopper in mind. After the crisis is over it would be foolish to assume things will return to the way things were. Throughout the following weeks and months, infrastructures will have been built to sustain a higher level of ecommerce, and the demand for online shopping will continue to exist even when people are free to go about their lives normally.

Investing in a strong online customer experience will not only serve as a respite to the current crisis, but it will also mean a better overall product offering for your customers in the future, once life has settled into its normal routine (whenever that is, and whatever it looks like).

Demand for online shopping will continue to exist even when people are free to go about their lives normally.

Data is Power

Many may not be aware, but tracking technology allows us to truly track the journey of each individual who visits our website. If you already have an ecommerce website, we recommend investing in getting this tech up and running. With enough data about what people are doing once they've reached your website, you can visualise what a typical visitor does. You can identify which pages on your site cause people to close the page (also known as "bounces"). "Heatmaps" overlaid over your website pages show you exactly where people seem to be clicking the most. You can see how long (or little) people spend on your website, and on which pages. Basically, from this data, you can begin to identify problems with your customer journey and rectify them.

How may I help you?

You may have also noticed that lately nearly every single website has a little pop-up chat box that appears on the bottom right of your screen. It's the equivalent of a retail store assistant checking whether there's anything they can help you with. If implemented well, this can be useful for anyone with a specific purpose, but unless you have a real human behind every single chat, the experience can prove to be frustrating. That being said, chat-bots have exploded in popularity over the past couple of years, and the technology is rapidly improving. Remember that if not implemented well, a chat-bot can be a significant source of frustration for the end user, so if you do decide to go down that route, go big or go home.

Be water, my friend

Think of your digital customer journey like a river, gently flowing to a lake. One contact point must point towards another with purpose, but without being pushy. Possible frustration for the end user

must be minimised to its lowest degree. Here's a list of typical peeves that may be causing your river to be a bit too rocky:

- Annoying banners that get in the way of content
- Subscribe pop-ups without a clear 'X' to close
- Too-chatty chat-bots
- Unwieldy navigation
- Search functions that are non-existent, or don't really work
- Poor text contrast & illegibility
- Broken links
- Lack of a decent mobile interface
- Inconsistent design from page to page
- Slow loading times
- Clickable areas that are too small
- No clear way to get in touch

Basically, the less your user has to think, the less frustration they'll experience, and the quicker they'll end up in the "Thank you for your purchase" page.



In summary

1. **Analyse your journey as if you were a customer - from ads to post-purchase.**
 2. **Systematically eliminate frustrating steps - from a user perspective and not from the perspective of yourself as product or service provider.**
 3. **Data is power, and your site has a lot of data. Collect all you can and make sense of it.**
 4. **Be helpful, offer direct help, and be sure that any automated assistance you offer, like a chatbot, is actually useful to the customer.**
 5. **Ensure easy flow from one step to another. Grease those joints - you want your customers to flow with ease.**
-



Expert Insights // LVMH

Customers, collectively, have experienced the biggest shift in their habits for a whole generation (or three). We were curious about the effects that COVID-19 had for luxury brands, and reached out to an Executive Committee Member of an LVMH company with a few questions:

How is the customer experience changing? Will these changes persist and implant themselves into the 'new normal'?

The changes in the behavior of the luxury customer had already begun before the pandemic hit. We noticed that:

- *Storytelling as a fundamental has shifted into storyliving.*
- *The ivory tower is turning into a commitment. We're noticing a trend where luxury now needs to take a stand on life in general. There's a need for convictions, vision and background to get out of snobbery. This is a trend seen across all audiences, regardless of age.*
- *The celebrity is becoming a singularity. We're witnessing the takeover of the consumer, who rises to become the marketing director, the artist, the director of communication themselves. Now, the information flow comes both from the top and from the bottom, from the tribes, and from the street.*
- *Advertising is shifting towards aspirational proximity. Brands show faults, allow peeks behind the scenes, strive to be less fake: they're showing real personalities with their real faults. Brands need to be in touch with reality if they're to remain relevant.*
- *Culture is now counterculture. The conservation of privileges by elites is lifting. The counterculture is looking to fields that aren't the nobility, but are more pop, more street, street art, sportswear.*

If we look at these developments in the light of the pandemic, we realize that social distancing, lockdown and restriction of freedom are above all likely to reinforce these shifts, which were already underway.

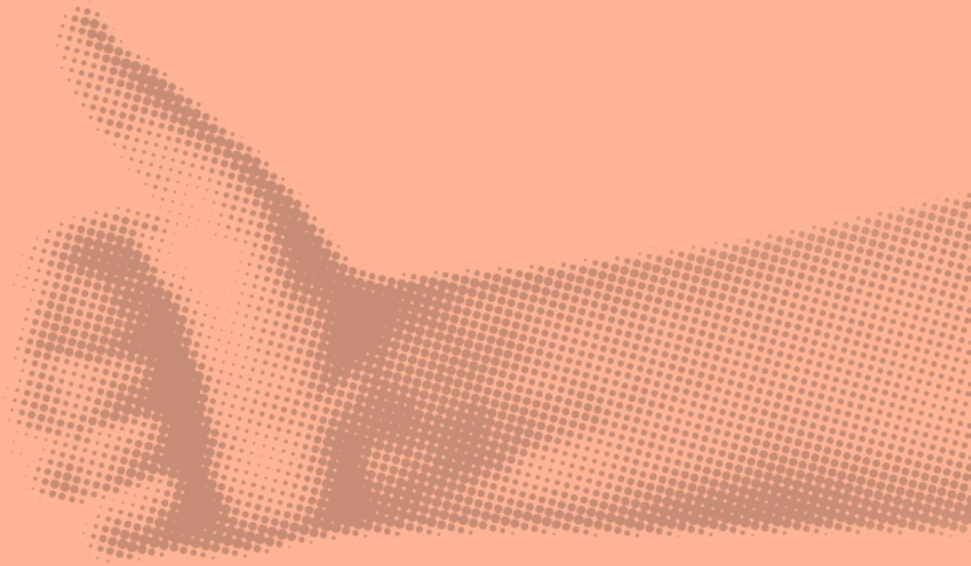
Now that people are more used to the comfort of ecommerce, will they want to go back to physical stores? Have we just accelerated changes that were bound to happen, or are we seeing a shift that was unpredictable (in nature, not in the rapidity of its onset)?

People will probably want to go back to physical stores, yes. The reason being that ecommerce provides comfort and convenience, of course, but the physical store provides physical experience, discussion, even a sense of belonging at times.

It is clear that the balance will shift and that the ROPO will evolve very strongly (By ROPO I mean Research Online, Purchase Offline - and vice versa). That said, it is easier for luxury brands (perfumes, spirits, leather goods, fashion or jewellery) to build a memorable experience by playing on all of the customer's senses (view, smell, taste, hearing, touch, feeling in space, etc.). This is only really possible in the physical world, as e-retail only plays on sight, and on a reduced scale.

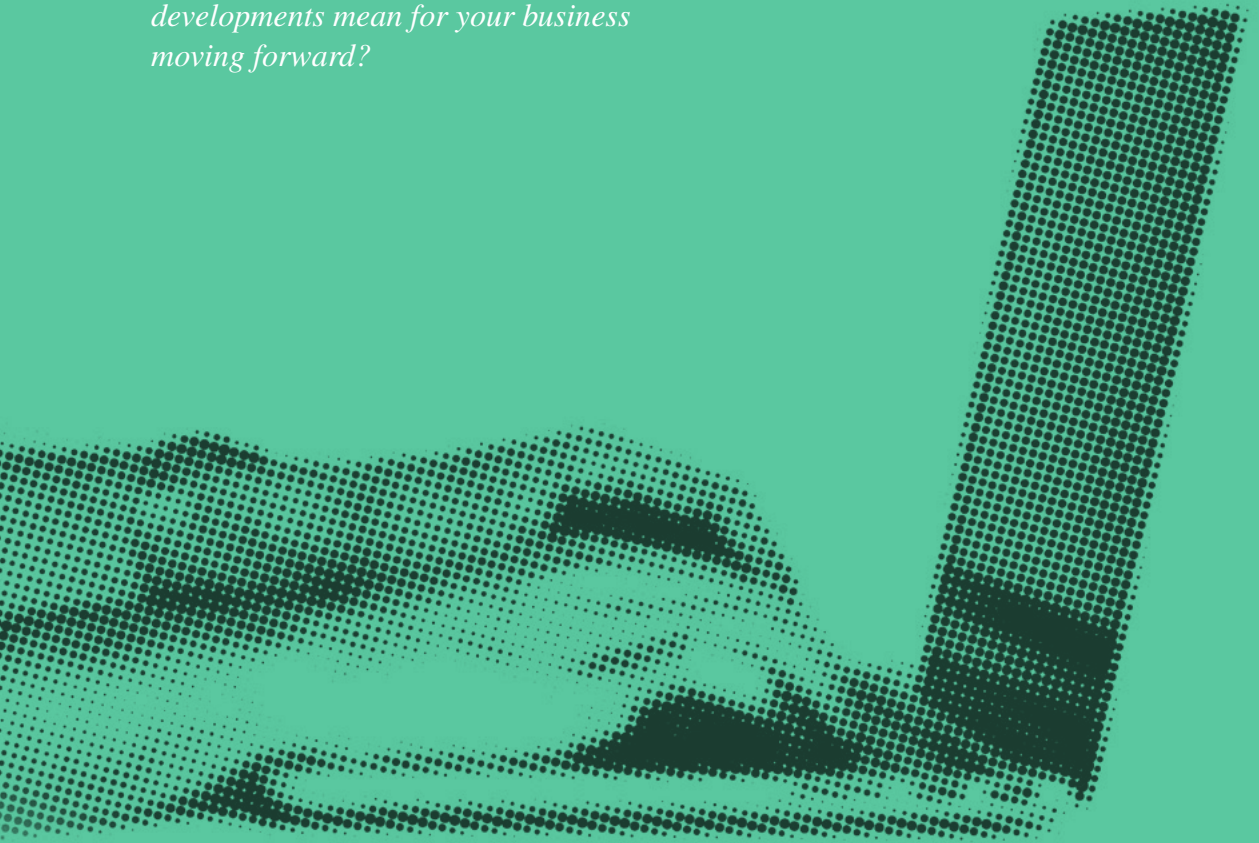
What is certain is that the social restrictions will have put a significant boost in the already very dynamic evolution of online sales, and that there is no reason to think that this will take a step back again. The future will be more multi-channel than ever.

We'll help you plan your
custom experience to reduce
uncertainty and increase
comfort in your services.



Customer Journey

As eCommerce has been accelerated to the forefront of businesses over the past few months, how has the customer journey developed in that time? What do these developments mean for your business moving forward?



A customer journey map is a visual representation of the process a customer or prospect goes through to achieve a goal with your company. With the help of a customer journey map, you can get a sense of your customers' motivations - their needs and pain points.

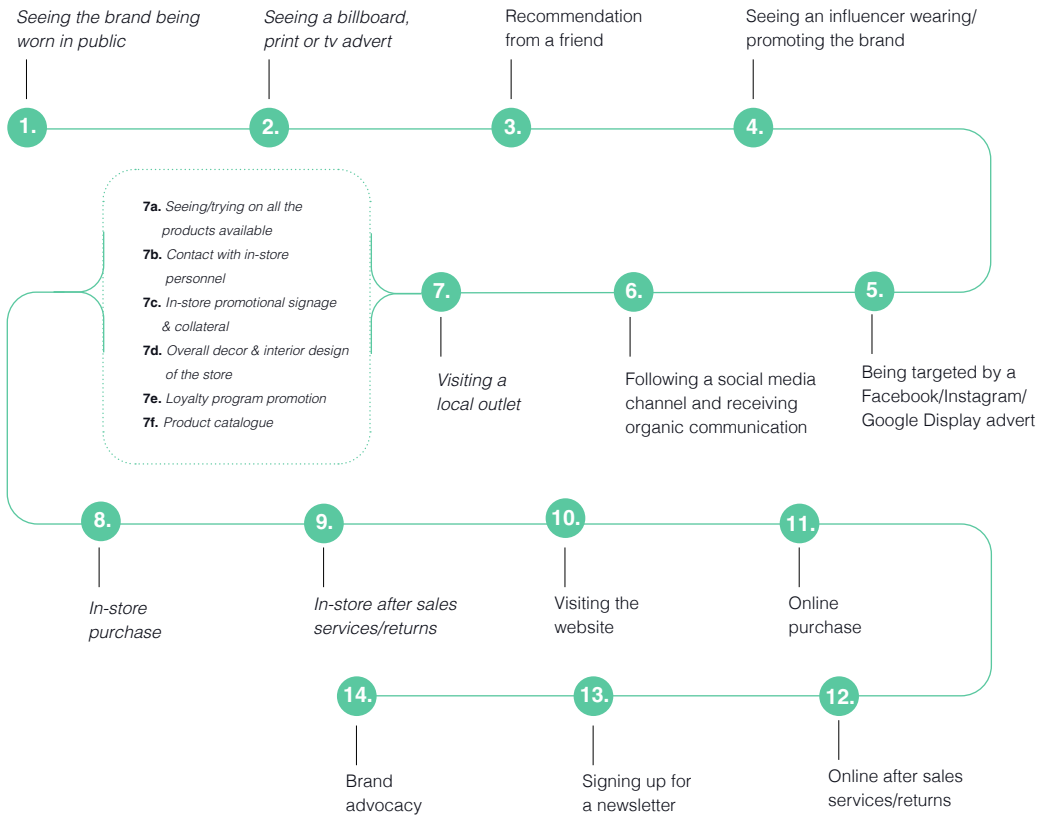
In the best of circumstances, getting into the shoes of your customers is a tricky ask. Figuring out how and when they interact with you, and what specifically in those interactions motivates them to act in any particular way is a real challenge. Customer journey maps help bring that experience into focus by outlining as many details as possible about each and every touchpoint a customer has. Painstakingly going through this map allows you to understand where and when a customer might be derailed from the journey, and endeavour to fix it.

