

Nutshell



An ISA Publication

Volume 1, January - March 2021



*Marketing
in Covid times*

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From the Chairman's desk

Dear Member,

How to market in Covid times is perhaps the most important question marketers are asking today. With social distancing, self-isolating and remote working becoming the new normal, there has been a shift in the market from the supply and demand side and consequently, a shift in the marketing paradigm. Further, an all-time low consumer confidence combined with loss of jobs and restricted movement has resulted in tough times for brands.

What should a brand do or not-do therefore is the biggest question plaguing marketers. While challenging times like these require marketers to be nimble, they also call for an actionable plan for the path forward to optimize marketing performance.

This issue of the Nutshell attempts to understand the challenges of these trying times and showcases the best way forward. We would love to hear from you. Do feel free to send in your feedback to isa.sg@insocietyad.com

Regards,



Sunil Kataria
Chairman

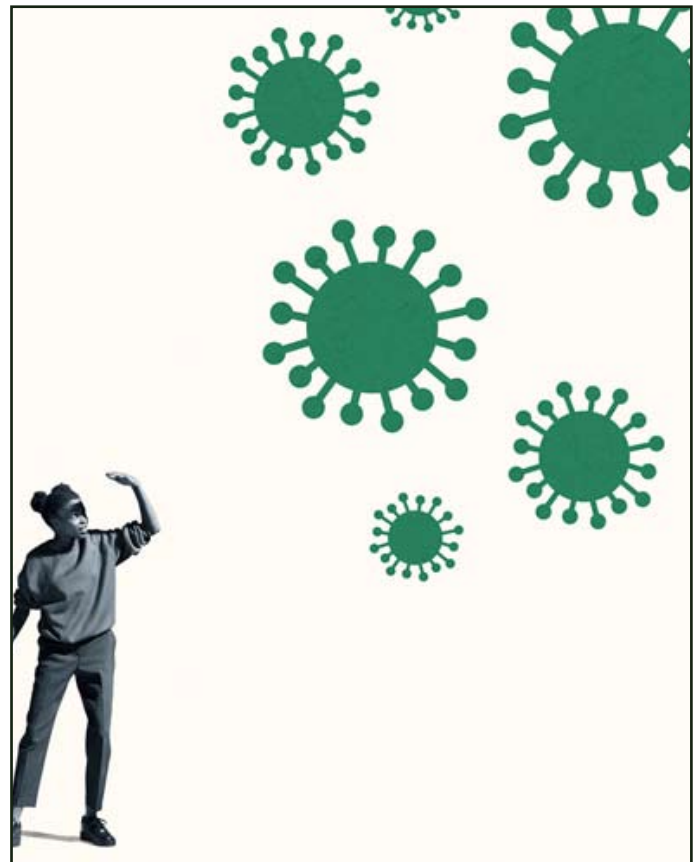
Marketing in Covid times

That's the most important question marketers are asking today. With social distancing, self-isolating, and remote working becoming the new normal, there's been a shift in the market from the supply and demand side, due to which there's a shift in the marketing paradigm. For brands and marketers navigating the COVID-19 crisis, simply reaching the customer has become a challenge. While challenging times like these require marketers to be nimble, they also call for an actionable plan for the path forward to optimize marketing performance.

Navigating the Covid-19 crisis and the resultant challenges:

A global crisis can either paralyze a marketing team or galvanize it to thrive. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, that's exactly what we're seeing: some companies are cutting back on marketing (in some instances, laying off the entire marketing team), while others are being more agile and coming up with interesting ways of engaging their audience during these difficult times.

If you want to stay in business, you can't stay idle for long. In the wake of the crisis, it seems perfectly understandable why many entrepreneurs would want to cut down completely on marketing activities. Being conservative feels like the safe choice when there's uncertainty about how long the crisis will last. But we have to balance financial



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responsibility with the need to keep consumers informed and engaged when things get tough.

