

## MARKETING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Ciprian PAVEL**

**Abstract:** The current period is a difficult one not only for each of us, but also for most businesses. Now, more than ever, managers are forced to take steps to ensure the stability and continuity of the company's development. At the same time, the loss of a good and efficient employee is a loss both for the business and for the community to which it belonged. *During a crisis, communication is essential, it can create, stabilize or destroy business opportunities.*

In this context, the marketing strategies adopted become very important for the future of the company.

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

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

### INTRODUCTION

COVID-19, otherwise known as Coronavirus, has affected all areas of business in various proportions. Countless people now practice so-called "social distancing" and stay home as long as possible to prevent possible infection. Of course, everything is guided by the legislative norms in force.

What happens when it comes to marketing? How does this strategic marketing climate affect you? What do we need to know and do in this difficult time?

During a crisis, communication is essential, it can create, stabilize or destroy business opportunities. And more importantly, it can help people or cause confusion.

Moreover, "some individuals can take advantage of this situation"<sup>4</sup> and influences the company's activity by shaping an unfavorable financial image of the company.

However, a crisis cannot be ignored when it affects the public, the audience, or customers. Hence the importance of marketing activities during this difficult period for everyone, both customers and companies.

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<sup>4</sup> AE Domil, AE Artene, CD Pavel. International harmonization of accounting standards for multinational entities. Anale. Seria Stiinte Economice.3.2012. p351

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, DATA, RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS**

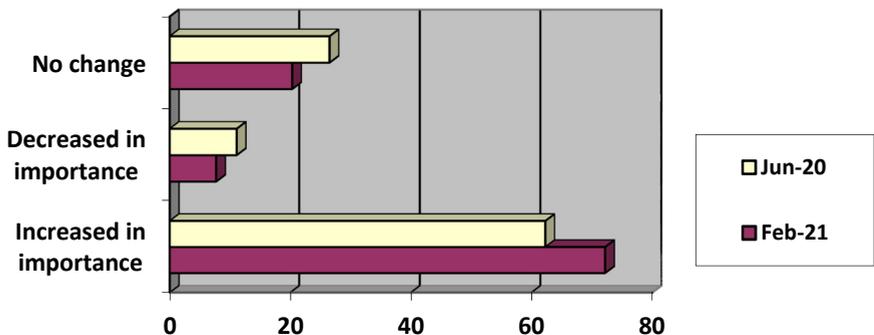
According to one of the latest editions of the study, Deloitte Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) Survey, during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies redirected nearly half of their marketing budgets (46%) to social networks and mobile devices. twice as much as before the pandemic.

The study also points out that in the next 12 months, experts anticipate a continued increase in spending on marketing actions on 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 services<sup>5</sup>.

The change of marketing role in business activity during pandemic(in studied companies)



Source: [www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/chief-marketing-officer/articles/cmo-survey.html](http://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/chief-marketing-officer/articles/cmo-survey.html)

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

If the climate around marketers shows the increased importance of marketing activities, it remains to be seen what is important to do from this point of view.

In this context, numerous advertising messages revolve around social and civic responsibility, aiming to promote social distance as recommended by all authorities, presenting ways of acting but at the same time promoting a state of calm. It has been noted that most service providers advise customers to pay their bills through online platforms and to reduce as much as possible the activities required to go out.

Throughout the pandemic period, the main goal for players in all markets is to create stronger links with the audience given that the messages transmitted during this period have a very large impact on the mind of the consumer in the medium and long term. In this sense, simple tools such as advertising that promote staying at home for consumer safety and the presentation of products, services designed to ease the deadlock are considered to be done in good faith and encouraged by the competent authorities.

There are no marketing manuals for a situation like this. In every market, companies and brands need to find ways to adapt to the crisis and reinvent themselves. Let's analyze some steps you can take to overcome a difficult period, like the pandemic one.

### **1. Do an audit for global marketing**

As an experienced company, you know that it is important to tailor your marketing messages to each market. The pandemic has affected over 200 countries<sup>1</sup> and some or all of your markets are likely to have been affected. Therefore, it is important to re-evaluate your advertising materials properly.

Check the language and tone of your ads and other materials. Billions of people have been affected by the virus, and many of them are in isolation. So, you have to take into account the mood of the customers and adapt to the situation.

Are your images appropriate? If your ads and advertising material depict people hugging, clapping, or in large groups, it is recommended that you make some changes in accordance with the laws on social distance.

Do you have events planned? Even if your market is not isolated, delegates may be reluctant to attend events. If you need to postpone the event, let us know in advance and clearly explain the next steps.

In order to have an idea as close as possible to the truth regarding the medical situation present in certain locations imposed by the pandemic, it is useful to use the media regarding the real figures on the cases of infected people and the growth or decrease trends.

The sources of information in this situation are multiple, but it is important to choose these sources carefully in order to have a more accurate picture of the situation, so we base our decisions on real information. Decisions that will influence the company's strategies regarding its activity in the future.

## 2. **Be a source of truth and positivity**

During a global pandemic, this is not the time to think about customer segmentation, product launches, and marketing plans. For now, focus on the brand, not the products, find ways to build close relationships with customers in each market and respond to global needs.

