

Communicating with Customers Post-Coronavirus



Higher Standards around Cleanliness

The emergence of novel coronavirus has brought the cleaning industry to the forefront of peoples' minds. Commercial facilities, transit systems and homeowners are cleaning more frequently and thoroughly to protect employees, patrons and loved ones. At the same time, facility managers and consumers are having difficulty securing necessary cleaning products and tools due to increased demand.

The extremely contagious coronavirus, which causes COVID-19, has left people searching for answers and best practices for cleaning and infection prevention. While there are still many unknowns surrounding the virus, one thing is certain: cleaning will continue to be viewed as essential for maintaining health and safety.

In this new era, it will be increasingly important for product manufacturers, distributors and building service contractors (BSCs) to nurture relationships with customers and prospects through marketing.

This white paper will discuss the progression of cleanliness from "good enough" to "must have" and how marketing professionals in the cleaning industry will need to approach messaging moving forward. Companies that implement marketing best practices will be better positioned to get their products and services in the hands of frontline cleaning professionals who are instrumental in protecting the public.



A Shift in Messaging

Cleaning is much more than the visible. It's what we don't see that can be most harmful. Today's customers want assurance that facilities are following cleaning best practices to keep visitors safe. This is ushering in a shift from cleaning for appearance to cleaning for health, which requires a greater focus on infection prevention.

Additionally, decisions relative to commercial cleaning that were previously made by facility managers, in-house cleaning departments and procurement departments, may now be scrutinized more closely, specifically by the C-suite. After all, lapses in cleanliness can have a detrimental impact on employee and customer safety, brand reputation and the bottom line. Leaders will want greater insight into cleaning processes and procedures so they can guide the business away from potential risks and better prepare for scrutiny from shareholders, customers, partners and employees.

With more people now hypersensitive to cleanliness and disinfection, purchasing decisions will transition from price-based to quality based. This represents a tremendous opportunity for the cleaning industry, and makes marketing and communicating even more important.

Product manufacturers and distributors will need to address the following:

Supply chain stability: When an outbreak or pandemic occurs, facilities need a larger volume of supplies to meet the demand for increased cleaning. This pandemic revealed supply chain shortcomings, as many manufacturers struggled to get products and equipment to customers.¹ In some cases, shortages were further exacerbated by delays and surcharges. Moving forward, it will be important for manufacturers and distributors to communicate how they have overcome supply chain challenges and how they intend to make sure essential solutions are available during times of need.

Product efficacy: BSCs and facility managers want to know that products perform as expected, especially when they're faced with product shortages and may be using an unfamiliar solution. Manufacturers and distributors will need to clearly communicate product efficacy, key features and benefits. For example, if a disinfectant or sanitizer meets the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19,² this should be specified for customers.



It's important to be cautious about language used in marketing materials. Using terms like "safer," "non-toxic" or even "fragrance-free" could result in scrutiny from regulating bodies like the EPA and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).³ Understanding the approved language is beneficial when distributing items like blogs, infographics and e-newsletters.

Building service contractors should communicate the below points:

Credentials: There will be a greater demand for cleaning competency post pandemic, meaning that BSCs will face added pressure to undergo training through accredited organizations. These may include ISSA, the Worldwide Cleaning Industry Association and its Cleaning Management Institute (CMI) and Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS); the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC), which teaches how to prepare, respond and recover from biohazardous issues; and certification through the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification (IICRC), which establishes and advances globally recognized standards and certifications for the inspection, cleaning, restoration and installation industries. Training and certification ensure BSCs are implementing proven best practices and following the proper protocols, so it's important to communicate to customers and prospects your organization's knowledge and dedication to continuous improvement.

Safety precautions: Facility managers will rely on BSCs to take the proper precautions to uphold safety in their buildings. For example, BSCs should address the fact that employees wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and know how and when to don and doff PPE to

minimize cross contamination and the spread of infection. BSCs should highlight their commitment to following manufacturers' instructions and avoiding mixing chemicals. Following the pandemic, BSCs must also address their dedication to employee well-being by outlining their plans for temporarily removing those who are sick from the workforce.

Cleaning frequency and thoroughness:

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have dedicated more time to cleaning, with some doing so every half hour.⁴ It's expected that routine cleaning services will double to ensure all surfaces are cleaned, sanitized and disinfected.⁵ BSCs should reassure customers that they can be onsite more regularly and can train employees on how to clean in between their visits.

Along with cleaning frequency, BSCs will need to emphasize the thoroughness of their services, including how they clean and which products and tools they use. BSCs should note that they clean with EPA-approved products that inactivate harmful pathogens and have a reliable stockpile of necessary solutions to avoid lapses in cleanliness during critical times.



Marketing Tactics that Make a Difference

More than ever before, BSCs, facility managers and leadership teams are relying on help to understand what products and equipment they should use and how to implement the right processes. For example, some large hotel chains are partnering with specific manufacturers to devise new cleaning protocols,⁶ and others are seeking accreditation from trusted groups like GBAC to implement performance-based cleaning, disinfection and infectious disease prevention strategies.⁷

Marketing professionals should implement several content marketing tactics to help customers navigate this uncharted territory, including:

Case studies: Case studies help end users better understand how your product achieves a greater clean by highlighting another organization's experience. Focusing the piece on the accomplishments of a current customer adds credibility and enables prospects to envision their own success through implementation of your solution.

Make sure to highlight the opportunity to set the scene and then discuss how your product functions and why the customer selected it.