In fact, long-term studies show that the right approach during economic uncertainty is to increase — not decrease — your marketing spend. The last thing you want is to be caught flat-footed and find yourself lagging behind your competitors as the economy kick-starts again.

For the most part, consumers are receptive to some marketing at this time. A recent study from the American Association of Advertising Agencies found that 43% of consumers find it



reassuring to hear from brands. In addition, 56% said they like learning how brands are helping their communities during the



pandemic. Only 15% said they'd rather not hear from companies.

That said, marketing during these times requires sensitivity to what's going on in people's lives and the flexibility to keep up with swift and swooping changes.

Start with customer empathy

COVID-19's impact on consumer behaviors and attitudes cannot be understated. An ongoing study recently found that 76% have recently picked up new habits, behaviors and routines in the wake of COVID-19. Of those people, 89% said they plan on keeping some of their new habits. Consumers are also trying new products, with 36% planning to continue using new brands they've tried after COVID-19.

Now is not the time to rely on assumptions. Any data you have from 6 weeks ago—let alone 6 months ago—is already out of date. As the consulting firm Gartner recently advised, CMOs must be proactive in monitoring changes to customer behaviors and purchasing needs while the crisis is unfolding.

Businesses must move forward but do so with genuine empathy. Marketers can help C-suite executives take the right action by acting as



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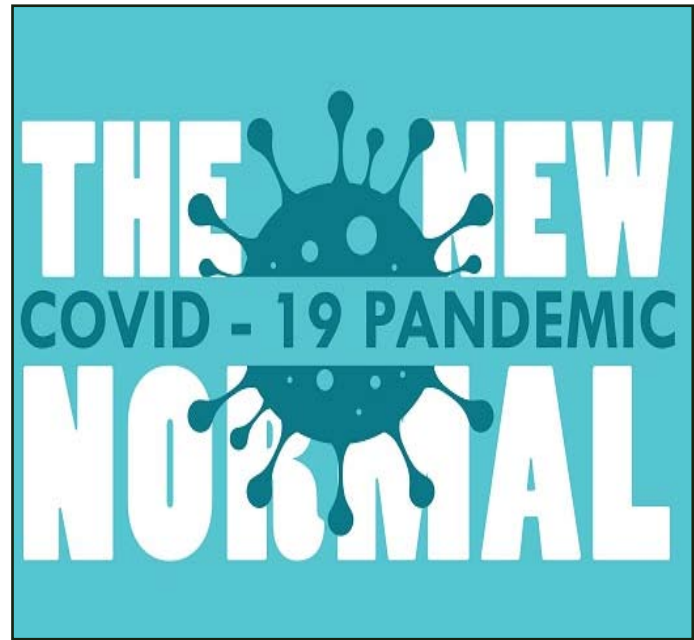
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a lighthouse for consumer understanding. Many companies already have existing Voice of Customer and research programs—these can be leveraged at this time to uncover the emotions underlying people’s shifting attitudes and behaviors. Doubling down on customer engagement and listening programs can help provide insights on how to best move forward.

Tell relevant, authentic stories — and give, give, give

Impressively, some brands have already produced compelling campaigns that speak to the realities of the pandemic. Dove, for example, created a spot shining a light on the courage of health care workers. Some brands, like Budweiser and Burger King, are focusing on social distancing and encouraging people to do their part by staying home. A case in point is Sam’s Club, which recently created a 60-second spot thanking its employees and calling them “retail heroes.”

It’s great to see creativity in storytelling at this time, but marketers must push their companies to do even more. This is the time to pay it forward and provide as much value as possible to your customers and communities. Every organization and person has the capacity to contribute in their own way. The most important question companies should



ask themselves is this: “what can I do to help?” Giving back can take several forms. For instance, Jägermeister is hosting a virtual event to help raise funds for New York restaurant owners. In tech, companies like Apple quickly mobilized their resources to produce much-needed PPEs. Following the lead of many software companies, Nike has temporarily eliminated its subscription fees for its app to help people stay fit while quarantining.