Why should you bother?

For the most part, the mapping out of a customer journey is done at the start of a company's life, and doesn't really change unless the business itself goes through major structural changes. Many-a-time, a customer journey isn't officially mapped out beyond a rough outline that exists in the brains of the management. If you are one of these businesses, we strongly recommend taking the time to go through this exercise, especially since many long-established customer journeys are changing, thanks to the acceleration of eCommerce -- whether you like it or not.



A sample customer journey map for a clothing brand could look something like the below. It's one of a thousand possible combinations, and each point can expand into a lot more detail depending on the store in question:



As you can imagine, an essay could be written about each individual touchpoint, as there are nearly unlimited possibilities as to what might go wrong/right at each touchpoint that could affect the ultimate behaviour of a customer. And that's exactly what makes this exercise so valuable. By taking the time to think of as many possible scenarios as possible, you can begin to understand the way your customers are behaving. It might be worth scrapping any old customer journey map you've put together especially if it has been a while since it was created, because undoubtedly, your customers have either found new ways of

interacting with your brand, or have begun to change their behaviour due to other reasons.

Forced evolution

The elimination of brick & mortar stores during the crisis was a huge concern for many businesses, and the financial repercussions of that closure will be felt for a long time. The closure of said stores not only affected businesses, but also the general purchasing behaviour of consumers. Customer journeys were forced to go through major changes in a very short period of time.

Your customers have either found new ways of interacting with your brand, or have begun to change their behaviour due to other reasons.

Note that in the sample customer journey map we've laid out here, all the italicised touchpoints were impossible during the height of the pandemic. These are all points on the map that were completely taken out of the game, and they may never go back to the way they were before. Perhaps those who never would have bought your product online, or chatted with a rep through Messenger and were forced to do so during the lockdown, will never go back to the old way.

What now?

While the height of the pandemic seems to have passed, it would be foolish to assume that people's behaviour will automatically go back to the way things were. If we've learned anything from the past months, it is that eCommerce can work, and work well if executed in the right way - to the point that it can bring in the same revenue as any brick & mortar store. This is because consumers were forced to change their journey, and that journey will likely never return to exactly what it was pre-Covid.

Therefore, create your customer journey again as it stood just before the crisis began. Go into as much excruciating detail as possible. Mark the steps that have been affected, both mildly and severely. Identify the ones that are now suddenly thrust into the limelight due to the fact that people's habits might have evolved in the past months. This way, you'll be able to create a list of

actionable items, prioritised by the ability of the item to reduce customer frustration and anxiety. Pay particular detail to those touchpoints that have changed significantly.

With all that in mind, create a new customer journey with all the possible adjustments that can be made to make the experience of interacting with your brand as smooth as possible.

Wherever possible, the touchpoints that have been erased must be replaced by something that will provide equivalent value. Loyalty programs must be able to live digitally, as should seasonal promotions and product catalogues, for example.

What later?

The more a business manages to convert physical touchpoints into digital equivalents now, the less of the customer journey will be lost, and the more of the original overall experience is retained. Thanks to that consistency, the customer anxiety can be slightly abated, and possibly turned into a positive for the future. It is very likely that by forcing eCommerce to the forefront of the mass market, more people who never shopped online have done so already, and may continue to do so, making the careful mapping out of an updated customer journey map all the more important for the future of any company that is striving to get through any crisis in one piece.



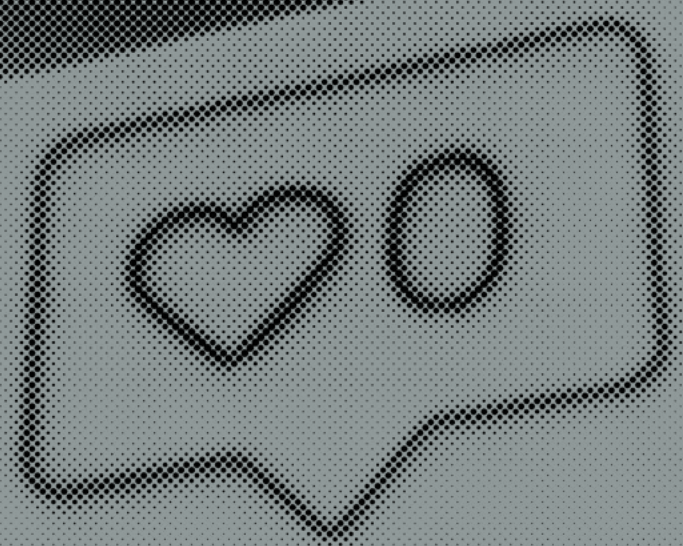
Unless we work together to plan out the entire customer journey, we'll never be able to help you identify the instances in which you might be losing clients to your competition. Contact us now, there's no time to waste.



In summary

1. Build customer journey maps, even if you know your journey well but have never documented it.
 2. Assess the steps in that journey that have been impacted by the crisis, and beyond.
 3. Improve or adjust existing steps to recover lost business.
 4. Convert what you can to digital - it will help now and pay off later.
-

This is the time to create more content, not less. At the risk of sounding like Oprah, you have the time, your audience has the time - you all have the time! As we settle back into life as it used to be, give them the gift of distraction: things to read, see, watch, listen to and share. Help them make sense of the new normal through entertainment, education and yes, sales. That's why you're here, isn't it?



Content Marketing



Expert Insights // Red Bull Ireland

We reached out to our friend Hanne Grainger, Marketing Manager at Red Bull Ireland, to hear her thoughts on the current situation.

“You must ask yourself the question - is this a time for my business to try and sell? If you think your product can genuinely benefit the lives of people at home, then go for it. Dependent on your product and target demographic, find out where your potential customers are spending their time. Then find ways to bring it to life on the selected platforms. You must create content which looks native to that specific platform - it’s not a one size fits all approach. Think about your format specs for each and how you’re going to make it appealing for people to convert to purchase. However, if you don’t think your product is beneficial for the at home consumer at this time, now is the time to invest in content which takes a long-term strategic approach. Think about how you can build a relationship with them. Drive advocacy through useful and helpful content instead. If done right this will undoubtedly benefit your sales in the long run.”



If there's anything that the current crisis has done, it's teaching us to level the playing-field by bringing everyone's workforce down to one.

We always work with our clients to instill in them the importance of turning business transactions into meaningful relationships. Brands need to put the same effort into community-building as they put into sales. This is how they will achieve brand equity, brand loyalty and brand love - three fundamental goals for any marketer.

During a crisis, people are scared and stressed, and in the case of COVID-19, they are also stuck at home and bored out of their minds. People are desperately in need of distraction and entertainment and will find both on their own steam - unless you get there first.

This is War.

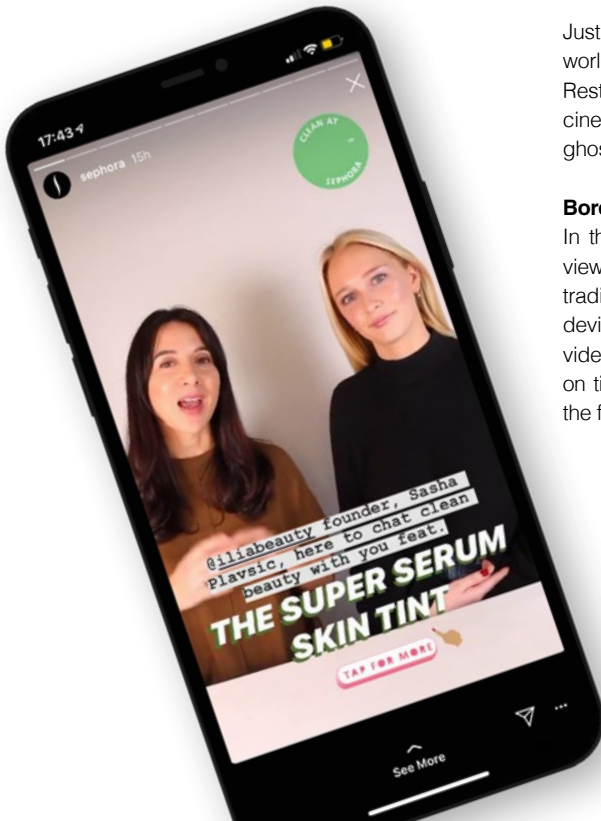
The elderly tell us that what we are experiencing is similar to being at war. At times, it very much feels like one, except that this time we were all on the same side, fighting the same enemy. During the Second World War, people would distract themselves through social activities. With the current global situation and its restrictions, we're seeking relief elsewhere.

Of course, one of the main differences between World War II and the post-COVID new normal is that there now exists a second world, the digital one. The Internet has granted us access to an unlimited source of entertainment, giving brands endless options to connect with their audience.

Just look back at these past months, and how the world had to shut down because of the pandemic. Restaurants were closed, playgrounds locked, cinema seats left empty, and streets turned into a ghost town. So what have we learnt?

Boredom is an opportunity.

In the US alone, during the rise of COVID-19, TV viewing increased by 20% in mid-March for both traditional and smart TV, along with connected devices. HBO Now, a subscription on-demand video service provider, documented a [40% increase](#) on time spent on their platform when compared to the four-week average.



You don't need to be HBO to provide users with entertaining content. The smallest of brands can host live shows on their Facebook Page, organise a watch party or record a podcast. If there's anything that the current crisis has done, it's levelled the playing-field by bringing everyone's workforce down to one. Due to social-distancing, producing large-scale content that requires a team of people is off the table until further notice which makes it the perfect time for a scrappy, resourceful and determined brand to punch through the noise and get themselves noticed.

Sephora, a French personal care and beauty store chain, began organising live Instagram sessions with doctors and experts in the field to create educational content for their followers.

Video content is not the only medium that won the battle. According to the New York Times, in March 2020, the number of minutes spent by readers on news sites [increased by 46%](#) when compared to March 2019.

Not surprisingly, as people spent more time at home, social media usage also soared. [A study carried out by consulting firm Kantar](#) showed that Whatsapp has seen an upsurge of 40% in the mid-phase of COVID-19, with an increase of 51% in countries that are at the latest phase of the pandemic. Facebook and Instagram have also experienced a growth in usage, specifically with a 40+% increase within the 18-34 demographic.

Brands leveraged the challenges presented by the economic situation to connect with their audience

on a more personal, peer-to-peer, level. Parfois, a Portuguese women's accessories brand, moved away from solely advertising their products, creating new streams of content for follower-engagement. They created a series of Spotify playlists that they share regularly via Instagram swipe-ups, as a way to keep their followers entertained while on lockdown.

The numbers are clear and speak for themselves - people crave connections and entertainment during uncertain times. This creates the perfect landscape for brands to create content that will build stronger relationships and foster greater brand loyalty with their audience. A loyal fan will not only make that purchase but will also do your marketing for you by talking about your brand and recommending it.

Entertain and educate but don't forget to sell.

We've talked a lot about the importance of creating content that your audience wants to consume in uncertain times, but hey, we're all here to sell something, so it's important to not forget every business' top metric: sales. That said, we really must stress the importance of not making this your only stream of communication. Remember what we said about building meaningful relationships? You won't be able to truly connect with your audience if your only intent is to sell (whether we are experiencing a global crisis or not).

