



Look back before looking forward

A COVID-19 Brand and Marketing Recovery Guide

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No one needs to remind you of the disruption that the current pandemic has caused most businesses. Likewise, no one has a crystal ball that can tell you precisely what the future holds. But while it is human nature, especially among business-people, to take control of our own destiny, the worst mistake one can make is to over-react. Whether the future returns to normal or brings us a new normal, business leaders who apply clear and concise strategic thinking to the situation will triumph over those who panic and resort to a series of reactionary tactics. In many ways, the British mantra during WWII, “Keep Calm and Carry On,” has relevance today.

In that spirit, we are offering this game plan for protecting your brand and maintaining (or growing) market share as the country moves into the recovery phase of the crisis.

This guide will not provide you with all of the answers. If it were that easy, we would all know precisely what we need to do next. Instead, this guide will provide a framework to help you decide your best course of action as we gain clarity about the new business world A.C. (After Covid). Ideally, this plan can serve as a valuable tool for assessing your branding and marketing communications strategies in three areas: Pre-COVID, COVID and Post-COVID.

PRE-COVID

The most appropriate starting point for moving forward is to look back at the marketing strategies you established before the pandemic.

Assuming you had a marketing plan in place, how were your branding and marketing strategies defined? Remember, tactics are only relevant to the degree they support clearly articulated strategies. Strategy is the foundation of your plan to achieve specifically defined goals. Tactics, on the other hand, identify actions you will take in order to accomplish your strategic mission. For example, let’s consider the following simple and hypothetical plan.

GOAL:

- Grow revenue by 5% year over year

STRATEGY:

- Position our products (services) as well-differentiated alternatives to our company’s top three competitors

TACTICS:

- Deploy a highly targeted earned media program, including PR and social media
- Implement a paid digital and traditional media campaign
- Update sales support materials

what led you to these decisions originally, (2) how effectively the strategies and tactics were working, and (3) what you perceive to be the residual impact of the current situation moving forward. In other words, are there compelling reasons not to stay the course? We recommend a deep dive into these questions. Objectively consider which parts of your marketing strategy were producing results and which were not. Were you accurately tracking the outcomes of those efforts? Did you have a clear, expected outcome identified that would define success?

In reviewing your pre-COVID tactics, you may also want to consider additional elements that had previously been considered, such as expanding the organization's presence on social media or through specifically targeted marketing campaigns. Conversely, were some components of the plan simply not worth the

to shut down completely and others could operate at something less than normal. Some businesses were deemed essential and allowed to remain fully in operation. And a small number of businesses have even seen increased demands for their products or services.

Regardless of where your business ended up on this broad economic spectrum, there are undoubtedly factors that are morphing in ways you may have never previously considered. To what degree has buyer behavior, both consumer and commercial, changed? In a short period of time, nearly 30 million people are suddenly out of work. No job means diminished consumption. As for commercial business, besides the overall drop in demand, many supply chains (domestic and international) have been seriously disrupted. For many companies, the laws of supply and demand are now governed by lack of supply and demand.

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time, effort and/or investment? Even if you did not have adequate tools in place to track outcomes, chances are you have a good sense of what was not working.

When markets are humming along as they were before the virus outbreak, most of us were caught up in the daily flood of activities that consumed our workdays. Often, there wasn't time or the perceived need to stop and think about marketing strategy and the tactics being employed. It was just business as usual. One of the few benefits of the current crisis is that with this sudden disruption of markets, many of us now have the time to actually step back and reassess our circumstances and/or challenge our previous assumptions.

COVID

Once you have thoroughly examined the marketing plan that was in place prior to the pandemic, you need to consider the implications of the crisis on your business model and your ongoing marketing efforts. The business community has been shredded, and the workforce along with it. Some businesses were forced

Given this new reality, it is critical to assess what your marketing plan comprises. What is the appropriate messaging you should be communicating? And how much of it is the result of your prior decisions versus what the current environment is dictating to you? Again, looking back, which part(s) of your original plan are still valid, and which need to be re-evaluated?

Some important factors to consider:

Buyer Behavior

How are buying decisions being made?

Value Proposition

Has the pandemic changed your positioning as it relates to differentiating your product or service?

Pricing Strategy

Is discounting now expected as the new norm?