These moves transcend marketing and may not increase sales immediately, but they’ll build goodwill and help drive long-term loyalty. Giving back is simply the right thing to do. The faster the world can beat the COVID-19 pandemic, the better chance all companies have in surviving the crisis.

Be agile for the new normal

Some entrepreneurs and marketers are holding off action, thinking that things will be back to “normal” in a few weeks or months. This really may not be the case.

For one, some scientists are predicting that some form of social distancing may need to happen until 2022. That’s a long time to put any type of marketing on hold. A more

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important consideration is the fact that the pandemic will have a long-term effect on the psyche and outlook of consumers. In another COVID-19 study, 86% of Americans and 81% of Canadians agreed that the crisis will create a new normal and have a lasting impact on society.

Regardless of how long the crisis actually lasts, COVID-19 will forever change the consumer landscape. After this comes to pass, companies can't go back to their old playbooks. Personas, messaging and even your product strategy may need to significantly evolve for the realities of the post-COVID-19 world.

For various reasons, some CMOs are hesitant to engage consumers in research at this time. It has also been observed that many marketers who have deployed surveys specifically about COVID-19's impact on customer experience have seen actionable responses. It has also been observed that not only are people answering conversational chat surveys, they are also providing detailed selfie videos, which is really helping brands understand the human impact of the pandemic.

The bottom line is that fresh data and accurate insights have never been more important. In these uncharted territories, relying on instincts



alone is dangerous. If you haven't reached out to your customers in the past month, now's the time to do so.

While it's important to recognize the uncertainties and fears surrounding COVID-19, don't let this crisis paralyze you. Enabling your team to really understand your customers and act based on timely insights is key to



navigating your way through this crisis both for your marketing team and your company. Good marketing, at its core, has to include a deep understanding of your target market — their day-to-day lives, their challenges, their joys, their perspective on the world around them. Once you understand that, you can figure out how your brand fits into that story. You probably had that down pat. And then the coronavirus outbreak shut down schools and businesses, imposed social distancing, and completely upended almost everything we thought of as typical daily life.

Many of those things you knew about your target audience are different now. People are feeling communal anxiety and grief, their



daily routines have likely changed completely, and some have either lost their jobs or are risking their health to keep essential services functioning.

The other challenge is that there's no playbook for this.

We have to accept that there's probably not a right answer to the question of how to do all of this — but there are a couple of wrong answers. The keys will be to err on the side of humanity and transparency, and to avoid the big no-nos and faux pas like a tone-deaf ad campaign or insensitive post on social media. Let's look at some of the steps you can take



to re-evaluate your marketing plans in light of coronavirus and make decisions on how to move forward in these challenging times.

Reanalyze Your Marketing Plan With COVID-19 in Mind



The coronavirus pandemic is a health crisis like we've never seen before, so it's no surprise that it came with disruptions to the supply chain, hoarding of toilet paper and hand sanitizer, empty shelves at grocery stores, and stress on Amazon's warehouses.

In times like these, you need to be able to respond to change in real time. For the first few weeks after the U.S. began taking serious measures to combat the spread of coronavirus, the situation seemed to change daily — having ripple effects on people's feelings and behaviors.

Dramatic and/or widespread events like the COVID-19 pandemic should always trigger a marketer to first step back and say, "OK — what do I have in market right now?" Here are some steps you can take to reevaluate your



plans, recenter your thinking, and focus on what's next.

1. Stop, relax, and don't panic.

Seriously, sit down — not in front of your computer — and take a few deep breaths. This is not a time to panic, but to gain perspective. People's lives are at risk, but not from your marketing campaigns. Your business is so important, but you have to keep your mind first and foremost on your health.

The second part of not panicking is to not immediately pull back on all your digital marketing efforts. It may seem like a prudent option to cut marketing budgets to preserve cash flow, but consider what's known as the "mere exposure effect," or the phenomenon



that being exposed to something more, will make you like or appreciate it more.