Entertaining and educational content will allow you to tap into your audience's world and create strong connections with them. Once you've built a community of followers that trust and care for your brand, you'll be able to add on layers of content that are more tactically aimed at selling.



Oysho, a Spanish clothing brand, has done this excellently. During the time when social distancing was the norm, they shared live home workout videos with their users on Instagram. They've also shared easy recipes that people could try at home, which made sense during a time when eating out wasn't an option. As friendly and casual as the content may seem, they've still got a sales edge. Their content is tagged with items from their own clothing range which are perfect for people who are living, working and exercising indoors.

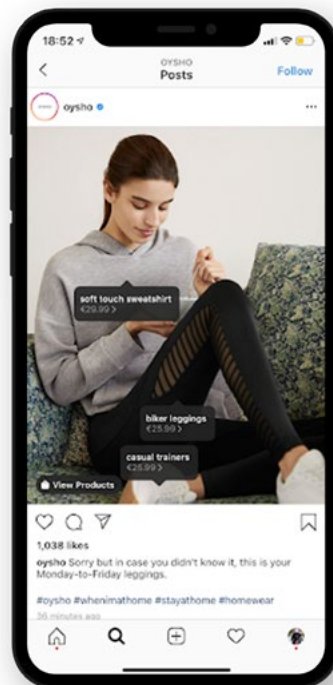
Always have a plan of action

It's easy to get overwhelmed during a crisis when the rules of life are being rewritten daily. You're also human and facing your own personal challenges. Make sure you're in the right frame of mind and avoid panic. Once you're sorted, ensure that your own brand avoids its own form of panic mode. Everything that you deploy should still be within the brand's vision and purpose. That way you'll never take a wrong step.

Here are a few suggestions on how to tackle your content marketing during a crisis:

Don't stop communicating - Crisis-fatigue has set in and people are bored of scrolling mindlessly on SoMe, binge-watching series and ticking off their reading list. Now is the time for brands to up their communication strategy and connect with their audience.

Create entertaining and educational content - Whatever business sector your brand comes from, there are plenty of opportunities for you to provide entertaining and/or educational content to your audience, showing that you're a thought leader within your sphere. Think about who your audience is, and what content they need and want to consume during these difficult times.



Although restrictions are being lifted, we are entering a new normal. We will never return to the life we knew before COVID - this makes it for the perfect opportunity to connect with your audience on a more personal level.

Use the right channels at the right time - Don't just post content for the sake of doing so. Think carefully about what you're sharing and when might be the best chance to reach your audience. For example, most countries are still broadcasting daily national crisis TV briefings so these would be times to avoid going live.

Work on community building - If you didn't before, now is your time to up your game and reply to all the messages, comments and feedback you receive. You want to encourage your followers to engage with your brand as much as possible right now (and every day) and, and the best way to achieve this is by humanising your brand and showing that the conversation is two-way.

Keep analysing - This should always apply, but perhaps more important now that behaviours are changing. Scrutinize your content once it's out there and notice the way your audience interacts with it. Is it getting the engagement that you are aiming for? Are you sharing it on the right channels? How can you improve it? Never stop analysing.

A crisis is a crossroad - Which route will you take? People, and brands by extension, will be judged on how they reacted to these changing times. The new normal is your chance to establish meaningful relationships with your audience - so don't lose out on that opportunity.

The content you communicate in uncertain times now will establish whether your brand is a fair-weather friend or not. The engagement you achieve during this crisis will set the foundations for years to come and once this is over, you and your brand will thank you for the work that you put in.

Content shows brands that you care about them. You're here, aren't you? Get in touch to see how we can help your brand create meaningful content for your audiences.



In summary

1. **Be there: In uncertain times more than ever your audience needs to hear from you.**
 2. **Be educational and entertaining: create content that always keeps your brand and goals in mind, whilst also giving back to your audience.**
 3. **Be sensitive: make sure that your channels, timing and content subject is appropriate to the time of release.**
 4. **Be engaging: show your audience that you are listening to them.**
 5. **Be aware: always look at your content's performance and see how you can improve on it.**
-

*How should you approach SEO in these times?
It's becoming even more important as people
spend much more of their time (and money) online.
But intent is changing too, so a search that might
have taken people into a store further down the
line will now lead to an online purchase. How
should we realign our SEO strategies - and should
we be spending more (time, effort, and money)
on it now?*



Paid Search & SEO Strategy

Search traffic has always been one of the highest converting channels. The intent of a user when they perform a search is at its highest. And this is unlikely to change in the time of uncertainty.

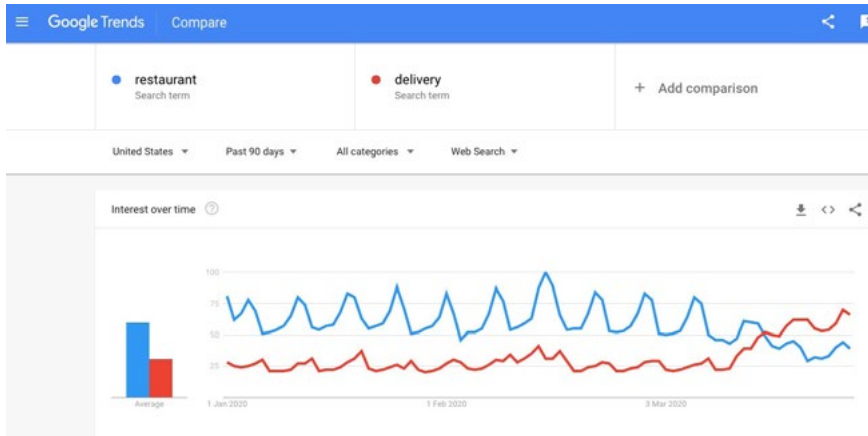
It's probably going to get even more effective.

Users clearly have a "problem" or a need and are looking for either a solution to their problem or a product or service which meets their needs.

This makes search an excellent channel for direct sales.

How users acquire what they need in times of crisis will probably be different than usual though. Have a look at the following Google trends graph for the first few months of 2020. We've compared "restaurant" (in blue) to "delivery" (in red).





If your restaurant was not equipped for take-out or delivery, then you need to get your act together quickly and start delivering.

While most restaurants will be open soon or are already open, there is going to be less money going around - 40 million Americans are unemployed as at the writing of this document in June 2020.

And some people will simply be scared to visit populated areas - the fear factor will remain long after restaurants doors are open. People will also opt for cheaper home delivery options as opposed to eating out.

So people still want to eat food that they haven't prepared themselves. They just can't or won't do it at a restaurant. So if you're a restaurant, they're expecting you to deliver.

Identifying trends like these and piggy-backing on them will make you agile, and keep your business operating.

Let's take a look at some other trends we've noticed in search:

As the anti-Amazon sentiment keeps making headlines, you're bound to see people supporting their local communities more than ever. This means that it's an excellent time for to switch your messaging to "Support your community - Buy Local" or other collaborative and support-oriented messaging.

Something else worth considering is that now that more people are working from home, voice search queries are bound to be on the increase.

With most smart speakers making use of Google, you'll need to make sure that your website is optimized for voice search.

One of the ways to do this is to have a frequently asked questions section on your website which answers queries associated with your products and services. If you want to make this more accurate, run a few queries around your products and services and make sure that you answer the questions in the "People Also Ask" search box that pops up in Google search results.

Make it easy for natural language processing algorithms to make sense of the content.

People also ask
What can I bathe my dog with sensitive skin?
How often should you bathe a dog with sensitive skin?
What can I give my dog for itchy skin?
What dog shampoo is hypoallergenic?

While writing the answers to these queries, think about the type of person that would ask just a question and write in a way that they'll understand easily.

For example:

What dog shampoo is hypoallergenic?

The following is a list of dog shampoos that are hypoallergenic: Product 1, Product 2, Product 3.

In this example, notice that the question and answer are written with a similar sentence structure. This makes it easy for natural language processing algorithms to make sense of the content.

Add [FAQ schema](#) to these FAQs, so that they are easily understood by search crawlers (and hence are more likely to be consumed and used by smart speakers).

Use other [structured data schema](#) for informational posts, such as How To schema for posts that are instructional in nature. These help the search algorithms better understand your content and make it much more likely to take important ranking positions such as the Featured Snippet.

SEO is a long-game; you can't optimize your website for search engines today and expect results tomorrow. Optimizing specific pages to rank in search engines can take months to

achieve results at a minimum, and years for some high-traffic, high-buying intent keywords.

So we always suggest a three-pronged approach.

1. Long-term SEO

First, put a whole SEO strategy in place that is planned for the long-term. Go the whole nine yards. Start with a competitive analysis, keyword research, technical site audit, on-page optimization exercise, content + SEO marketing strategy, and a link-building strategy that plays out over the long-term.

By planning for your long-term strategy in this way, you can identify:

- bullseye keywords (the most competitive keywords which, if you dominate, will elevate your business to a new level)
- money keywords (any competitive keywords which can convert to direct sales)
- long-tail keywords (keywords which have low volumes but very specific intent that can be used for direct sales, or adding a customer to the top of the funnel)
- complementary keywords (these are search phrases that are similar to your customers' intent, and are leads that need to be nurtured)

Once you have identified such keywords, you can then put them into their correct placement and use specific tactics for each of them.

The good thing about this is that you can work on both competitive high-intent keywords (long-term strategy), and other lower-intent keywords (short-term strategy) which could still convert into sales if they're part of a good sales funnel approach.



2. Short-term SEO

As long as people are kept indoors, or won't go out because of the dire economic situation, they will continue to consume more online content, simply because it's the most readily-available source. This means that we'll continue to see a climb in search volumes.

What's interesting to note, however, is that while the trend for the past few years has shown mobile searches taking over, it is now desktop searches that are once again spiking. People are browsing for longer hours from their work-from-home computer, rather than their phones.

This means that there is more opportunity for you to get a slice of the pie, because there is more screen "real-estate", and more time spent searching and consuming content.

Your short-term SEO strategy would focus on quick wins. First and foremost, you would need to focus on the low-hanging fruit, to take as big a piece of the search-rankings pie as possible.

The easiest way to do this is to check the pages that are currently getting organic traffic (you can check using Google Analytics or [Google Search Console](#)) and give them a strong dose of content optimization:

1. **Check the keywords that your best pages are ranking for** using Google Search console. Run a search for those keywords that you are ranking for, and check the other pages that are ranking for this content. If your page is missing any of the content that other pages have, make sure to update the content with the missing information.
2. **Update the content in general**, add relevant videos and better imagery, expand on certain sections that might be lacking, update any external links and spend a good amount of time making sure the content is the best piece

of content when compared to other pages ranking for the same query.

3. **Update the title of the page to make it more "enticing" to click through.** Put yourself in the shoes of the searcher and imagine which title you would click on if you were running the search yourself. Compare the title to other ranking pages and make sure yours is better. Using power words in the title, numbers, the current year, emotion, or a call to action to make it as clickable as possible.
4. **Link to the ranking page** from other relevant pieces of your website to help it rank better. Also make sure the rest of your site doesn't have obsolete or outdated content, take the time to refresh as much of the content on your site as possible.
5. **Make sure the content reads nicely**, satisfies fully the user-intent of the searcher, and makes use of structured data where possible (FAQs, reviews, How To, Article schema, Product schema, Event schema, etc)

These are typically either long-tail keywords (high-intent for a specific need, but very low volume, e.g. "dog shampoo for breeds with highly sensitive skin") or informational keywords that could signal a user's need for a solution (e.g. my dog has a patch of skin with thinning fur). Informational keywords like this indicate a problem that your audience has, which can be solved by a product or service you sell.

Other keywords could be any phrases that are typically used by your client-base where there is no buying intent.

However, by having highly-useful informational content for the actual audience, you are pulling them to your business. By using various tactics (such as adding them to your email list), you could keep the audience hooked to your business so that eventually, when they have a need for your product or service, you would immediately come to mind.

Even if you had to somehow reach the first organic search position today, anyone who is paying for search ads will still have a better position in the rankings. The page results for most high intent keywords are likely to be packed with ads already, so you need to be among them.

Using SEO to rank for long-tail keywords and then funneling the resulting visitors into your email list is the most effective way to continue to bring both new and returning business in the long term.

Having excellent informational content on site will draw visitors over to the site. Then, pull them into your email list with an excellent lead magnet, and use drip marketing to win their trust. Eventually, buying from you will become the obvious next step for them.

3. Paid Search Ads

Now this is where you'll see the beauty of this strategy. While you're ramping up your SEO for long-term results, you short-circuit the whole process through a solid Google Search ad campaign.

