

MARKETING IN A PANDEMIC

Do's, Don'ts, and Considerations for Brands

DO'S:



Stay connected to your audiences. Reach out to the customers and prospects you've worked so hard to nurture over time. In most cases, people still want to hear from brands and connect with appropriate value propositions.



Be authentic. This is a unique moment of national and global unity. Your brand has no doubt taken steps to pitch in and be part of the solution. Find ways to highlight the fact that you are in this with your audiences. Tell the stories about how you're working from home and encouraging employees to practice social distancing. Use this as an opportunity to align your corporate behavior to your brand values.



Add value to the conversation. Increasingly, marketing is about value exchanges. At this moment, even more than at other times, consumers want utility. They are looking for practical ways to make this challenging situation work. There's been a lot of reporting around how this pandemic could boost e-commerce activity, but that's not the only opportunity out there. Some restaurants are emphasizing home delivery or drive-thru options. Home fitness providers are offering extended free trials. Think about ways in which you could support your audiences through your media and marketing.



Lean into channels and tactics that are working. This crisis has the potential to change consumer behavior in a dramatic fashion. People are leaning on social channels even more than usual for information, entertainment, and connection. We know from Nielsen ratings that people watch more TV when they're working from home. That space will grow in importance with homebound masses who are hungry for regular news updates. Find ways to be present in these and other spaces where you have something meaningful to say.



Focus on brand safety. This is more important than ever. There are straightforward ways to ensure that your messages aren't appearing next to highly sensitive content. While that content is beyond ubiquitous at this point, if ever there was a time to prioritize safety over scale, it's now.



Be agile. Things are changing by the hour. Strategies that you set today for your media and marketing may well be irrelevant tomorrow. Agility in marketing has been increasing in importance for years, but it is absolutely critical in this time of crisis and uncertainty. Lean on your partners who no doubt are encountering similar situations with other brands. Marketers need to align themselves in ways that allow for rapid response to changing conditions. This type of approach makes brands seem relevant and engaged with the situation.

DON'TS:



Strike the wrong tone. It can be hard to know exactly what to say in the face of such unprecedented circumstances, but there are some straightforward things to avoid. Anything that seems to encourage behavior contrary to public health recommendations should be changed immediately. This could be travel or gatherings or any activity that could be construed as being counterproductive to the country's collective well-being. Attempts at humor should also be handled very delicately at this time. Trying to lighten the mood with a joke could come off as tone deaf when people are experiencing real suffering and anxiety. Brands should comb through their messaging to make sure it's coming across as intended and err on the side of caution when it comes to tone.



Come across as salesy. While there are legitimate marketing opportunities right now, the last thing you want is for your brand to seem like its only interest is in selling. If this is the only "value" in some of the marketing you're doing right now, consider shifting that and offering help and utility during this period.



Be transparently opportunistic. Being seen as taking advantage of the pandemic is just about the worst look possible for any brand. Be helpful. Offer value. Do what's best for all of your stakeholders. That will most likely mean marketing and media strategies that are modified for the circumstances. Just make sure that nothing comes across as capitalizing on the situation.



Panic. These are unprecedented circumstances. Putting the brakes on everything may feel like a natural reaction, but in most cases that's a bad and potentially damaging course of action. Halting all media and marketing can have lasting effects on a brand, especially if key competitors continue to occupy those spaces in meaningful and relevant ways. Simply restarting efforts when circumstances improve does not mean that you'll be able to pick up where you left off. Revenue, market share, and brand perception could all take serious hits if your brand isn't present when your audiences need value the most.

CONSIDERATIONS:



There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each industry is going to be affected differently. Strategies for highly affected verticals like travel, hospitality, and retail will be very different from brands that have e-commerce and other delivery mechanisms that don't rely on in-person interactions or gatherings.



Consumer behavior is a moving target. While we don't fully know yet how people will react to the behavior changes associated with social distancing and working from home, we hope that they will remain receptive to marketing messages and perhaps will even use this time to research and take care of purchase decisions they haven't had time to do. The exact impact on media and marketing is yet to be seen. Brands will need to be ready to react as results and conditions dictate.



Economic realities will ultimately dictate strategy. Of course, all best practices are subject to very real business considerations. Depending on how long the situation persists, doing (and not doing) all of the things catalogued here may or may not be practical. Doing the right things for stakeholders will undoubtedly look different for everyone, and only time will tell what that means for your brand.

Stay healthy and stay safe. [#btdoingourpart](#)