Keeping your business in front of consumers could help improve their perception of your brand even if they're not buying right now.

2. Evaluate your current images, language, and tone of voice.

Assess everything you currently have in market, starting with the channel that gets the most eyes. Evaluate those assets and messages from a new point of view: one that is living in a world with record-high unemployment rates, economic uncertainty, and general anxiety. Your messages (both copy and imagery) should take into account the impact of cultural events on your customers. They may be in a sensitive emotional state and possibly not in the mindset to make a purchase from your business.

As the crisis progresses, the level of sensitivity required will likely go down a bit, and at some point some light humor might even be appropriate in certain situations. But you have to follow the organic lead of the community — this is not a place to lead the front lines.

3. Adjust marketing campaigns and timelines.

Let's face it: your well-laid marketing campaign plans might have to be pushed back. And that's ok. Don't nix them altogether, but take a little time out to focus on the situation at hand (and part of that means to get your own house in order — take care of your family and employees, keep them safe, and do the best you can). And now it's time to pivot. Craft a message that is sensitive to the current situation which takes into account your customers' new situations and concerns, and is honest, transparent, and human.

A gold standard for this kind of messaging pivot is what Nike did shortly after Americans were asked to stay home if at all possible.

It's human. It's inspiring. It aligns with the zeitgeist. And the simple, black-and-white creative adds to the gravitas of the message without pulling it into dreary gloom. Instead, it has an underlying tone of hope. (And they put it out fast.)



4. Have a positive mindset, but don't be insensitive.

Try your best to keep an upbeat attitude and show your customers that you are there for them in these uncertain times and also still hopeful for the future. That said, watch that you don't cross the line into possibly being seen as insensitive by minimizing the scale of the pandemic or its impact on human life.

Retain and Grow Your Customer Base During Coronavirus

The Pareto Principle says that 80% of your revenue comes from 20% of your loyal customer database. If COVID-19 has dramatically reduced your sales rates, or you've had to temporarily close shop, it's your loyal customers who will be the ones to keep your business booming well beyond the end of any international pandemic.

Loyal customers spend more on average, with larger purchases more frequently. It's a win-





win! Here are a few areas you can leverage to maximize your customer engagement now.

1. Content marketing and coronavirus.
2. Paid advertising and COVID-19.
3. Social media marketing and coronavirus.
4. Offer discounts and promotions.
5. Email marketing and COVID-19.
6. Optimize your ecommerce store.

Content Marketing and Coronavirus

Content marketing is all about answering your customers' questions. What are their questions now? How have they changed? If you can zero in on how to answer, content marketing is a great way to fill the holes left by any paid campaigns you paused to conserve cash.

Here are some ideas to jumpstart a content marketing strategy that aligns with the changing situation and evolving customer needs and desires.



1. Perform a content audit.

Just as you assessed your marketing campaigns, do a quick audit of your content. Make sure that what's out there is appropriate for the times — especially what's featured on your blog homepage or website.

Then, think about what kinds of content would be useful to your customers now, and if you have anything relevant you can update and re-release. There are some common threads running through the reactions to the COVID-19 crisis that can be served by content that's not at all related to the virus. If you have articles on working from home, dealing with stress or anxiety, or how to entertain children stuck inside, for example, those may well become very valuable.

2. Provide information.

As we already mentioned, content marketing is about answering questions. But that doesn't mean you should be the one-stop shop for



COVID-19 facts and figures. Provide relevant information to your customers, like if you expect shipping and delivery times to be delayed, or you want to communicate how you're keeping your customers and employees safe.

Other information your customers may need will likely depend on your vertical or specific products. If you run a toy store, maybe it's a blog post on the best toys for kids to entertain themselves. If you sell office furniture, you could post about ergonomics and how to make sure your at-home setup works for you.

Providing useful information without pushing a sale is something that customers will remember and return for — and retention is a step on the path to loyalty.