What about providing products or services at no charge? Do you dare consider increasing prices due to new cost considerations, or is there a real risk of diminishing demand even further – or being perceived as price-gouging?

Promotion Strategy

If you have maintained a promotion plan, which part or parts warrant retention, reconsideration or elimination? How might your promotional messaging need to change?

Online Strategy

Have you had to revise or suspend your online media presence? How has that messaging been affected in terms of tone or content?

Customer Retention

What has been the impact on customer retention? How have you changed your communication style and rhythm with your customers?

Brand Image

Has the current environment enhanced or diminished your brand image and/or brand value? For example, many healthcare organizations are getting at least a temporary bump, while other companies may be seeing a decline in brand perception.

It's equally important to determine whether there is a need to change your business model and how you serve your target audiences. Some organizations have discovered that they have become surprisingly effective delivering services remotely. A few may even determine that remote work will become a permanent fixture for their organization. And other structural efficiencies may have evolved that can be grafted into the new business model.

POST-COVID

So, what does the future look like? As stated previously, no one has a crystal ball nor any silver bullets to guarantee future success. Hopefully by now you can begin to form a vision of how to determine what your marketing plan will look like once we are on the other side of the crisis. Determining where and how to go from here is the most challenging part of this exercise. It is always easy to look back and clearly see the outcome of your decisions. It is not so easy to predict the future, particularly when there are no relevant precedents for the situation in which we now find ourselves.

Determining a post-pandemic plan will require all of your skills and experience in order to outline the assumptions that will need to be made and in what areas.



In addition to traditional planning processes, your plan should fall into two categories:

A Best-case Plan

This is your most optimistic expectation if all of your assumptions turn out to be right and everything else falls into place.

A Worst-case Plan

This is your most pessimistic plan and would consider that many or most of your assumptions may turn out to be wrong.

Realistically, your expectations will rest cautiously somewhere in the middle. But you won't know where that is until you have defined the best- and worst-case scenarios. So, what are the assumptions and thought categories you need to consider as you craft your post-COVID plan?

Supply Chain

- How quickly will the disruption be resolved?
- How long will it take to rebuild inventory (for those in hard goods businesses)?
- What parts of the supply chain may change or completely morph into something new and different – and what might be the impact on the flow of supplies?
- How will costs be affected both short term and long term? Are there alternative sources that might come into play?

Market Supply and Demand

- How rapidly will demand return once recovery begins?
- In what areas will demand become more prominent? Or less prominent?
- What products or services may be challenged by alternative choices?
- How will pricing be impacted by demand?
- How might purchasing habits have changed?

Competition

- What is a realistic expectation of how competitors might change their marketing strategies and tactics?
- Which competitors can be expected to enter the recovery aggressively with strong marketing initiatives?

- When is it safe to transition messaging to the present and the future from the past?
- What are others likely to do in terms of messaging (including competitors)?
- What changes need to be made to your brand presence? Transitioning out of the pandemic provides opportunity to consider some bold changes.

The Business Model

- What lasting impact has the pandemic had on your business model?
- What permanent changes should be made to capture improvements or efficiencies that have been discovered?
- How will competitors' business models change and potentially become a threat?

Transitioning out of the pandemic provides opportunity to consider some bold changes.

- Is there an opportunity to capture market share that may have been lost by the competition during the pandemic? What strategies will you employ to generate greater revenue?
- How will the markets react in the early stages of the recovery to strong or aggressive marketing tactics? Depending on your assumptions, should you plan to move in the opposite direction?
- Which competitors have been severely damaged by the pandemic?

Messaging and Brand Presence

- What is the appropriate tone in messaging as the recovery begins?
- At what point can messaging return to what it was pre-COVID? Can it ever?
- How long should messaging be connected to the coronavirus event?

- What steps will need to be taken to provide a safe work environment? For how long?

Economic Recovery

- What is your assumption about the economic recovery? Slow and steady? Quick and dramatic?
- How long will the effects of the pandemic linger over the performance of the economy?
- What are your assumptions about unemployment and work force during the recovery and beyond?
- What are your assumptions about interest rates during the recovery and beyond?
- What are your assumptions about US GDP during the recovery and beyond?
- What are your assumptions about the global economy during the recovery and beyond?