Yep, that's right - You will still need a solid paid search strategy in place to compliment your SEO strategy. The reason is simple: Even if you had to somehow reach the first organic search position today, anyone who is paying for search ads will still have a better position in the rankings. The page results for most high intent keywords are likely to be packed with ads already, so you need to be among them.

As we saw earlier in the Google Trends example, it's also time to revisit the keywords you are using. Look at any ads you have running at the moment and change the messaging, optimizing them to meet the needs of your clients in their new reality.

With such a strategy you can have a placement in the search results pages in under two hours. This means that until you hit the top spots organically, you will have a good spot which you are fully in control of in terms of spend. If your budget is \$10/day or \$100/day, you are in full control of what you spend.

When you do hit the top organic spots, your business will then have two spots in the search engine results pages: a paid listing and an organic listing.

Now here's the thing: Not only should you definitely include Paid Ads as part of your search strategy, but you should actually be more aggressive with your campaigns during a crisis like the one we're going through. People have cut their marketing budgets and so there is less work available, so you need to grab every opportunity that comes your way.

The fact of the matter is, search converts. And when there is less money going around, you need to place yourself directly in front of your potential clients when their intent is at their highest. Many times, you need to consider the lifetime value (LTV) of a customer, rather than just their first conversion, i.e. you should be ready to take a loss on your first conversion, safe in the knowledge that the lifetime value of a client will eventually make up for this loss.

Of course, when it comes to off-page SEO, or link-building, during times of a crisis, there is less money going around, so there is plenty of room for hard negotiations to get links.



By using this two-pronged approach, you can use paid search ads that return a good ROI and use the business generated here to invest in the long-term SEO strategy. That means that as soon as you are out of the crisis, your site will have already gained a number of crucial organic spots which will convert beautifully when the crisis is over and business (and search volume) starts ramping up again.

How to invest in SEO during a Crisis

When it comes to link-building and off-page SEO, given that you might have more time on your hands than usual, you need to invest hard in both the content and your off-page SEO (building links).

Essentially, ranking today requires a significant investment in content. We always tell our clients that to rank for any given keyword, the content for that keyword must be the best content available on the internet for that specific search intent.

Your link-building efforts will also be revolving around creating world-class linkable assets or link-bait. These are pieces of content that become

magnets for links. Such linkable assets include anything that can attract tools:

- High investment pieces of content (think along the lines of spending \$10,000 worth of effort on building each piece of amazing content)
- Innovative research or data reports - create your own research and publish the results in highly digestible ways such as with live charts, graphs or other attractive UIs
- Free tools, templates, checklists, assets or anything which gives value and can attract links

Crises also bring people together in a different sort of way. Many times you can leverage your existing audiences to encourage them to stick it out together and to find innovative ways to help each other.

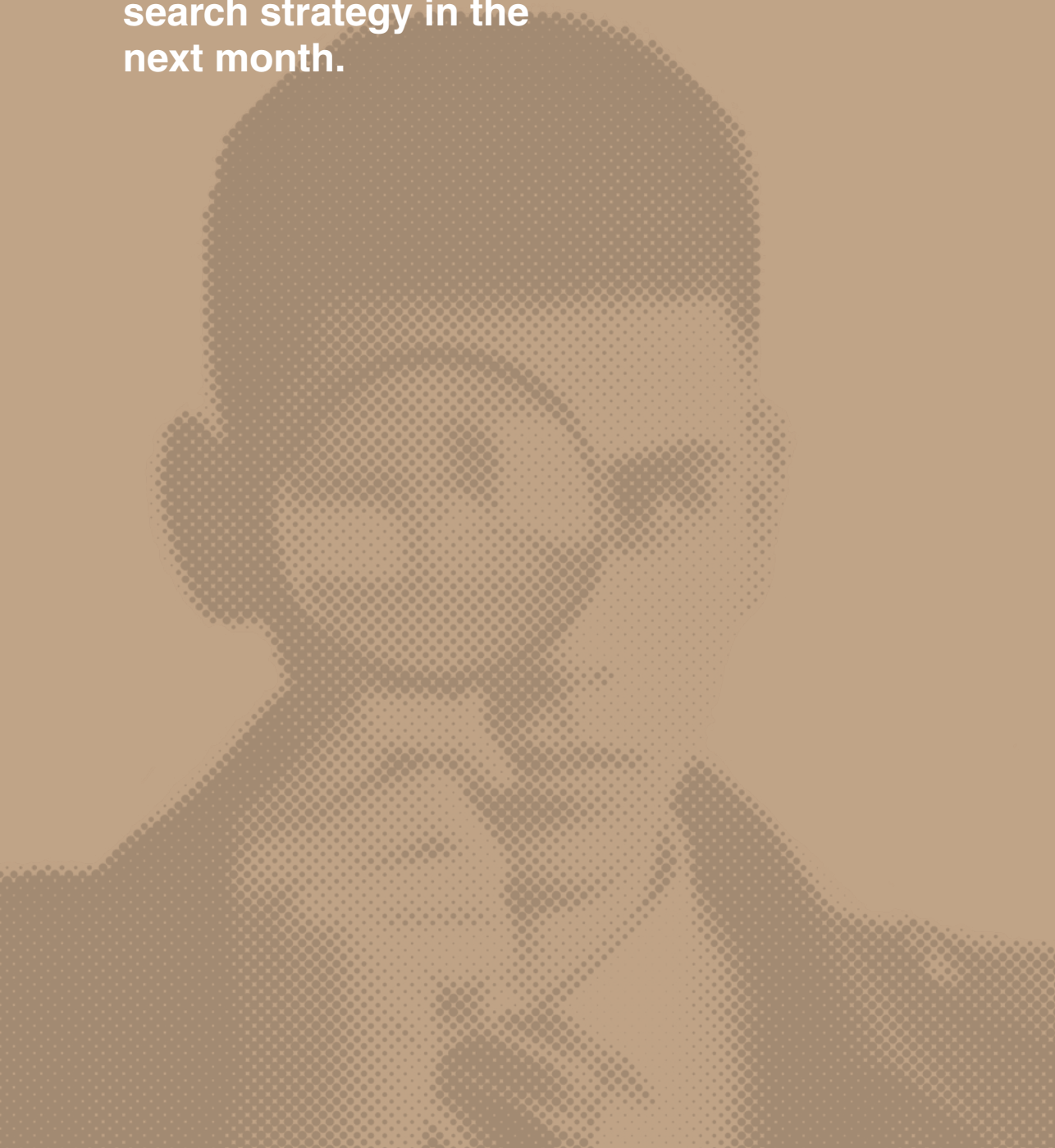
Your search strategy is a "conversion" strategy after all, so broaden your strategy to align with the rest of your marketing + conversion strategies.

Where necessary, you can partner with other relevant suppliers and offer bundles that could benefit your customers, and yes, even yourself as a business.

In summary

1. **Plan for a full SEO strategy, identify various levels of opportunity.**
 2. **Invest in a long-term strategy.**
 3. **Ramp up a short-term SEO strategy quickly by focusing on optimizing existing ranking content and plan for a few quick wins that you can take in the next few months.**
 4. **Complement the SEO strategy with paid Search Ads.**
 5. **Use the downtime to invest in awesome content, linkable assets and leverage existing (or new) relationships.**
-

**Good SEO is hard. We can
help you jump-start your
search strategy in the
next month.**



CRO

Social proof used to be enough as a quickfire measure, but in a time of social distancing, what are the things that people care about? This is the time to revisit your CRO strategy because people have very different needs, wants and fears in a time like this. Sanitisation is a bigger worry than fraud these days.



CRO or Conversion Rate Optimization is one of these quick-wins that can easily bring in additional business with little to no effort.

CRO in uncertain times

Traditionally, CRO revolved around performing A/B testing or steps to improve the user journey, removing anything which could create a barrier to conversion. CRO typically also involves strategies to create a sense of urgency, or greater need to purchase through techniques such as perceived scarcity.

Crucially, CRO is about removing as many barriers to conversion as possible.

CRO in such circumstances is about going inside the visitor's head and filling the gaps in their knowledge. It is about answering the questions they have before landing on your pages.

If the uncertainty has created new concerns, (a good example would be sanitisation or social distancing), the first step in CRO starts with changing a businesses SOPs (standard operating procedures) so that these concerns are fully-addressed.

But addressing the SOPs without creating specific messaging around this would only be half the job. The concerns need to be addressed in the most effective way possible.

For example, one of our clients, a cab company, implemented a sanitisation policy on all their cabs and quickly went out with messaging addressing

this new SOP. Specifically, we ran ads around the new policy showing cabs being cleaned after every ride, such that customers who had any concerns could overcome this barrier to booking.

Considering that the situation might be the new reality for a few months, you'll need to figure out new ways of doing business. Whether this is through delivering your products, providing your services remotely, or otherwise, this is the absolute basic CRO. It will be the only way to keep your business running.

Traditional CRO

Once we've addressed any new barriers that have become a reality due to the crisis, it's time to revisit traditional CRO.

If there is less money going around in the economy, then you need to make sure that you close every opportunity that comes your way. In a buyers market, a seller needs to significantly up their game.

When business is booming, CRO can take the backseat (even though it shouldn't, you should never leave money on the table).

During a crisis, or when there is less money going around, CRO should be one of the first steps that a business that transacts online takes.



CRO in such circumstances is about going inside the visitor's head and filling the gaps in their knowledge. It is about answering the questions they have before landing on your pages.

At this point, it is important to remember that CRO is not about changing the color of your Buy Now button.

CRO is a full process that considers the user journey, comes up with a hypothesis that could result in improved clicks or conversions and then runs A/B or multivariate tests until results with statistical significance are achieved. You can use paid tools to perform such testing, but if you can't afford additional expenses, you can use free tools like [Google Optimize](#). You are limited to 5 simultaneous tests, which is good enough for most people.

Once a winner emerges, the winner becomes the new version and other tests are defined and run. This is done iteratively over a number of weeks / months (depending on your business' volumes).

Keep in mind that whatever works for a certain business (even a specific page on a website) will not necessarily work for everybody. Only statistically significant results can determine what works and what doesn't.

You can also use heatmaps or User Journey focused platforms such as [Hotjar](#) to help you follow the user journey step by step, see drops in your funnel, identify the areas where users are clicking the most and other ways of improving your conversions.

Unfortunately, CRO is quite different for different industries. CRO for an ecommerce site is very different from CRO for a services company, for instance.

For ecommerce, CRO is all about removing any barriers to purchase and "hype" up the user to buy as quickly as possible.

Small wins for ecommerce include listing the number of items currently in stock (especially if there is a limited stock), creating timed discounts or offers, or finding other ways to create a sense of scarcity and FOMO (fear of missing out).

Testimonials and positive reviews with each product can also make a drastic difference. People need to be assured that what they are planning to buy is a good fit for them, so positive reviews should be displayed prominently.

CRO is a full process that considers the user journey, comes up with a hypothesis that could result in improved clicks or conversions and then runs A/B or multivariate tests until results with statistical significance are achieved.

Optimal CRO - Booking.com

Booking.com and most sites in the travel industry have an excellent CRO implementation. The strategy is to get you to book on the spot, so that the visitor does not get the opportunity to price-shop or browse around on other sites.

Some of their specific tactics including the following:

- **Ratings and reviews** for the hotel are immediately visible with positive aspects of each accommodation highlighted
- **Scarcity and FOMO (fear of missing out) is always ramped up** through messaging such as “24 people looked at this property in the last hour”, “Only 2 rooms left at this price”, “70% of properties are already booked for this period”, “Book Now to avoid missing out on this deal”, “This hotel typically sells out quickly”, “You missed it! - Your dates are popular - we’ve run out of rooms at this property”, “Booked 2 times for your dates in the last 24 hours”, “Lock in a great price for your upcoming stay. Prices may go up, so secure your reservation today”. Such aggressive messaging puts the buyer in a state of heightened anxiety where they feel that if they don’t buy on the spot, they might miss out on good deals. This gives the visitors less opportunity to research or compare prices on other sites.
- **Reassurance** when possible using messaging such as “Free Cancellation”, “No Prepayment Needed”, “Risk Free - you can cancel later, so lock this price in today”, “Reservation possible without a credit card”. Here Booking is anticipating conversion blocks and mitigating the buyer’s hesitation by offering peace of mind that they won’t be locked in, or need to share credit card details.
- **Highlighting of deals** - accommodations that have reduced pricing or deals are prominently displayed. This includes the “Secret deals” or “Prices just for you” that are (very conveniently) limited to the times you plan to travel and are emailed to you if you left the site without booking.
- **Aggressive contextual email follow ups** - if Booking detect that you have left the site without making a reservation, you will be very quickly bombarded with offers that are specific to your travel dates. Because they know that most people will “tolerate” their marketing emails, and not unsubscribe (we simply ignore them if we’re not planning to travel), for the first few hours and days after your first visit and search for a particular city, you will receive highly-customized offers.