Then, provide the outcome by showcasing quantitative benefits like cost savings and increased productivity and qualitative results like improved employee engagement and customer satisfaction. Consider creating both written and video testimonials to communicate these stories.

Social media: When utilized correctly, social media can be instrumental in generating brand awareness, driving website traffic and increasing sales. At a time when people are facing many unknowns, social media is another avenue for brands to effectively communicate how they are stepping up to fight COVID-19.

Many customers are turning to channels like LinkedIn and Facebook to get advice from BSCs, manufacturers and distributors. Thus, marketers must create purposeful content that addresses the needs of the target audience and utilizes the right platforms to share their updates and secure engagement. This content may include checklists, podcast and webinar recordings, blogs and microsites. Develop an organized content calendar, but be flexible regarding its execution, as this crisis has required many brands to shift their messaging.



For added transparency, make sure to address customer questions and concerns in a timely manner. If you would like to expand the reach of your messaging, consider investing in sponsored posts to target distinct audiences.

Videos, infographics and tips sheets: It's not enough to simply sell a product. You must ensure that the end user understands how best to use the product to achieve the intended results. During the pandemic, many cleaners have had to use products they've never worked with before, and inadequate training has led to eye and skin sensitivities and improper cleaning.⁸

Offering materials that highlight best practices and potential risks takes some of the training burden off the shoulders of facility managers and BSCs. How-to videos, instructional infographics and easy-to-understand tips sheets can all help alleviate uncertainty around using a different chemical or type of equipment. Consider developing materials in both English and Spanish, and additional languages for cleaners based outside of the United States.

White papers and eBooks: As more businesses prepare to reopen, facility managers are relying on experts to provide tips for doing so safely. Using white papers and eBooks, marketers can debunk cleaning and hygiene misconceptions, clarify unknowns and highlight best practices to help facilities improve cleaning processes and better protect employees and customers.

White papers and eBooks are authoritative reports or guides that concisely inform readers about complex issues and demonstrate an organization's expertise on an important topic. They are often used as gated content, requiring completion of a lead form to gain access to capture contact information from

prospects. However, providing ungated access may be the right alternative approach for your business. Whichever option you choose, make sure the piece leads with educational content rather than focusing on selling. The goal is to help customers solve problems by offering easy-to-implement strategies.

E-newsletters: An e-newsletter is an especially great tool, as it allows marketers to promote each of the aforementioned types of content in one place. E-newsletters should primarily focus on positioning your organization as a thought leader. You can accomplish this by sharing white papers, blogs, articles and infographics as well as relevant industry updates. Secondarily, highlight how your solutions, such as dispensers, disinfectants and microfiber cloths, support cleanliness. Do so by incorporating videos, case studies and links to landing pages and spec sheets. Close with company updates and methods for connecting to your team, including phone, email and social media.

In addition to perfecting the design and the content within the newsletter, it's important to decide upon the frequency with which you'll send updates to your customers and prospects. While the pandemic has encouraged many marketing departments to send e-newsletters more regularly, it's necessary to be mindful of the impact of overcommunicating. Determine what makes the most sense for your business and your audience.

There are many more tactics to consider, including blogs, press releases, bylined articles, webinars and dedicated microsites. Whichever strategies your organization favors, make sure you are providing clear, concise and correct information that will help your customers improve their businesses.



Using B2C Messaging to your Advantage

As a cleaning product manufacturer, distributor or BSC, you are accustomed to creating messaging geared to other businesses, which include your prospects and customers. However, with many facilities overwhelmed with the new expectations around cleanliness, there is also an opportunity to leverage B2C resources.

This B2C content will be used by your customers to address key audiences such as retail shoppers, healthcare patients, hotel guests, students and parents, etc. For example, to help people feel more at ease about visiting places like hotels, retail stores and restaurants, these businesses need content like: hand hygiene posters that remind and instruct customers how to perform handwashing in restrooms; videos about the products being used to clean the facility for use on Facebook and Instagram; and FAQ documents that

organizations can add to their websites to address customers' questions.

Every customer has different needs, so ask them what communication materials will be most helpful. It might be checklists that customers use to ensure they're ready to return to the facility under its new guidelines. Or perhaps the business would prefer a content calendar with custom images and copy for social media that addresses their new certifications and science-based procedure. The easier that you can make it for organizations to communicate their new cleaning strategies along with health and safety measures to building occupants and visitors, the more these customers will view your company as a trusted partner.



A New Era of Marketing

The “good enough” approach to cleaning previously focused on doing more with less, and ensuring a clean appearance would secure positive brand recognition and return business. However, the coronavirus pandemic has brought about increased awareness around cleaning and disinfection as well as hand hygiene and personal hygiene. Facilities are now shifting from cleaning for appearance to cleaning for health, as it is clearer now that lives are at stake when there are lapses in cleaning procedures.

Product manufacturers, distributors and building service contractors will all have to adjust their messaging to ensure it aligns with their customers’ needs and expectations. Those that follow marketing best practices will be better able to capture market share in an increasingly challenging economy.

About Mulberry Marketing Communications

Founded in 1995, Mulberry Marketing Communications is a full-service marketing and communications agency headquartered in London with offices in Chicago and Melbourne. Mulberry specializes in developing strategic business-to-business campaigns, and offers an array of services, including strategy and branding, content marketing, public relations, design, video, digital and social media. For more information, visit www.mulberrymc.com

SOURCES

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