3. Aggregate resources for customers.

What do your customers need? Again, don't come at this with the mindset of being your customers' one-stop shop for pandemic facts. This is to meet a specific need that is relevant to the product or service you offer them.

For example, if you sell primarily to small businesses, resources on small business loans or other relief programs may be relevant. Or, if you're a lifestyle brand with a strong community, you could create virtual events or aggregate a list of those that might be of interest.

Paid Advertising and COVID-19

There are lots of stories about brands pulling back on their paid advertising to conserve cash flow. But the other side of the coin is that, when we come out of this on the other side, your brand may have been forgotten. Out of sight, out of mind, as they say.

If you can afford it, keep your paid ads running, and find ways to budget instead of killing the program entirely.

What you should consider, though, is moving away from conversion-focused advertising toward brand marketing. The message now is more about communicating your identity and values than "Buy this blender."

Social Media Marketing and Coronavirus

Social media is a wildcard on a good day, so tread carefully — but tread you must. If you have an established presence on social channels, you should be there now. Especially if you find yourself having to pull back on ad spend, you'll need to (responsibly) take advantage of all your organic opportunities.

1. Be there, and be social.

One of the biggest takeaways across this whole pandemic is the vast number of people who have thrown up their hands (figuratively) and said, "You know what? I'm human. I hurt, I





get scared, and I'm protective of the people I love."

If your brand can be like that person — and receptive to the person on the other end — your social media platforms can be a powerful foundation for building trust and relationships. But you have to be engaged.

2. Be part of the conversation.

Embrace the conversation when it's appropriate for you to do so. Start conversations, engage with the community, and try to make it right with dissatisfied shoppers. And remember to be compassionate towards people who may have a shorter fuse than normal.

That said, that insertion in the conversation needs to be organic, not forced. If you don't have anything relevant or substantive to offer, you may at best look out of place, and at worst be perceived as insensitive or tone deaf.



Offer Discounts and Promotions

In the early days of crisis, it could be seen as gauche or inappropriate to advertise discounts and deals. Carefully and consistently gauging customer sentiment will be important. But as the situation evolves, and instead descends into what may likely be an economic recession, price-conscious shoppers will be looking for those deals.

Discounts can be helpful in attracting new customers, building loyalty among existing customers, driving traffic to your site, and increasing your sales. Here are a few different types of discounts and offers you could try:

- Select two or more complementary products and discount the bundle, giving customers an opportunity to try new products.
- Use volume discounts to raise customers' order values.
- Offer discounted shipping, or ship for free if customers reach a certain order value.
- Maximize cross-sell opportunities and/or order value with buy one, get one promotions.

One other opportunity is in charitable sales promotions, like donating a portion of all profits for a certain period of time, or doing a give one, get one promotion. These can



encourage conversion because customers can purchase items for themselves while still doing good for others.

Email Marketing and COVID-19

It's no secret that communicating with your customers is an essential step to retaining them. Still, there's a fine art to that communication, and one of the indisputable kings of comms is email marketing.

With 59% of people saying that email marketing impacts their purchase decisions, it is still by far the most effective long-term method of marketing communication.

And now, more than ever, it's vital that you're keeping your customers abreast of any changes affecting your businesses, stock, and industry.



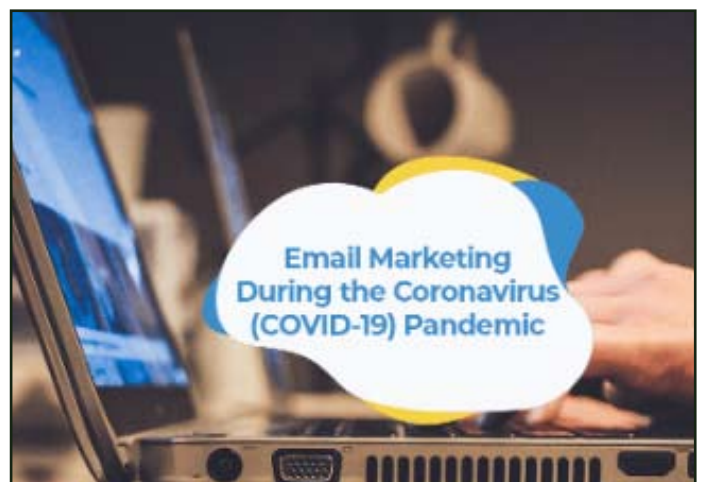
So how can you ensure that you've got your email marketing down pat at a time when clear, goal-based communication is essential?