Case study

In summary

1. Identify new conversion blocks / concerns that have come around due to the current situation and change standard operating procedures to resolve them.
2. Creating messaging around the fact that you’ve addressed such concerns.
3. Figure out what are the traditional barriers to purchase and ways to fix them.
4. Ramp up your traditional CRO through A/B testing.
5. Use free tools such as Hotjar and Google Optimize or premium tools if you can afford it.
6. Good CRO will give very good ROI.

Paid (Online)

The word "facebook" is rendered in its characteristic lowercase, rounded font. The entire text is composed of a dense grid of small dots, creating a halftone or dithered effect. The dots are slightly darker in the center of each letter, making the word stand out against the lighter background.

It might seem counter-intuitive, but now's the time to kill, or severely reduce, performance marketing. It's always going to underperform. Spend your money on brand building. It's also the time to reexamine your keywords and to analyse intent, as this is changing in these times - just like we mentioned in our SEO chapter.

These are interesting and fascinating times for social media platforms. People are using them much more (during the COVID-19 lockdown, Facebook, saw a surge of 70% usage on its platforms), but advertisers are curtailing their budgets.

This is a massive opportunity, because, given that brands auction for ads when running campaigns on ad platforms, when you have less supply (of ads) and much more demand (for content) happening at the same time, prices are bound to drop drastically.

Also, consumers still expect you to advertise. Marketingweek referred to a study that claimed that only [8% of consumers globally](#) expect brands to stop advertising in this crisis.

So let's say you operate in the travel industry or another industry that has been completely wiped-out in the crisis. People are simply not travelling, particularly for leisure and entertainment purposes.

So once again, you need to play the long-game here. Some day, in the near future, things WILL pick up again.

And when they do, it is likely that users will be primed to travel, go on holidays to relax or otherwise catch-up on their travelling needs (both leisure and business).

What we've seen is that CPMs (Cost Per 1000 Impressions) have gone down by half, which allows you to go down a different route with your campaigns.



Build your email list

Most times, when we run paid ads, we are looking for direct conversions. We don't usually run campaigns specifically to build our email list. It's not something we plan for.

Yet with paid ads being so much cheaper than usual, it makes sense to create specific campaigns where you target the same audience that you used to target before, but this time, your goal will be to get them on your email list. This allows you to build up your pipeline for when things get back to normal.

Let's use the same travel agency business as an example. You're unlikely to get people to book during a crisis, people are simply not in the mood to book, as there is too much uncertainty.



They will, however, be looking forward to getting back to their own version of normality once this is all over.

You can jump on that sentiment and run a campaign that leads your potential customers to a landing page which simply makes an offer in exchange for their email address.

You could do this in a number of ways, each of which could complement each other

- If you service a particular region, you could design a detailed guide "map" which you give away for free in exchange for their email address. Of course this doesn't need to be a map, it could be any item of content, just make sure that it gives your target audience good value. Complete travel itineraries for different types of travellers would also be a good idea. Take some time to brainstorm, and you're bound to come up with some great pieces of content. Just keep in mind that, while you will always want to sell, that's not currently your main goal. At this point, refrain from being overly aggressive in pushing sales. Rather, think of what the customer would find

interesting enough in exchange for their email address.

- At the same time to make the offer more attractive you can let them know that once it is safe to travel, they will be the first to get the best hand-picked offers.
- Be reassuring. Tell your customers that you fully respect their rights. Let them know that you are flexible with booking amendments (remove any change fees) and make sure you address any concerns they might have.

2. Change your messaging

As we said in the chapter on Search Strategy, your paid ads have to factor in the new reality and switch the messaging accordingly.

If you are paying for ads, you need to make sure that the messages you are sending out embrace the new realities, address the new concerns and empathize with the audience.

Here's an example we worked on ourselves. A client of ours runs a cab company, and worked swiftly with us to change their digital campaign messaging to address health-related concerns. It wasn't long before we were pushing ads showing their cabs being deep-cleaned and fully disinfected after every ride.

3. Test, Analyze, Learn, Optimize and Repeat

If you're already doing performance marketing, tracking events, conversions, bookings, lead-generation, and user movement through a cart, you already understand the value of using the ad platforms' algorithms to optimize for conversions.

Ad platforms such as Google and Facebook have invested heavily in understanding their user demographics and pitching to the right audiences.

Take Facebook for instance. A Reach campaign will show your content to one audience, while a Conversions campaign will target a whole other

audience entirely. The platform knows which users are bound to convert, and shows relevant ads accordingly.

If you haven't been taking advantage of these mechanisms yet, now's the time to get acquainted and set up your platforms in a way that will have you ready to hit the ground running when the time comes.

This doesn't mean just adding a Facebook Pixel to your website. You also need to "feed" the ad platform algorithms with useful data that can be used to your advantage.

For example the [Facebook platform supports the following tracked events:](#)

- Complete Registration
- Add to Cart
- Contact
- Lead generated
- Purchase (including purchase value)
- Start Trial
- Subscribe
- View Content

By ensuring that all the above information is being tracked and sent back to Facebook, you can then run campaigns that optimize for the events that are important to your business.

Using artificial intelligence, the algorithm can then reverse-engineer the targeting approach. It will analyse the customers who arrived at that tracking event, and then attempt to bring in others that show similar characteristics and behaviours.

Google Ads and Google Analytics also support the tracking of these events particularly if you [set them in the form of Goals](#).

Once you have put in these events in place, you can then create data-driven marketing campaigns that make sense for your own business, rather than flying blind. This data can then be used in a number of ways:

First, you can measure ROI on a granular level, allowing you to understand which campaigns are effective and which aren't.

Second, in certain instances, you can bid more (or less) aggressively based on the performance of a campaign. For example, you could choose to bid aggressively, even using specific bid strategies such as Return on Ad Spend (ROAS), or Cost Per Acquisition (CPA) on high-intent, highly-converting campaigns, while bidding less aggressively on lower intent campaigns.



In summary

- 1. As less people tend to market during uncertainty, the price of online advertising goes down and you will get more reach per £/\$/€ spent.**
 - 2. Conversely, people are less inclined to buy and are more cautious so you need to invest in acquiring trust through brand advertising and building your email list.**
 - 3. Shift your messaging to address new concerns, new needs or new realities.**
 - 4. Use this time to implement full conversion tracking on your campaigns so you can better measure campaigns.**
 - 5. Optimize and plan better performance-driven marketing campaigns that are fully-measured such that you can learn the art of performance marketing and can ramp up once the uncertainty blows over.**
-



Expert Insights // William Hill

On the topic of online paid advertising, we couldn't think of anyone better to weigh in on the discussion than Kirsten Openshaw. She's the Head of Digital Media and Social at Mr Green, part of the world's biggest bookmaker, William Hill. We got in touch to ask her a few questions:

Have you seen changes to your cost per acquisition since the crisis started affecting your markets?

This has been a hot topic amongst all in digital. There was an expectation that costs would drastically rise, however, while we have seen fluctuations, there was nothing to be alarmed by. We did not shift to more aggressive marketing strategies - all we did was adjust and keep a positive CPA.

Do you advise business as usual, or should people adjust their paid strategy in a time like this?

As marketers we always respond to what is happening to our macro environment. But with a mammoth macro environmental event like this, there is no prewritten playbook or any guidelines on how to protect our micro environment. In our industry, we are so used to having to adapt to external events that are out of control that it's become an almost natural reaction in any situation to go back to the drawing board and look for new opportunities and adjust our objectives and actions.

I think it's impossible to carry on with business as usual, simply because this is not the usual. We have all had to

adapt to a new 'usual' and every industry has had to rethink their paid strategy. KPIs also need to adjust, targets and expectations need to be flexible. The focus needs to shift, with areas like Branding and Engagement brought to the forefront of conversation. Keeping your brand top of mind and increasing the positive share of voice through the following months is what will pay off in the long run - and budget should be shifted to do so.

Place your brand where your customer is. Desktop traffic is seeing an increase. People are working from home, but this is not to say that mobile is not still the dominant device. Consumers are spending more time on social media during peak times than ever before, and commenting, sharing and engaging with posts is drastically increasing. Not only is this great 'free' marketing, but it also indicates what the consumer wants, which is to engage with your brand. So give them the right content to do it on.

Paid strategy should be migrated to where there is the highest long term return on investment and average quarterly revenue per user. Loyal customers should be rewarded and cared for. There should be no hard sell and all content and tone should be respectful of the situation. The key is keeping your brand in the conversation in months to come. Focus less on new acquisitions and more on retaining all your current customers and building brand safety.

**You can spend a lot of money
on digital advertising. Let us
help you change that spend
into investment.**

The Facebook logo is displayed in a large, semi-transparent, light blue font, centered horizontally and slightly below the main text. The logo is rendered in its characteristic lowercase, rounded, sans-serif typeface.

*Is there still scope for traditional media?
Should businesses cut down the spend on
these channels entirely and shift all budgets
to digital channels in a time of crisis?*

Paid
(Traditional)

We love social media for its effects on our real life. However, although people may be spending more time on these channels, the internet at large is a viable tool for audience building. The true power of communication emerges through a specific concept, synergy.



A note on social media

Social media is a source of dopamine and oxytocin in our lives according to Courtney Seiter on the [psychology of social media](#). However, all these benefits happen because at the end of the cycle social media translates into real-life benefits.

Another way of viewing this is that humans are now turning to social media and digital channels to compensate for their lack of social interaction and entertainment in real life. But what happens when the real benefits fail to show up? When no one recognises you at a party from your Instagram account? Or your neighbour doesn't compliment you on that witty comment you dropped into that hot debate about Donald Trump? One possible outcome is that we'll begin to crave real meaningful interactions and tangible communication that we've been missing for weeks.

No matter what the medium, content is king. Here's an idea someone came up with for a Netflix outdoor campaign

Boring is not a tradition, it's a habit

While digital media might sound more dynamic and interesting, traditional media doesn't have to be boring. But first, let's clarify what we mean by traditional media:

- In this report we refer to traditional media as any form of mass-communication that was available before the advent of digital media. This includes channels (radio, TV, print, mail, out-of-home, etc) and vehicles (BBC, NBC, Fox, New York times, Sunday Times, etc)

There is nothing stopping you from launching a direct mail campaign with a message that addresses one of the needs we're currently craving (entertainment, belonging, social interaction, stability, etc). During a time where most of our human interaction takes place at home, we begin to crave some interaction beyond our front door.

According to [BBC](#), there is a surge in television viewership. One can only [assume the same effect happened to radio](#). There is also an increased sense of authority in the traditional press amidst all the fake news circulating about COVID-19. This implies that traditional sources are perceived to have better reporting quality than your online media.

Guerilla Marketing

When conventional warfare fails, humans turn to guerilla warfare. If there is one word we tend to associate with guerrilla, it's unconventional. Just like its more popular cousin, Guerilla warfare, Guerilla marketing is exceptionally effective when

used in situations that require you to either be resourceful, or disarmingly surprising.

Traditional media is traditional because it has a structured and consistent way of presenting its messages. This makes it an interesting playground for guerilla marketing to break some rules and grab an entertainment-starved audience's attention through the simplest and most resourceful of applications. Guerilla marketing campaigns always attract a significant amount of attention and are known for highly visible reactions. The best part is that the distribution of these campaigns isn't done by conventional or traditional channels, but by the people themselves, who are currently starved for stories to tell and interact with.

Remember: content is king. But do consider the vehicle very carefully. Traditional media gives you the opportunity to use a medium in a way that's surprising. Often, the way you distribute your message forms the guerilla nature of your campaign. So, why not bring the two together?

The days of having digital campaigns planned separately from your traditional media campaigns are long gone. Unless the message is a stunt deliberately placed to attract attention, we should be practicing omnichannel marketing at all times.

While online media can be more effective at reaching a wider audience, enabling conversation and disseminating massive amounts of information, let's take a look at what traditional media can offer marketers right now:



- It's trusted more than its digital counterpart (especially with all the fake news going around)
- It tends to be uneventful in a time of crisis (so it's easier to stand out)
- The tangible distributed media channels can give a sense of ownership
- Radio, which is now also broadcast through digital channels, feels more intimate than most other channels.

Emerging technologies like Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) are blurring the lines between the real and the virtual. They also offer exciting interactions and dynamics between media.

Remember that exceptional examples of marketing using traditional media are always picked up and shared extensively online. How's that for a win-win situation?



