

# BRAND SAFETY IN A TIME OF CRISIS

The Covid-19 pandemic has marketers and business owners searching for adapted best practices for brand safety in a time of crisis. The exponential growth of Covid-19 related content has caused the topic to creep into nearly every corner of the internet, resulting in unique and unexpected scenarios that your current brand safety parameters may not be equipped to handle.

So, how do marketers and brands continue to advertise in safe and suitable environments during a global pandemic? Unfortunately, there is no “one-size-fits-all” answer. However, an increase in overall media consumption, combined with an inherent sensitivity to the type of content being consumed, has placed a larger emphasis on reevaluating ad placement and tone.



## Establish Brand Placement “Boundaries” and Adjust Accordingly

Unprecedented times call for a deeper understanding and evaluation of exactly which content aligns to your brand’s values. In today’s current state, nearly all news is Covid-19 news. Based on your brand or specific product, you may be comfortable with (or even interested in) running next to some crisis-related content. Other brands or marketers may want to take a more conservative approach and avoid running next to any crisis-related content entirely.

### How to Play it Safe

Whether your product or service is limited based on social distancing parameters, or you’d simply rather avoid any risk, these strategies can help ensure your brand does not appear next to any crisis-related content:

- Implement a crisis keyword blocking strategy to your programmatic campaigns through your brand safety solution. Add all Covid-19 related keywords to your block lists to limit the possibility of running next to any crisis-related content.
- Stop the placement at its main source by adding all major news sites to your campaign blacklists.
- Consider pausing some things. Channels like social media make it more difficult to take a conservative approach. There is less transparency around brand safety measures on sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, because most content is curated by the audience. If this pushes the limits of what you’ve established as your brand boundaries, pausing these tactics in a time of crisis may be the next best step.

### How to Find Your Place

Implementing a blanket blocking approach around all Covid-19 content may limit your ability to reach the increased audience using the internet as a source of information during this pandemic. Much of the published content contains information that is beneficial to the public, such as new guidelines for social distancing or testing resources. This type of content could be aligned to your brand.

Major advertising inventory sources have recognized the limitations of blanket blocking and have adjusted their policies as the crisis evolves. [Google](#), for example, lifted its ban on coronavirus-related ads a few weeks into the crisis. If you are in the fortunate position of being able to continue running your business despite social distancing, or have less stringent boundaries on what you are comfortable with content-wise, there are still ways to safeguard your brand:

- Rather than implementing blanket blocking, utilize content categories and high-severity keywords to help avoid running against crisis-related content that threatens your brand boundaries.
- Lean into the increase in news consumption without making yourself vulnerable to high-severity alignment by adding the front pages and section headers for trusted news sites to your exception list (MSN Finance, for example).
- Continually monitor performance and practice active listening. If your brand boundaries include continuing to run on social media sites, monitoring audience feedback is crucial to understanding if the placements you've chosen are remaining sensitive and relevant.



### Reevaluate Your Tone

Many marketers and businesses have chosen to adjust their creative, rather than placement strategies. This includes continuing to run adjacent to crisis-related content while shifting messages from a sales-oriented focus to one of support, unity, and hope. Covid-19 has impacted individuals on a personal level worldwide, so the risk of inadvertently coming off as insensitive or even exploitative is higher than ever right now. Sincerity will always prevail over opportunity in a time of crisis. If you decide to run adjacent to crisis-related content, here are some ways to ensure you're striking the right tone:

- Perform a complete audit of your current messaging for sensitivity and relevance and remove any messages that could appear irrelevant or tone-deaf in the current crisis climate.
- Try to keep a positive, inspirational, and helpful tone while taking a neutral or supportive stance.
- Continue to utilize standard whitelist and blacklist segments through your buying platforms that will allow you to avoid running your updated content next to any "high-severity" content such as extreme violence.

No matter which strategies you choose to implement, make sure to keep a finger on the pulse of this ever-changing crisis. Keep an eye on reporting to understand where your blocks are primarily occurring and update your keyword lists if any new topics start to arise.

Unfortunately, there is no "right" answer on how to approach your advertising during an unprecedented global pandemic. What is and isn't considered brand safe will vary from brand to brand. Take time to evaluate your media strategy and establish your boundaries within the current crisis-climate. These are uncharted waters for all of us, but once you've found where your brand fits, you can protect it by implementing adapted strategic placement and tone best practices.

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