1. Set your sights on a goal.

As we alluded to, it's vital that your email marketing has a goal. Not only will a goal help you to measure the success of your marketing efforts, but it will also give your customers a clear direction as to what you want from them.



Check out this innovative and eye-catching one-off email campaign that Texas-based clothing retailer, T.C. Elli's sent to customers at the start of lockdown. In the email, T.C. Elli's draws their customers' attention to the store's social media channels, creating more potential contact points and strengthening their ties to





their customers. From here, they can promote stock and sales, encourage customer feedback, and delight and excite customers with ongoing updates.

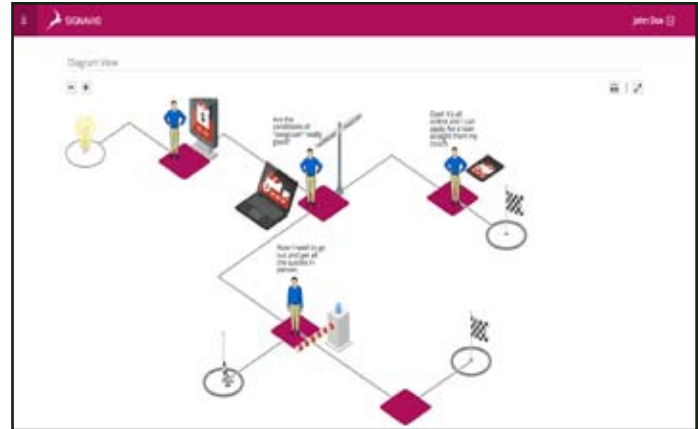
It's clear from this email that their main goals are to gain social media followers and, by offering a 20% off sale store-wide, encourage sales. And while we're here, special mention to their outstanding design that really draws the customer's attention to those main cues.

2. Go with the flow.

And by this, we mean automated email flows. Nailing the basics of your email marketing can be as simple as making the most of automation.

The essentials of an automated email flow are as follows:

- The first email is triggered when a customer becomes part of a segment by completing an action; e.g., they abandon their cart without completing a purchase. The email communication doesn't stop there, though.
- If the customer doesn't make a purchase, they're still within that same segment and could still be compelled to make a purchase. The email flow is designed to send them a series of emails encouraging the customer to make a purchase (through offering a discount).



- If, at any stage, the customer completes a purchase, they are instantly removed from that segment and will no longer receive the other abandoned cart emails from that flow... unless, of course, they abandon their cart again.

Automated email flows — like happy birthday campaigns, win-back flows, or abandoned cart emails — can make all the difference. Throw in tools like a product recommendation engine that accurately predicts products that your customers will like, or adjustable discount codes and customer segmentation, and you've got a recipe for tailored, targeted emails that are easy to design.

Check out this example from Singaporean lingerie retailer, *Our Bralette Club*, who designed a captivating automated email flow designed to re-engage customers who have not shopped in 60 days and are at risk of not shopping again.





With GIFs that help their emails to stand out, clear branding, irresistible discounted offers, and product recommendations, Our Bralette Club is keeping their customers entertained while also encouraging them to shop again.

With \$4,700 in attributable revenue in the year since they enabled this automated email campaign, based on data from Marsello, *Our Bralette Club* is really showcasing the power of automated marketing.