In summary

1. **Humans love social media, until it's their only option for communication.**
 2. **Tangible communication will become a need in a few more weeks.**
 3. **Traditional doesn't mean boring.**
 4. **Guerilla marketing gets your message out there more effectively.**
 5. **Don't think traditional vs. digital marketing. Think omnichannel marketing.**
-



Expert Insights // Morrison

We were curious to hear what our ICOM partners at Morrison were thinking about the situation. Joey Sanchez is the Media Supervisor at the agency in Atlanta. Here's what he had to say:

Prolonged times of uncertainty drastically impact media planning, buying, and ongoing media management. Media activities are suspended, postponed, and reduced, as is the need to continually evaluate rapidly changing circumstances by geography and ever-changing shifts in consumer behavior.

For many years, traditional media – TV, radio, print (newspaper and magazines) and out-of-home – have been negatively impacted by the shift to digital. The events of 2020, culminating in the COVID-19 situation, made things worse for some traditional vehicles, while others have been affected positively.

Consumers stuck at home due to lockdowns were spending more time using traditional media. TV and radio reversed downward trends and experienced historic audience increases. The renewed interest in TV has been driven by the need for news and information, which has helped offset TV audience and revenue losses due to the loss of sports and major events. More importantly, audience composition has been forever changed based on each consumer's comfort level of venturing out in public while maintaining safe social distancing practices.

Access to real-time demographic and psychographic data is more vital than ever to inform traditional media strategy and to ensure brand messages reach the intended audience. Regardless of the allocation of traditional media within the overall media mix, flexibility and adaptability to changing consumer preferences will be the key to reaching client marketing objectives.

Another major issue now central to many brands' thinking is trust – and the fact that where you deliver your brand message is as important as what you say. Today's consumers are inundated with information and content – much of which may not be relevant or accurate. A recent Kantar study found that traditional broadcast and print media are more trusted than digital platforms. Knowing the proper channels to use is more crucial than ever with ever evolving consumer attitudes in response to uncertainty.

**There is scope for traditional
media advertising as long as
it's planned to make sense in
a comprehensive strategy.
We'll make sure that it is.**

Video

During a crisis, video plays a slightly different role to the one it usually does. We're not talking about video from a production angle here. We're talking about it as a tool in your marketing arsenal, a storytelling medium that you can hardly do without and that is easier to deploy than you might think.



In the simplest terms possible, video takes a still image and adds the factor of time. Rather than telling a story in a single frame, video allows us to progress from one moment to another, allowing a story to unfold.

Back when the media landscape was much simpler, the newspaper (read blog, news site, aggregator/etc) was the place you went for detailed coverage and opinion. The news on TV (read Facebook / Instagram Stories, Youtube, TikTok, FB video, IG TV. etc) was where you got less detail but engaged with a human face as they delivered the goods.

Of course, there is more to video than delivering what we traditionally regarded as 'news'. But one could argue that we mostly use video to either inform us or to entertain us, often with both happening at the same time. If an influencer I follow shows a product they are using and I am interested in, I'm being informed by a human who I originally considered for their entertainment value to a certain extent.

Due to the saturation of high production value video and abundance of content of all shapes and sizes, folks out there are more forgiving of the quality of your production as long as you're telling them good stories that matter to them.



We mostly use video to either inform us or to entertain us, often with both happening at the same time.

Let's break it down

Context - emotion and expression

If you've ever had an argument with anyone over text or email, we don't have to preach to you the importance of tone of voice and body language, and what a huge role they play in effective (or non-effective) communication. The best way to communicate exactly what you intend is to speak to someone in person. As brands and even as humans, this is unfortunately impossible right now. So what's the next best thing?

As most of us have figured out, a video call is as close to a face-to-face conversation it's going to get for a while. It's more genuine than the alternatives, and there's a much higher chance that the person on the other end is really going to understand what you're trying to say.

As brands, we should aim to achieve this kind of genuine communication during these times of turmoil (and in any other time, for that matter).

Meaning - relevance vs sales

We are all looking for genuine human interaction more than ever before. Cold sales pitches, even in video form, will undoubtedly be less effective in a climate where people are in survival mode.

If your video communication is to be effective, it has to be genuine. Don't just talk about yourself. Don't only talk about what you're selling. Provide genuine support to the community you've been growing using all methods available to you so far.

Attention - seek and retain

Here's one fact about video that we can't ignore: Our audience decides whether or not they want to watch a video just a few seconds after they come across it. This time window is constantly shrinking.

Just a few months ago, we had 20 seconds in which to grab their attention. At last count, this was down to 8 seconds. Just like leading an article with a strong opening sentence, it's extremely important to capture your audience's attention very early on in a video.

Which begs the question: In a world where everyone is demanding the attention of your audience, how do you stand out? Well, you stand out with good stories. Your videos should:

1. Identify their audience. "Stuck inside and wish you were playing football?" identifies a different audience from, say, "Want to strut out of lockdown with a bikini bod?". We need to immediately tell the part of our audience we're talking to that their attention will be rewarded.
2. Include messages that have relevance to the current situation. As obvious as this sounds, a message that ignores our collective predicament will come across as tone deaf and insensitive.
3. Be positive. Have a message that includes a reason to be hopeful, a moment worth celebrating, a demonstration of real solidarity, or even a funny or heartwarming tale.
4. Have one thing that is unexpected. In a good story, all is not as it seems. This introduces an element of surprise, a moment of 'I did not see that coming'.

Production - good now vs perfect later

Movie-quality production takes time and money. Lots of it. And all that time and money does not mean you'll end up with a product that works. Michael Bay's movies should be enough to illustrate this point.

Be honest with your story and respectful to your audience.

All too often, we've seen that an influencer can produce a video that has more impact than a million-Euro production if they're armed with a phone, 30 seconds of time, and an understanding of what story resonates with their audience.

Don't go crazy with production budgets. Don't delay producing video until everything is perfect. Be honest with your story and respectful to your audience and give them the video they need, not necessarily the video you wished you could produce. We're now used to watching everyone from Hollywood stars to the most accomplished of scientists and thinkers speak to us from their home using their phone cameras. With that bar

set, your brand needs to focus on telling a good story, instead of telling a half-baked story that's perfectly produced.

The videos that made their way out of Italy, shaky phone footage of people singing from their balconies, spread a message of solidarity that warmed hearts the world over. That's the mindspace we need to be in for video for the foreseeable future. While daily life may mostly return to some version of normal, the lessons we've learned about humanity and the fast spread of goodwill through video should not be forgotten.



From short animations to movie-level productions, we can help you create the best video content possible within your budgets. It will be beautiful and it will convert.

In summary

- 1. Be quick. Emphasise speed over production value.**
 - 2. Be human, be considerate, show empathy.**
 - 3. Be useful. Solidarity is great, but not enough. Provide tangible value with the content you're sharing.**
 - 4. Be agile. A video that made sense this week could be dated next week. Be prepared to throw away good ideas that are dated.**
-

Email Marketing

Remind your list of the ways you can still service them. Build a new list of people who could become your customers at a later date. What can you promise to your readers at this point that will make them loyal readers?



GDPR all over again. It's been almost 2 years since our collective inboxes were flooded with emails from companies from across the world telling us about how they're doing everything they can to protect our privacy and data.

Most people probably read the first GDPR email they received - maybe the second one too. But once people realised that companies were sending the same email over and over again, they stopped paying attention. The same thing happened with COVID-19, and will happen again and again during times of uncertainty. It's very easy to fall into the same trap of sending an email to your customer base just to tick the box and say you did it.

Take off your marketing hat

While a crisis presents opportunities, a new sale or new discounts isn't what you should lead your communication with. Customers need trust,

security, clarity & positivity, and most of all, they can't feel like their uncertain situation is being taken advantage of. Offer your help in whatever form you can afford, and be empathetic to your customer's situation. Make yourself available for all questions and concerns regarding your service, and ease customer anxiety by making as many resources as possible easily available to them. Don't bother trying to be witty or to make light of the situation (unless this is clearly your brand's premise) - people in desperate times may not respond particularly well to jokes. Anything directly related to the crisis should be centred around "We understand your situation. Here's what we're going to do to help."



It's very easy to fall into the same trap of sending an email to your customer base just to tick the box and say you did it.

Check your flows

If you have automated email flows, a widespread crisis doesn't necessarily mean you have to stop all communication. Just make sure to sweep them thoroughly for anything that might be out of place. CTAs such as "Let's meet up and chat" or "Visit our outlet" during the COVID-19 crisis should have been replaced for obvious reasons. A few jokes you might have written may suddenly come across as tone deaf too. Small, clear adjustments to your communications can go a long way to earning people's trust. You could even take a more drastic route - especially if a large chunk of your email content is irrelevant during this time (for whatever reason). Replace all your content with content that might not generate direct business, but will still provide value to your customer base. If you were a restaurant during the coronavirus situation, for example, giving step-by-step instructions on how to make one of your best-selling dishes would have been a great idea. If you're a fashion retailer, take a page out of Marie Kondo's book and give tips on how to organise your wardrobe. There are many such examples for all industries - it just takes putting yourself in your customers' shoes to figure out what could work.

"We understand your situation. Here's what we're going to do to help."

(Don't) pat yourself on the back for a job well done

Communicating the actions that you're taking to protect your business, employees and customers is a good start. However, make sure to maintain balance in the way you tell the story. There's a fine line between informing customers about operational changes and bragging about what a great boss you are. Keep email communication short, to the point, and laced with a strong dose of humility. Don't brag about what is expected of a great company, just do it - your customers will draw their own conclusions.

Go beyond that first email

If you don't regularly email your database, sending an email about a crisis out of nowhere will most likely result in less-than-ideal results. Communicating with people out of the blue can be misinterpreted in a number of ways. Like a friend you haven't heard from in months suddenly asking to borrow your car, it might come across as a desperate attempt to slow dropping profits or to capitalise on a bad situation.

If this is going to be your first email in a long time, it's also the right time to think about a long-term email communication strategy that goes beyond that first email. Communicating regularly (but not too regularly - you don't want to seem clingy and end up in the spam folder) with relevant updates and information can build a sense of feedback and response, which is very close to reality, as we're all figuring all this out as we go along.

Furthermore, be as adaptable as possible. New information is constantly coming to light and affecting people's daily lives. Be reactive - understand what changes have a real impact on the lives of your consumers, and if you adapt your service to accommodate these changes, make sure to communicate these changes regularly with short, clear emails that highlight what is being done and how it will help.

Relevant updates and information can build a sense of feedback and response.

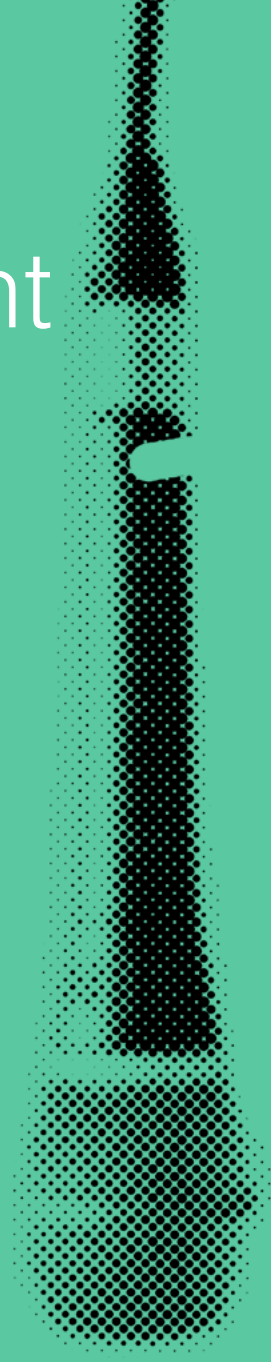
**“Dear sir, we’re thinking about you in these hard times. Do you want to buy from us?”
If you’re fed up with email strategies that suck, speak to us. We’ll get you out of the rut.**



In summary

1. **Be reactive.** Keep your customers updated with the latest information as soon as it's available.
 2. **Be relevant.** Keep your message simple - communicate how, when, and why (in that order) you're making your customer's lives easier in a stressful time.
 3. **Walk the walk.** While communicating what you're doing as a company is important, don't fall for the temptation to send a long email congratulating yourself for actions that are expected of well-run companies.
 4. **Keep an ear to the ground.** Read emails that other companies are sending and be part of the conversation.
 5. **Be empathetic.** Put yourself in the shoes of your customers and figure out what information would be valuable to them.
-

PR & Content



Is this the time to shutter your doors and freeze your communication channels or is it the time to adapt? If you've made it this far you're clearly the adaptive sort, but how do we change our tone of voice to remain true to our brand, be sensitive in the times of the coronavirus and still keep our public relations strong?

