

FOCUS ON ONLINE MARKETING DURING CRISIS PERIODS

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***Abstract:** While most of the planet is stopping to flatten the coronavirus infection curve, companies in all fields need to adapt quickly to the new economic reality. Much of the way we do business has changed abruptly and will likely remain unchanged even after the delicate medical situation passes. Although it may be tempting to limit activity during this period and focus on survival, now is the time to adopt a new marketing strategy. Companies that adapt now, during the crisis, will be best positioned not only to survive, but also to prosper later.*

***Keywords:** crisis strategy, efficient marketing, online marketing, marketing in pandemic conditions*

***JEL Codes:** M31, M11*

INTRODUCTION

In this article we try to understand if and why it is beneficial for companies to reallocate the marketing budget to online marketing, why it is now time for a marketing strategy to prioritize virtual communication, building relationships through online resources.

Even before the pandemic, companies began investing in online marketing. However, for many businesses, the virtual world accounts for a small part of marketing efforts, while networking events, direct sales, customer meetings, fairs and exhibitions still play a significant role in promotion. However, all this is now canceled and will have to be migrated to the digital environment. Companies need to reconsider their attitude towards the online environment and rely exclusively on digital communication channels.

Why digital marketing and not just online marketing? Are there differences and how much does it matter? But most of all, what it means to us and for companies.

The impact of the Internet on companies and organizations was felt after 1990. In ten years, however, the evolution of technology has been significant, and the major change has been the transition from analogue to digital communication.

The Internet and digital technologies have created new ways to promote, sell and distribute products. The emergence of social networks has created a favorable environment for the creation and aggregation of communities. The Internet, the web and the multitude of associated technologies have generated many names and labels for terms related to performance and marketing practice in this new context. The terms often overlap, although most practitioners or theorists agree that digital marketing is more comprehensive and covers a wider range of activities and processes.

RESEARCH, DATA, RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Online marketing or internet marketing covers a smaller area of activities because it includes digital media (web, email and wireless media), but also digital data management systems (CRM, eCRM). Online marketing includes using a company's website along with online promotional techniques such as search engine marketing, interactive advertising, email marketing, affiliate marketing with other sites.

One of the digital marketing specialists, Dave Chaffey, the author of numerous books on this field, referred to online marketing as achieving marketing goals by applying digital technologies¹.

The concept of digital marketing involves, in short, the application of all digital technologies that form market channels to achieve the company's objectives by meeting and exceeding customer needs better than the competition.

The same author considers that digital marketing involves the use of digital technologies (internet, email, databases, mobile, wireless and digital television) to support marketing activities in order to gain profitable customer retention in a multichannel process, whatever the stage in the customer's acquisition cycle.

According to one of the latest editions of the study, Deloitte Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Survey, during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies redirected nearly half of their marketing budgets (46%) to social networks and mobile devices. twice as much as before the pandemic.

The study also points out that in the next 12 months, experts anticipate a continued increase in spending on marketing actions on

¹ Dave Chaffey., Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, Digital marketing – Strategy, implementation and Practice, Seventh Edition, 2019

mobile devices, while those related to social networks will remain close to the new level, which is high.

In recent months, social networks have played an important role in increasing brand awareness and company performance. Three quarters of respondents used social networks mainly for actions aimed at brand awareness (84%) and more than half of them, to retain current customers (54%) and attract new customers (51%). In addition, the study highlights that social networks have made a major contribution to the performance of companies during the pandemic, with an increase of 23.5% compared to February 2020. When it comes to partnerships with influencers, the study shows that specialists in marketing it makes little use of such collaborations and only 8% of the budget is allocated to such activities on social channels, such as LinkedIn, company blogs, Instagram, Facebook and others. Respondents anticipate that in the next three years, they will direct larger budgets to collaborations with influencers, up to 13% of total marketing spending, and the most significant increases are expected in areas such as banking and professional services².

HOW DOES ONLINE MARKETING HELP DURING A PANDEMIC?

We have noticed that more and more large entrepreneurs are expecting an increase in ecommerce. Somehow it was normal and expected because the situation led to the closure of physical locations, social distancing and quarantine. But people still need to buy something for their home, and most of them choose to do it online because it's safer. And how could you make your products or services better known than through online marketing?

The question arises: What if I don't have an online store? Should I focus more on on-site sales? The answer is that now is the time to enter the online market. Do you have a restaurant and can no longer serve on location? Communicate online that you make deliveries!

Many competitors will make the decision to temporarily stop online promotion, which for you translates into: more bidding space. That is, if until now there was a big battle in displaying through Facebook campaigns in certain fields because there were many merchants who bid for money maybe bigger than yours, now the lines are tightening, and

2 <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/chief-marketing-officer/articles/cmo-survey.html>

you have the opportunity to show up several times. With a simple calculation, you will be able to generate more traffic relevant to your business with the same budget with which you did it until now or maybe even smaller.

HOW TO DO BETTER ONLINE MARKETING IN "HARD TIMES"

1. Adapt ads and online communication.

Be more active on social networks and provide useful information. Keep your users up to date with business activity, new regulations or implementations. It's also important that the ads you run normally have tailored text. It would not be ok to run ads that are focused on visiting locations, for example. Rely on a few key aspects in composing texts:

- Inducing the idea of ordering at home, without having to stay in stores.
- Highlighting reductions or benefits.
- Presentation of solutions through which customers can continue to enjoy their favorite products / services.

2. Highlight the products or services that would catch you the most during this period.

Do you have an online store with personal hygiene or household products? Now is the time to raise them, even if they weren't the ones you relied on until now. Do you offer food delivery services? For now, give up the minimum order or the shipping cost.