3. Incentivize customer loyalty.

Combining your email marketing with your loyalty program might not seem COVID-19 specific, but trust us, if you've skipped this step, you're missing a retention marketing cash cow that could be the ticket to getting your store through even the toughest times. Need we mentioned the Pareto Principle again?

Optimize Your Ecommerce Store

Consumers are turning to online shopping for many things they may have previously preferred to purchase in person. You want to make sure your store is optimized for



findability and usability, and that you're featuring the products that resonate with customers today.

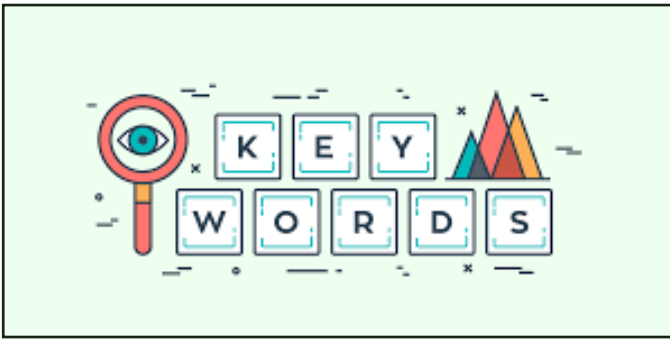
1. Evaluate your homepage SEO.

The purpose of your homepage is to introduce customers to your business. It's your digital storefront. Users should be able to quickly and easily understand your business and its value propositions.

As far as keywords, it will likely be more effective to focus on a small subset of keywords that tie into your brand and site theme than to try to rank for one branded keyword. Make sure to work those keywords in naturally to any content headers on your homepage.

2. Optimize your product pages.

Start with keyword research: what terms are your target audience using to search for products like yours? Identify a couple of relevant long-tail keywords to work into your page copy as well. While you've probably already done this once or twice, consider how search trends and shopping behavior are different now, in the face of coronavirus, and make sure your strategy is responsive to those trends.



Once you've identified the right keywords, create your product description copy, headers, title tag, and meta description. Each page on your website should have a unique title tag and meta description.

3. Reduce page load speed.

Page load speed is a huge factor that sometimes gets overlooked. But its implications are twofold: pages that load slowly frustrate users and cause them to bounce, or at least leave your site before purchasing anything. Page load speed is also one of the signals Google uses in its page ranking algorithm, meaning sites that load more slowly may not rank as high as those that load quickly.

Here are some ways you may be able to reduce page load speed:

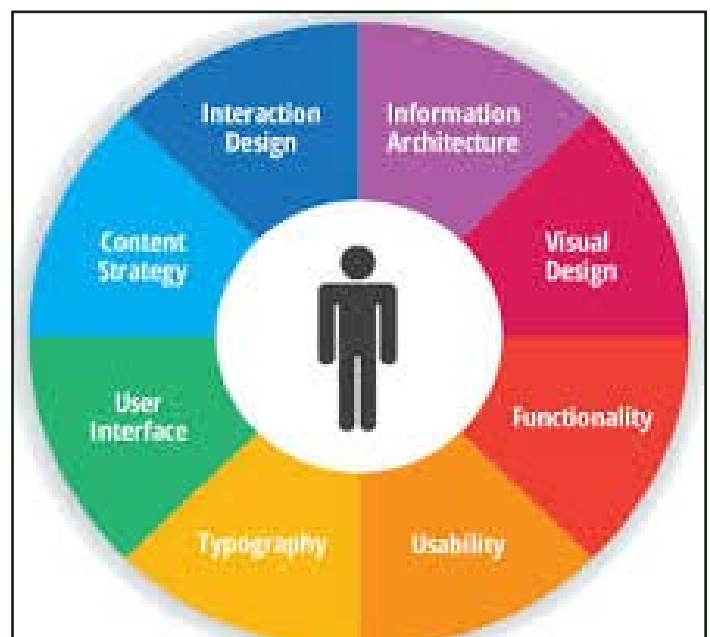


- Compress your images to reduce the file sizes.
- Assess your ecommerce site integrations, and make sure they're all still necessary and useful.
- Minify Javascript and CSS.