The crisis has dominated all channels of communication, from press-rooms and official press-releases to the most micro level, including personal SoMe posts and brand pages. All forms of experiential PR were the first to bite the dust, but we're living in a digital age where all brands have a huge part of their persona which lives online.



That said, all commercial PR was soon shocked into an initial blanket silence, retreating behind a wall of virus-related content. But the novelty has worn off. COVID-19-fatigue has set in and we're all set for a post-lockdown world. Consumers quickly reached the end of the novelty period that came with the shift to working reduced hours from home, and soon wanted to engage in content that allowed a sense of normality in uncharted waters.

What stories and conversations do these people want to hear and have, and how can you get to them using distribution channels that are best suited to these times?

Consumers quickly reached the end of the novelty period that came with the shift to working reduced hours from home, and soon wanted to engage in content that allowed a sense of normality in uncharted waters.

Blitz spirit

The worst thing that brands can do at this time is to go into crisis-mode and cut all communication as this will benefit nobody, least of all you and your brand.

Flexibility and adaptability are key here and these efforts to grow with these changes must be shared with your audience as you explore them. Why? Because we're all human and that's what's binding us together at these times. It's what's allowing brands to make mistakes as they try delivering goods for the first time. It's what's making it ok for companies to share videos which are sub-par in quality but full of heart and gumption. It's also what's making consumers more adventurous with their habits, making now the perfect time to convert that first sale from a client who's with you for the rest of the ride.



Emma's Kitchen, Malta

Emma's Kitchen is a small, hipster cafe on the tiny island of Malta. Ahead of government directives to shut the front-of-house areas of restaurants, the owner closed the cafe, based on enough evidence of what practices needed to be followed to avoid the spread of the virus. With fridges full of fresh produce that would otherwise have gone to waste, Emma pulled in the kitchen staff one last time to cook it all up and then dropped it off at the national hospital where staff were working around the clock to make it pandemic-ready.

This gesture was perfect for the brand in so many ways: it showed selflessness in closing before it was forced to do so, environmental awareness by not chucking all the leftover food and generosity by donating it all to the front-liners at the hospital.

The photos that doctors and nurses shared [quickly went viral](#) and loyal and new customers flocked to the Emma's Kitchen Facebook page, commenting on how they'd be booking a table the second things returned to normal.

Case study

You've spent years honing your brand voice and how it communicates with the world but you shouldn't be afraid of adapting.

Understand, adapt and make the most of the rainy days

Behaviours are changing rapidly and if you can be ahead of the curve, you'll be in a prime position to keep your business afloat as others struggle.

You've spent years honing your brand voice and how it communicates with the world but you shouldn't be afraid of adapting. Everyone is - it's a normal reaction to these times. If your brand is solid and you and your colleagues have a solid understanding of it, there will be a brand-loyal way of addressing changes that you will need to make.

Initial communications should never be tactical or 'salesy'. Everyone's in the same boat and it's

sprung a pretty serious leak. Do what you can with other businesses to patch it up before you start selling everyone oars. Take a hit and let people out there know that you're struggling too, but that if we don't care for our most vulnerable, then humanity is finished.

Once you've made your first move, adapt. Processes will need to change to keep up with official directives aimed at reducing physical human contact. See how your business will need to change and share this progress with your audience. Ensure that your staff are safe and that you're taking care of them and share this too - everyone's feeling insecure. Build your messaging towards achieving a sense of normality.



Airbnb

Airbnb is an online marketplace where one can either sell experiences or rent stays in properties. It operates all over the world and has revenues of over two billion dollars annually.

Their first move was to slow down travel by offering guests free cancellation for any stays that they had in affected countries. After that, they swiftly moved to help the hosts who were left severely out of pocket by the total lockdown on international travel. They created a fund from which hosts could claim 25% of the value of the bookings they'd lost in this period.

Once that was established, they launched an initiative to provide front-line workers with accommodation that would keep them away from their families while they were deemed to be high-risk. They did this by inviting hosts to house them for free or for reduced rates in the properties that had been left empty by the changes.

Of course, this also makes good business sense. If Airbnb helps out a property owner with a few hundred dollars now, they will be paid back that gift hundredfold if they were to continue hosting guests for the next ten years. If they go under and default on their loan repayments and lose the property they're renting a room from, then nobody benefits.

Case study

Embrace the new normal

Once you've got this far, see how your business can help your audience retain a sense of normality, because self-isolation got pretty old very fast. Consumers will want to retain aspects of life-as-it-was until they can return to it, or a version as close to it as possible, and you're going to help them do it.

Your communication shouldn't ignore this new normal and carry on as if it's business-as-usual, but you should also avoid making everything about the current state of affairs. Think of how your business can help alleviate stress and work towards that. This doesn't need to be related to sales, but if you can marry the two, then do!

Make your communication a mix of helpful, stress-relieving content and marketing that actually and actively solves a problem. Needs have changed overnight and so should your messaging.

This is also a great time to push the boat out on that project you've been delaying for a day that's never come. Well, that day has well and truly arrived and what's great about it is that the public are more forgiving than ever, especially if they see that you're making an effort to adapt.

Don't worry that the artwork announcing your new delivery service looks a bit unpolished. Your audience will just be happy about the new convenience and won't judge you on your design. Don't worry if the bags you're using for delivery are unbranded, but rather, ensure that the delivery person is leaving the items on your customer's doorstep and practising the correct social-distancing etiquette.

This is the perfect time to experiment and grow your company in ways that you've wanted to, but have been too busy for in the past.

In summary

- 1. Understand that this is affecting everyone so make sure your brand is as human as possible in its communication.**
 - 2. Now is not the time to sit it out - get out there and engage with your audience. Start by addressing the crisis and then show how you're adapting to it.**
 - 3. Experiment and don't be afraid if you're rushing something out that isn't as perfect as you'd normally like.**
 - 4. Most importantly, take care of your colleagues and this will reflect in all that you do and say during these times.**
-

eCabs and Merlin Publishers

Back to the tiny island of Malta where both eCabs, Malta's largest cab company and Merlin Publishers, a publishing house, were struggling with a changing consumer landscape. eCabs' tourist market dried up overnight and so did a lot of revenue related to rides for entertainment purposes.

Merlin Publishers, whose largest clients are schools, found themselves in a pickle with students sent home and families going crazy trying to entertain their children whilst attempting to work from home. Parents needed books, and lots of them, to keep their children entertained and on-track during these home-schooling days.

Merlin Publishers were stuck because they'd never operated a delivery service and didn't have the staff or setup to start now. For eCabs, it was the perfect time to launch eCabs Delivers, a delivery service for merchants where the driver collects and delivers any item that fits in the boot of an eCabs car for the cost of a ride. This service was the perfect solution for Merlin Publishers as it could get all those book orders to their customers without using the manpower that they didn't have.



Case study

Getting on the right side of the press takes finesse. We have it. Let's help you reach your audience through the best channels.

Partnerships



Can you think of new collaborations for your brand? Is this the time to market together with your competition? Is this the time to join forces with a client to communicate together? Can you innovate with products, channels or services if you joined forces? Can you reach more people if you partnered with someone?

Since the beginning of the 2020 crisis we've seen an increase in community feeling, with people coming together and finding ways to help each other survive. Meanwhile many companies have been hit hard and are trying to survive this uncertain period. It seems that there could not be a better time for companies to come together and find ways to help each other out, too. It's the perfect time to forge brand collaborations that might benefit the economy now and business in the long-term, even after the crisis is over.



A brand partnership, also known as co-branding, is a strategy where the success of one brand brings success to its partner brand, too. Brand partnership can be an effective way to build business and brand trust, increase awareness and break into new markets. But how do you create a partnership that works? A partnership that brings value for both brands? Let's have a look at a few different examples of brand partnerships and best practices.

Case studies: [Before the 2020 Crisis](#)

CoverGirl & Lucasfilm - Light Side and Dark Side Makeup

Before Star Wars: Episode VII The Force Awakens launched at the cinemas in 2015, Lucasfilm partnered up with CoverGirl, an American cosmetics brand to create a makeup line inspired by the movie. CoverGirl Created a make-up line that reflected the Light side and the Dark side that loyal Star Wars Fans would recognise as good against evil from the movies. The collaboration was a huge success that brought benefits to both brands.

Benefits

Lucasfilm got to reach CoverGirl's young female audience to promote their movie, while CoverGirl hopped onto the Star Wars advertising bandwagon and took over the internet and stores leading up to the movie release. Win-win.

Case study

Taco Bell & Doritos - Doritos Locos Tacos

In 2012, Taco Bell partnered with Doritos to create Doritos Locos Tacos - Taco Bell's taco special with a signature twist: a Doritos shell. The item was also presented wrapped in a Doritos bag. Benefits: Besides the financial gain from selling over a billion Doritos Locos Tacos in the first year alone, both brands got to tap into each other's fan base by creating a product that both sides loved. Plus, we can't ignore the national brand awareness that was brought about by the launch of the product.

Case study

UNICEF & Target - Kid Power

An ongoing partnership between Target and UNICEF began in 2015 when Target committed to one of UNICEF's sustainable development goals. The retailer started selling child-friendly fitness trackers that encouraged the wearer to complete various fitness activities, while all profits were directed towards CSR initiatives. This collaboration is still active today.

Benefits

This not-for-profit partnership has paid off in multiple ways, going beyond the benefit to the companies themselves. By selling this product, Target encourages children to embrace a healthy lifestyle as well as using the fund to be able to supply underserved communities with the resources they need. This ongoing partnership generates awareness of global malnutrition - helping UNICEF meet its demanding sustainable development goals, and opens up Target to a demographic of giving families they might otherwise not have had access to. Win-win-and win to the communities these companies benefit. Target is also exhibiting behaviour that's aligned with their CSR obligations.

Case study

Case studies: Now

McDonald's & Aldi - Share of Workforce

When the coronavirus crisis struck, the food retail sector was overwhelmed with demand, while physical restaurants were forced to restrict their operations or close altogether, and let their staff go for the foreseeable future. In light of the events, a unique solution took shape in Germany. Grocery chains Aldi Sud and Aldi Nord signed an agreement with McDonald's Germany to refer workers from the burger chain to retailer's stores "quickly and un-bureaucratically."

Benefits

The partnership allows Aldi to use McDonald's staff to cope with the growing demand of at-home food sales while McDonald's get to keep their staff and provide them with work opportunities while their own restaurant activity is restricted, apart from financial benefits that weren't disclosed. The fact that movement of staff between companies is very uncomplicated allows them to implement the activities immediately, while employees who would have otherwise lost their salaries and potentially their jobs, get to keep both. Win, win and win.

Case study



Chipotle & Uber Eats - Nationwide Delivery

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, physical restaurants were forced to close or limit their operation to home delivery. Now more than ever, people want the convenience of getting food delivered directly to their doorstep. Due to high demand of home deliveries, Chipotle Mexican Grill, Inc. announced a nationwide delivery partnership with Uber Eats.

Benefits

Chipotle was able to expand their delivery footprint using Uber Eats and deliver food to their customers nationwide, meeting their expectations while ensuring 'no-contact' delivery to ensure safety of their customers and staff. While being there for their customers in a time of crisis, Chipotle is able to increase its online sales and deliveries, which is one of their goals. Uber Eats in this case is perceived as an enabler by expanding Chipotle's delivery coverage, as well as benefiting financially.

Case study

Ford, GE & 3M and Medtronic & Tesla - Aid with Medical Equipment

In the light of the crisis, multiple automotive manufacturers are partnering with healthcare equipment providers to produce medical equipment and protective gear for healthcare workers to help address shortages in the fight against the coronavirus.

Benefits

Apart from the obvious benefits to the healthcare sector, car manufacturers are able to provide work for their employees who could have lost their main source of income after several brands had to temporarily shut down their car and SUV production. Another interesting outcome is that Ford, Tesla and other car manufacturers presented their teams with a purpose in such a difficult time - a purpose to innovate, to get together and create solutions to the problems the crisis has caused. This allows strengthening internal culture and relationships that will benefit the staff and the manufacturers once things go back to normal.

Fenty and Color of Change & Movement for Black Lives, Beyond Better Foods and NAACP Legal Defence and Education Fund and many more.

In response to the protests demanding justice for George Floyd and other black Americans who have been killed at the hands of police, many brands including Fenty and Beyond Better Foods have donated directly to the Black Lives Matter movement and urged their networks to do the same.