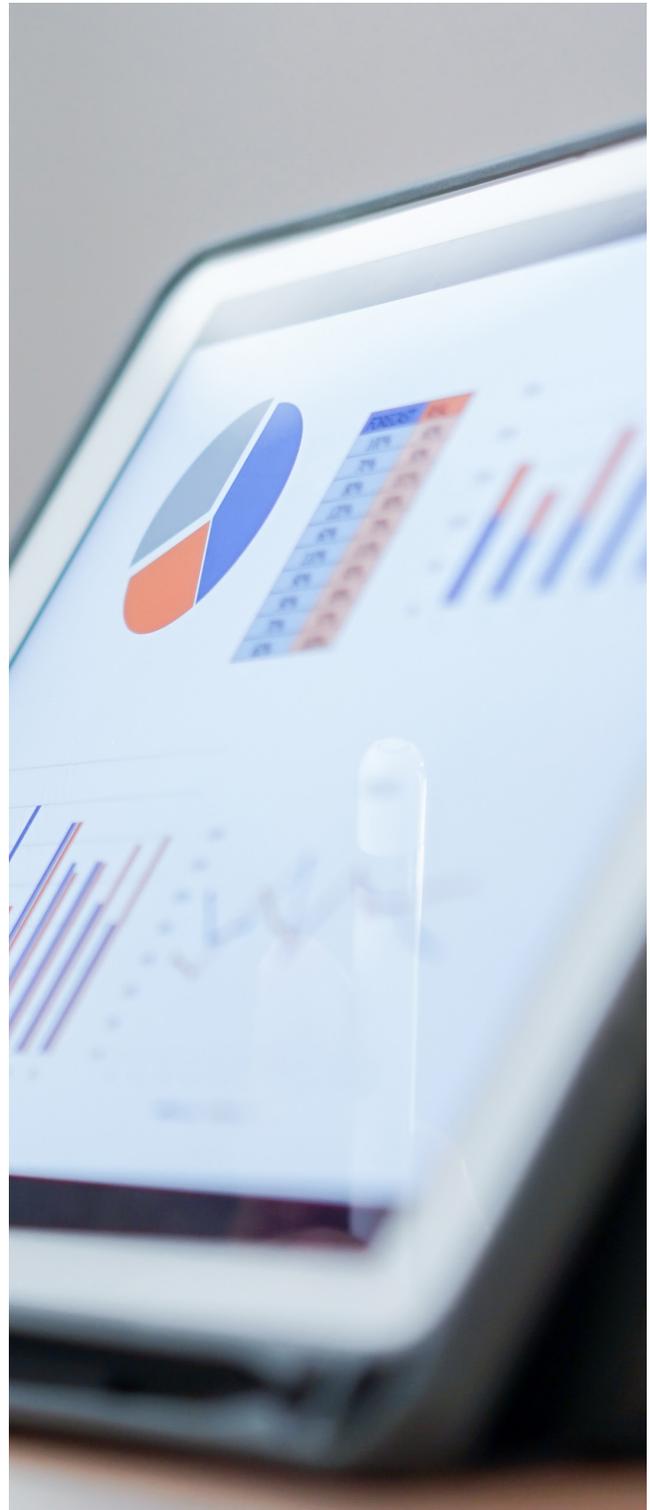
History has shown that businesses that market aggressively through and after an economic recession have better outcomes in terms of increased market share.

Coronavirus

- How will COVID-19 affect health once businesses are fully operational?
- What is the plan in the event that there is a second wave of infections? When would that plan be implemented?
- How will potential misinformation about the virus be addressed?

We invite you to consider these concluding thoughts. History has proven that businesses that market aggressively through and after an economic recession have better outcomes in terms of increased market share. While it is human nature to be extra cautious during times of uncertainty, analysis should not lead to paralysis. Be safe, be smart and always be strategic.

This COVID-19 Brand and Recovery Guide was developed to provide a framework for you to make the most informed decisions about your marketing strategy and tactics as we navigate our way out of this time of great uncertainty. While we don't know what the post-COVID world will look like just yet, we all need to prepare now to make the decisions necessary to return our companies to positions of strength. By doing so, we provide assurance to our employees, confidence to our customers and value to our communities and to the global marketplace.



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