Examples of donation activities that certainly help strengthen the brand name:

- Unilever donated EUR 100 million in soap, disinfectant, bleach and food to the needy around the world and set aside EUR 50 million for COVID Action Platform, an initiative of the World Economic Forum<sup>6</sup>.
- PepsiCo provided \$ 45 million for efforts against the global COVID-19 pandemic, including protective equipment for health care workers and food aid<sup>7</sup>.
- Airbus employees around the world have used 3D printers to create protective equipment against COVID-19, including strips and frames for face shields. In addition, they transported millions of masks from China to Europe, which will be used in hospitals and by healthcare workers<sup>8</sup>.
- Brewer AB InBev has produced and donated hand sanitizer and alcohol-based liquid disinfectant for front-line workers and hospitals around the world. In addition, the company donated

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6 <https://www.unilever.com/news/news-and-features/Feature-article/2020/from-our-ceo-we-will-fight-this-pandemic-together.html>

7 <https://www.pepsico.com/news/press-release/pepsico-commits-more-than-45-million-to-combat-the-impacts-of-covid-19-providing04022020>

8 <https://www.airbus.com/newsroom/stories/joining-forces-against-covid-19.html>

alcohol to South African manufacturers so they could make their own hand sanitizer<sup>9</sup>.

### **3. Empathize with the audience and offer compassion**

More than ever, in every market, consumers prefer products, services, and organizations that can reduce their anxiety, reduce risk, and inspire a sense of security<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, you need to re-evaluate the company's activities in light of these new priorities. Ask yourself: Does your action or message meet these needs? If the answer is no, do not implement them, as those actions can be ignored or generate even more anxiety among the public<sup>11</sup>. Be aware that values and priorities may vary by market, taking into account cultural norms and how the location of the pandemic was affected.

An excellent example is the action of Louis Vuitton in China, which posted on social media a message full of sincerity, which resonated perfectly with the public. Message to Chinese customers across Little Red Book, WeChat, and Weibo: "Every paused journey will eventually restart. Louis Vuitton hopes you and your beloved ones stay safe and healthy."<sup>12</sup>

### **4. Carry out your activity in the virtual environment**

In China, in the first week of the crisis, online car sales increased, although overall sales in this area were declining. In other words, although the vast majority of the world is isolated at home, there are virtual alternatives that can help you stay in touch with customers<sup>13</sup>.

From yoga classes, beauty consultancy, garden arrangements or singing lessons for children<sup>14</sup>, companies are creating new websites or using video calling technology to reinvent their offerings for a new isolated customer base.

Museums such as the famous Musée d'Orsay in Paris, the Natural History Museum in London or the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam now

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9 <https://www.ab-inbev.com/news-media/news-stories/ab-inbev-is-manufacturing-over-1-million-bottles-of-hand-sanitizer-to-donate-to-hospitals-and-frontline/>

10 <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-03/coronavirus-behavior-change-ipsos.pdf>

11 <https://www.bain.com/insights/three-elements-of-value-for-consumers-take-precedence-snap-chart/>

12 [https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/opinion/luxury-brands-three-best-practices-in-coping-with-covid-19/3469?platform=hootsuite&utm\\_campaign=HSCampaign](https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/opinion/luxury-brands-three-best-practices-in-coping-with-covid-19/3469?platform=hootsuite&utm_campaign=HSCampaign)

13 <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-03/coronavirus-behavior-change-ipsos.pdf>

14 <https://www.theguardian.com/money/2020/mar/28/work-businesses-small-firms-online-survive-coronavirus-crisis>

offer various interactive "exploration" tours, during which you can "get closer" to the artifacts and see them closer than you can. you could see in real life.

And in China, companies such as Taobao and Alibaba organized a "virtual concert"<sup>15</sup> in which popular artists broadcast their performances through a live stream for the audience at home. The event attracted an online audience of four million people and generated money that was donated to medical staff.

### **5. Consider the new social norms and contribute when you can**

Due to the difficulties caused by Coronavirus, people have had to adapt to ever-changing circumstances, make different decisions and create new habits. As a company, think about how and where we can act and contribute to the new reality in which billions of people live, and then adapt to each market.

For example, since most people stay home all the time, could the brand or company help them spend that time effectively? An excellent example is the company IKEA, which created the "State of the Home Catalog" - a printable children's coloring book that looks like one of the regular furniture catalogs offered by the company<sup>16</sup>.

If you can find a way for the company to be present and useful to customers during this difficult time, it is possible that in the long run you will create a loyal fan base and grow effectively.

### **6. Use the latest consumer and domain statistics**

One thing is clear during the COVID-19 pandemic: changes are happening all the time. Use consumer statistics to learn how to tailor your marketing to each region. For that we can check out the helpful resources as:

Google Trends - Stay up to date with market trends

Shopping Statistics - Find out what buyers are looking for

Google Alerts - Find out the latest news

Find an audience segment - Learn how to address your audience

Market Finder - Demographic groups associated with your audience

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The current and future situation of the world economy is subject to some unprecedented changes and the right solutions are very difficult to find. They will lead to a new state of affairs that requires a change in global

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.vice.com/en/article/epgapp/online-parties-china-coronavirus-lockdown>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.apartmenttherapy.com/ikea-coloring-book-36744921>

perspectives and vision and a new paradigm to guide the actions needed for this change.

Environmental changes have and will continue to have many dimensions and trends. A key trend is the constant increase in the level of connection from the local level to the global scale. It is powered by the use of numerous devices and platforms that help users to communicate faster and easier. Their use will facilitate more dynamic interactions between people, firms and economic sectors and will allow better adaptation to extended globalization and market fragmentation especially in these atypical conditions caused by the pandemic.

Marketing must take these requirements into account and find innovative solutions.

Taking into account the recommendations made, companies can hope for a positive result in the short and medium term.

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