Benefits

Now, we don't normally think of activist organisations as brands, and this is not a usual case of brand partnership where both sides look to increase their financial benefits. It's quite the opposite - companies are donating money to support a cause and enable change. This is where brands take a stand on a current issue and use their platform to spread a positive message of change. If done right, without a self-serving angle, this type of collaboration between a brand and an activist association can have more benefits than money can buy, for both sides. The activist association gains funds for their activities and an additional, extremely powerful platform for their message to be spread through. Meanwhile, the brand might get mixed reviews from the public. Through their generosity and solidarity the brand will develop and nurture strong relationships with some people on an extremely personal level, which leads to positive brand associations and brand love. On the other hand, such a political stand may enrage some of the brand's following resulting in financial loss. At the end of the day, every brand should stand for something if they want to build genuine and meaningful connections with their community.

Case study

Mini case study overview

We split collaboration examples into 'Before the Crisis' and 'Now' because current circumstances have changed the climate that companies operate in. You will have noticed that in the 'before' section, most collaborations were aimed at financial gain, wider reach, business growth or to meet CSR goals. Now, this highly uncertain situation has forced businesses to look for ways to aid the economy and communities affected as well as looking for ways to survive.

Current brand collaborations aren't so much about marketing itself. They are more about what brands will do to support and inspire their communities and help ease the effects of the crisis. Smart and strategic partnerships that leave a positive impact on the lives of their audiences will gain customer recognition and trust, cornerstones of brand love that are hard to achieve with a regular sales-driven collaboration.

Tips for brand collaborations

Identify shared values. It is essential that the two brands have shared values that are recognised and appreciated by the audiences of both brands. One of the main benefits of brand collaboration is the ability to tap into each others' audiences. You need to create a product or service that would appeal to both.

Be collaborative. This one's a given. For a partnership to work, both partners must pool their resources and contribute their strengths to achieve synergies that would not have been possible. This takes cunning on both sides but it also requires a healthy dose of humility. The fundamental requirement here is a common purpose. The earlier this is identified, the quicker it will be to foster a collaborative spirit.

Be considerate. This crisis has brought out the considerate side of many. It is essential that companies be considerate of the communities that are affected by this partnership. If the partnership exists to solely benefit the partnering companies and not the communities around them, they will come across as insensitive and inconsiderate.

Seek perceived mutual benefit. For a brand partnership to truly work there must be clearly outlined benefits to both parties in a way that's commensurate with the effort being made by each side. In effect, the resources being contributed to the deal, particularly where brand equity is considered, ought to be clearly reflected in the reward to each brand.

Is this the time to market together with your competition?

Possibly. This is the time to find creative ways to collaborate. As we've seen in the case of Aldi and McDonald's, although they're not directly competing during normal market conditions, during the crisis they do compete for the at-home market - McDonald's with it's home delivery and Aldi with groceries for at-home cooking. Even though theirs is not a marketing campaign in the traditional sense, both companies are perceived as caring and trustworthy by their customers and employees, which reinforces brand integrity for both brands that will be beneficial for a long time after the crisis.

Can you innovate with products, channels or services if you joined forces?

Absolutely! The collaborative nature of the partnership strategy lends itself to joining forces to create innovative solutions by opening up the resources that may have not been available to each company otherwise. The [Uber and Spotify partnership for the Soundtrack for Your Ride](#) is a great example of brands pooling in technology and music content from Spotify and direct customer access of Uber to create a remarkable travel experience for their customers. This unique proposition not only allowed the fans of both Uber and Spotify to enjoy their rides more, they have likely increased their consideration with both consumer audiences over their respective competitors.



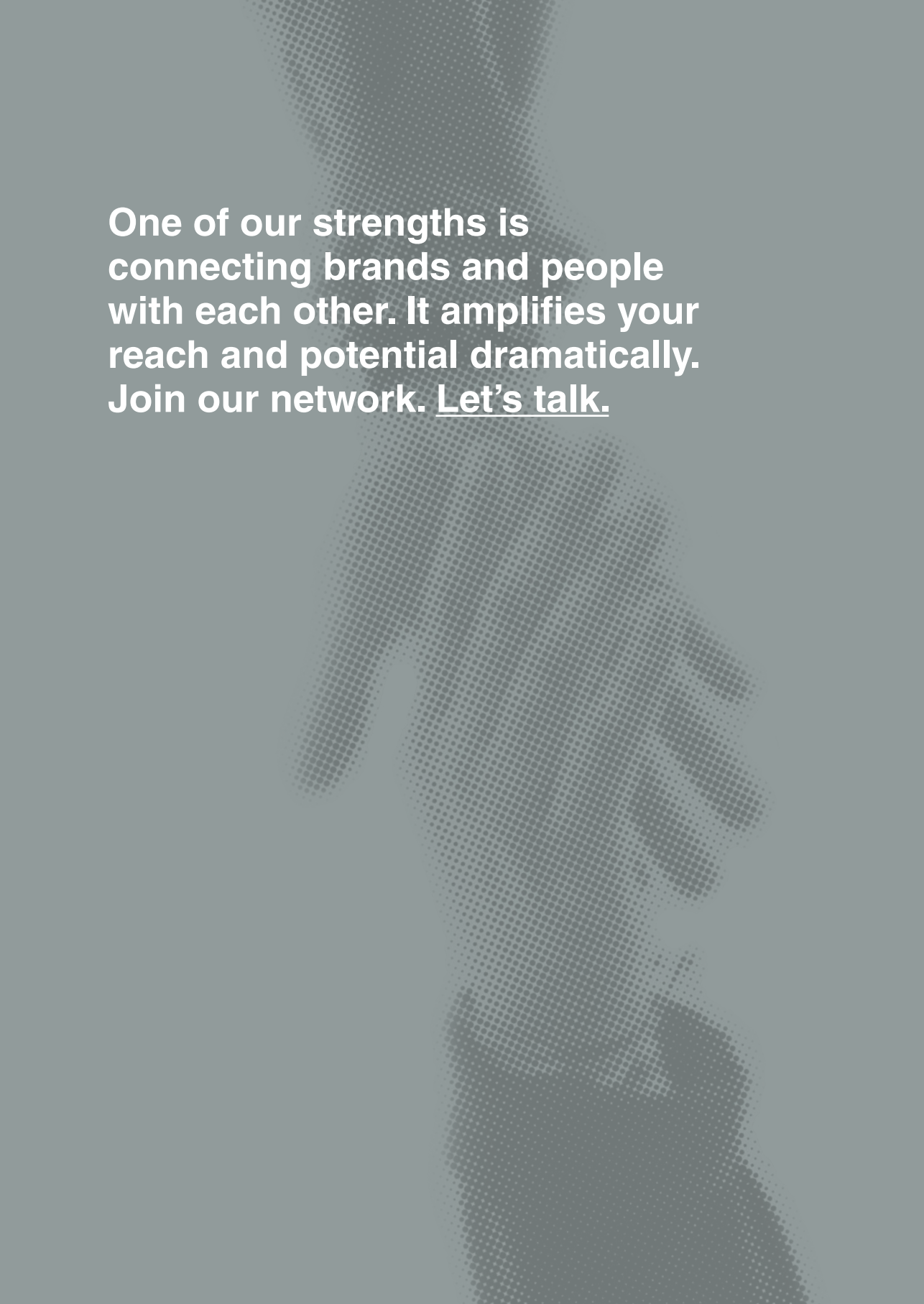
Can you reach more people if you partnered with someone?

Yes! The whole point of a collaboration is that all involved partners have access to (some) of each other's resources, and their pool of fans, followers and customers is one of them. CoverGirl X Star Wars is the perfect example. Through their makeup collaboration Star Wars got to reach out to and connect with CoverGirl's young female audience, while CoverGirl got exposed to the Star Wars fan base, in addition to riding the highly profitable promotional wave. As long as the product of the partnership is true to both brands and appeals to both audiences, both brands get to reach out to, and most importantly connect to a new pool of consumers that are more likely to be the right fit for their product, rather than spending more money for spray-and-pray ad campaigns.



In summary

- 1. Partnerships considered during times of crisis can have far-reaching impact after the crisis is over.**
 - 2. Partner with brands where there is significant overlap in core values.**
 - 3. Partner up for service to the community that is consistent with the needs of the crisis, not just for profit.**
 - 4. Seek audience reach, innovation, and a better story apart from the commercial benefit of your partnership.**
 - 5. Make sure there is mutual benefit that's in line with the investment of all parties for your partnership to last and generate value.**
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One of our strengths is connecting brands and people with each other. It amplifies your reach and potential dramatically. Join our network. Let's talk.

What's next

Keep calm and carry on

For the 10,000 years of documented human history, we've faced all sorts of crises, some of our own making like wars and poverty and others that we had no control over like natural disasters and disease. And through each one we endured.

To do so we learned new techniques on how to handle the threat while it lasted and manners in which we could emerge from the crisis better prepared for the next one. Our ability to make the most of a crisis and emerge stronger has arguably made us a very successful species.

This also means that we are better prepared for the current crisis than the one that came before. We used our collective learning from the past to better deal with the present.

And in every case, our failures along the way were forgotten and our successes went down in history. It's ok to fail in a few attempts because our last try is our successful one and it is the one that sticks with us for future generations to learn from.

Of course, while the major events end up featuring in the documentary, there are countless other smaller ones that helped in their own way for the collective effort to be successful. While we think of the bravery of the soldier on the frontline, we must remember the war wife who kept the family back home safe and healthy.

Every small effort you make to rescue your brand, your product, and your team will count, even if infinitesimally. Let's not consider our efforts to be insignificant when faced with the enormity of a global crisis because we need to restore or improve on every aspect of our lives before this happened.

What matters is that the choices we make now place us on the right side of history. You want your efforts, spoken about in the voice of your brand, to have been relevant to the days we are living and useful to the lives of people who are struggling - economically and psychologically.

Our best efforts will be:

Innovative - We must use all of the resources available to us in ways that are unusual, repurposing existing systems in a way that works better for us now and as we emerge from the current state. The farther we reach, seeking technologies that are on the fringes and outside our specific industry, the more likely we are to surprise ourselves with solutions that are elegant, efficient, and available to most.

Empathetic - We are seeing a wider portion of the global population affected by societal and economic factors we would not have dreamed possible. This is the time for brands to think and act in a way that is more deeply human than ever.

Cost-effective - If you've been saving for a rainy day, this is the time to use those surplus earnings. And yet we have no clear visibility into the duration of the economic slowdown nor of its magnitude.

So it is time to be prudent with our spending, prioritising those actions that will help our brand endure. It is not a time to stop investing in your brand. On the contrary, it is time to invest even more wisely than ever.

Connecting - The internet gives us a proxy to proximity. It provides temporary respite from our innate need to connect with other humans as we organise ourselves into societal structures. Our efforts on behalf of the brands that we steward ought to be those that will help provide the most intimate connections during a time when we have been mostly starved of them. Even when not deprived of contact by being forced into our own homes, connecting to one another remains an essential human need. Think of crises like the Arab Spring, where connectivity played an essential role in mobilising people and of natural disasters where connectivity is impossible for long periods of time. Our efforts to connect people, no matter what, will be ultimately the key to humanity gathering its resources to endure as a species.

Honest - We must be true to ourselves in a very specific way. We must assess our highest ideal for our brand during the time before the crisis and we must also look at the way we would like to be perceived now and when it is all over. Then we must be ruthless in our adherence to our founding principles - our purpose and our values - so that when we emerge, we are in a state we would like others to admire us for.

If all brands acted in a way that is innovative, considerate, and truthful, we'd have really made the best of this crisis. Ask yourself which side you want to be on and take the necessary steps to placing yourself there. You're not alone. There is plenty you can do with very little effort. There are aspects that are better handled by experts outside your team. Make those calls. You'll look back in a year or so and be glad you did.



We are a tightly-knit team of professionals who firmly believe that there is a better way to tell the stories that our clients want to tell to theirs. Sixteen years ago, we started out as a traditional agency and are now a brand and digital firm that partners up with a selection of clients that are like-minded.

Our clients, like us, understand that creative has to be strategic and that strategy needs to be creative. So we work together to tell world-class stories with them. And we have a hell of a lot of fun as we do so. We work by embracing our clients' business objectives first and then establishing a purpose for our activities, creating a point of focus that our team and our client use as a clear set of common objectives. We then follow a process that ensures we've covered all bases, across all bases. The results are ones we can measure and that lead to tangible successes for our clients.

We are based in Malta and are a happily multi-cultural team that draws on an unusually broad range of influences, each of us a specialist in their respective fields and usually fielding a couple of additional skills and quirks that contribute to the unusual brand of thinking we're known for.

We form part of ICOM, the global network of independent agencies. This means we have a professional (and very social) network of like-minded teams across the globe, brilliant agencies with an entrepreneurial and fiercely independent spirit that we can count on and who count on us.

**Want an agency you can count on for results?
Get in touch.**

**About
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