These are early days. A number of large organizations in the US have pledged no layoffs this year, including Morgan Stanley and the Bank of America. Of course, these organizations have deep pockets. Others have already shown themselves to have deep pockets but short arms. Assume, also, that the main theory of business for many remains the primacy of shareholder value, and that they have fewer resources to fall back on than the examples just given. Transferring the costs of the crisis to labour rather than capital will seem an entirely rational response, and the sooner the better.

The promotion of shareholder value as the primary, and often only, real purpose of business has activated this norm in a purely negative sense. People have already learned





to reciprocate the uncaring and dismissive attitudes that they judge many business leaders have shown to them. Actions now that are perceived as being primarily concerned with prioritizing shareholder value at the expense of employees will intensify these attitudes.

They will also activate concerns for what Al Goethals (2018) calls “procedural justice,” where people believe that they are not getting what they think they deserve. There are few cries more raucous than “It’s not fair.” Such agitation further fuels the fires of populism. In a familiar spiral, where cause and effect turn into their opposites, populism creates a crisis for business leaders whose responses strengthen the divisive agenda of populist leaders. In turn, this leads to more economic woes (and so on), unless and until other forces



intervene.

One problem is that the strongman view of leadership which we find in populism also exists in business, fanned by conventional theorizing and fawning tributes to celebrity CEOs in popular outlets such as Harvard Business Review. Leadership scholars need to do more to problematize the concentration of power in the hands of business elites, challenge self-serving theories of the businesses that guide much leadership decision-making, and interrogate the organizational practices that many of them employ to silence dissent and pulverize opposition. We need to participate in the debates taking place about how businesses can be reconfigured to serve wider stakeholder needs, including those of long-term rather than short-term shareholders. As already known fact, too much of our scholarship is hung up on playing with piddling variables as part of an introspective game where publishing has become an end in itself. The impact of most such publications is zilch.

The coronavirus crisis has created a practical and ethical imperative for us to do more work that matters.



Conclusion

Long before the pandemic hit, organizations were increasingly defined by their digital presence. That reality emerged to the forefront as social distancing and shelter-in-place orders created a reliance on online engagements as the primary connection to the world. As websites have been called upon to do more heavy lifting than ever before, opportunities for excellent UX have come into sharp focus, and users' patience with sub-par web experiences has worn thin.

COVID-19 has shaken modern life to the core. Historically, new design trends follow massive social upheaval, for good reason. After emerging from a constant stream of dire news, users are looking for bright spots, a breath of fresh air, and a reassurance that life is on track to be back to normal. The post-pandemic climate will present a powerful opportunity for renewal and reinvention.

In these challenging times, digital marketing is often the last thing on people's minds. But as marketers, we still have to pay attention. And our jobs change with the seasons, in that we have to respond to the world as it is, as it changes — not the world we wish it was, or



the world it used to be.

For those businesses seeing lower sales during the crisis, take advantage of that downtime and be ready to come back strong. Focus on building up your SEO, improving your website design, and optimizing your site's UX for better conversion rates.

Marketing in the conditions imposed on us by the coronavirus must lean on community, brand building, and relationships with existing customers. If you can strike the right tone in your messaging to speak to these people as they are, and that message resonates, your business will be in a good position to retain market share (or even gain it) as economic activity across the world begins to reach a new normal.

And, even more unpredictable, is how the markets will look like in the post COVID-19 period. Many brands will have to change archaic communication techniques and be quick to adopt new methods. Analyzing 'the now' and 'the next' is crucial. Having a foresight on how the consumer landscape is changing is imperative.

One thing is clear that the market scenario will not remain the same as it was earlier. Brands and marketers will have to re-evaluate their funnels and look at opportunities with an open mind. As audiences are moving to newer platforms, so should be done by the businesses. It's more about finding opportunities and making the best of it.



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