3. Provides solutions tailored to current requirements.

- One of the most popular ideas at the moment was to encourage payment by card. You can go further and offer a discount to those who purchase with the card. Thus, you urge them to make a purchase, but you also avoid paying cash because we know it is not a good option now.
- Enter the way to leave the orders at the customer's door (if they paid with the card) without having to contact the supplier.
- Disinfects the products and especially the packaging in which they will be delivered.

4. Offer benefits, discounts or promotional packages. Even though it may not normally be a time to give discounts, now is the time to keep your customers connected.

5. Be quick and up to date with what's going on.

Maybe your marketing and communication plan is ok today, but things are unpredictable and in two days you may need a new plan. Act

fast because you don't have time for A / B testing. However, be careful not to come up with something completely different, but to keep your direction so as not to mislead your customers.

6. Don't create sales-only messages!

Normally, we all want our business to survive in this period, but we don't have to be selfish. Messages like: “My product is the best for you now! Buy without thinking!” it won't catch very well. The world needs empathy, it needs your products, but it also needs to associate with you, to know that you are fighting the same battle as them.

7. If you still think you can't adapt your business for the time being, reduce your promotion budget, but don't stop. Online marketing has a long-term effect. The virus will pass, everything will return to normal, and you will have a period in which the world has made you disappear. It is important to stay in the minds of consumers.

8. SEO is an essential aspect in this times!

We know very well that site optimization is a service that helps in the long run, and at a time like this it is good to rank on the most popular topics. This means that you can focus more on the idea of relevant information and content than on sales.

9. Send newsletters to customers.

Whether you want to inform them about how the business will work for a certain period, or you want to thank them for supporting the industry in this crisis, you want to reward them or you want to assure them of good conditions, this is a good way to remind them that you are still active.

WHAT THE CORONAVIRUS TIMES MEANS FOR MARKETERS

The most suitable for the company is to don't exploit the situation. The first thing we are seeing is people trying to exploit fear.

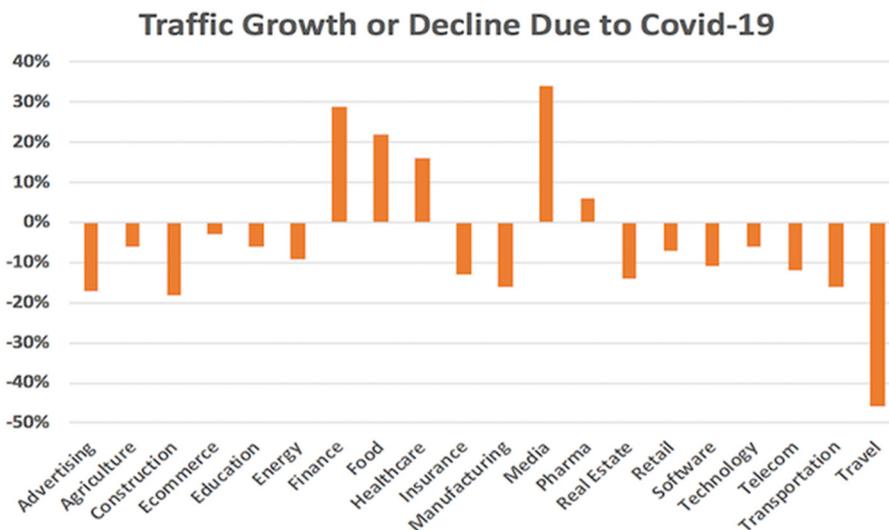
What I mean by this is supplies are running low around the world. From masks and toilet paper to hand sanitizer and other basic necessities... We are seeing marketers buying them and then reselling them on eBay or running ads and selling them for 10-50x the price.

This isn't entrepreneurship and this isn't marketing. I highly recommend that you avoid exploiting the Coronavirus situation to make a quick buck. Not only is it wrong but it is also very short-sighted. Sure you may be able to make a quick buck, but it won't last... you are better off spending your time on anything that is long term.

So what does the Coronavirus mean for marketers?

Even if the virus slows down fast as the numbers have dropped, businesses are going to struggle for well over a year because they will have to make up for their losses and the numbers can and will grow again bringing lockdown situations.

Organic traffic is down in most industries



Source: <https://neilpatel.com/blog/coronavirus/>

Now, from an SEO standpoint, the traffic from one week to the next we see huge drops in organic traffic for most industries which were analyzed. Just look at the chart above.

If you are in the news industry or financial space, your traffic skyrocketed. And if you are in the travel industry, you saw massive drops in traffic.

You can't tell by the chart, but e-commerce was a mixed bag, depending on what sites sold, traffic was either up or down. For example, if you were selling baby products like diapers or wipes then you saw a nice bump in traffic. But if you were selling luxury goods like big-screen televisions you saw a drop in traffic.

CONCLUSIONS

The internet and digital technologies are transforming our world. But existing barriers online mean citizens miss out on goods and services, internet companies and start-ups have their horizons limited, and businesses and governments cannot fully benefit from digital tools.

With this in mind, the European Commission launched its Digital SingleMarket Strategy in May 2015. Since then, the Commission has made good on its promise and delivered all the major proposals set out therein. The focus now must be on making the proposals a reality, starting with adoption by the European Parliament and the Council and following through with implementation by the Member States³.

The economy has been affected to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the area, by the decline of the stock market, the delay or cessation of exports of products for supply or travel cancellations. However, when it comes to small businesses, the effects can be long-term that can affect local communities.

In light of these events, it is best to always have a crisis plan in place. So you need to know how to make the most of your business to keep your customers close. In addition, there is no need to give up finding new customers. On the contrary, it is time to take advantage of your strengths and show your potential customers why they should choose you.

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3 <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/digital-single-market-making-most-digital-opportunities-europe>