

How to Pivot your Marketing in the Wake of COVID-19



Re-evaluating your Marketing Approach Amid COVID-19

The novel coronavirus pandemic has required many businesses to reevaluate their approach to marketing. In the early days of the global health crisis, local government shutdowns forced customers to stay home until further notice. Though some restrictions have since lifted enabling more in-person interactions, businesses that relied heavily on in-person marketing strategies needed to pivot and adjust to reaching customers in their homes.

It's safe to say that the spotlight on digital experiences has never been brighter. Customers are increasingly looking for ways to interact

with brands online and seeking guidance from them during such an unprecedented time.

So how can organizations re-strategize their marketing campaigns to make the most impact moving forward? This e-book will showcase best practices that include refining high-value content and understanding the power and value of social media. It will also discuss the importance of using the proper tone when addressing customers and how to become better equipped to handle customer needs during a pandemic.



Develop (or Refine) your Content Strategy

Simply put, a content strategy is the process of developing and promoting written and visual content. The strategy should position your business as a leader, increase awareness and support your sales team by driving leads.

To develop your content strategy or adjust an existing plan, a business must first define its target audiences. Identify which industries and vertical markets are ideal for your products and/or services. Then, determine the specific job titles and establish personas of your prospects. Taking the time to zero in on your targets gives you a better understanding of the types of content and channels that will engage those specific audiences.

The pandemic may have changed the size and scope of your target audience. This presents an opportunity for businesses to enter new markets or pivot when necessary. For example, perhaps you've mainly supplied disinfecting products and services to hotels and restaurants. Many of these businesses may be closed temporarily due to restrictions or operating at lower capacities. Marketing to other markets that aren't affected by COVID may be necessary. In this case, selling to long-term care centers and medical offices which are all open may present new opportunities due to increased concerns around cleanliness and

infection prevention. Determining if you need to expand your target audience due to the pandemic is an important first step.

Additional steps for developing or revising your content strategy include:

Addressing customers' concerns: The content you create should identify and address your customers' problems and guide them to a reasonable solution. By providing useful information and reinforcing that the problem can be solved, you help your customers become more confident in running their businesses.

During the pandemic, many businesses have implemented new products and services to meet their needs. For instance, some have turned to video conferencing platforms to connect with their employees and customers. Develop content that provides clear direction and helpful tips on how to successfully implement your products or services so that newcomers feel supported.

Identifying key trends: The pandemic has impacted the way that many businesses approach purchasing decisions. Being aware of your customers' current and future needs is crucial. While you can't predict the future,

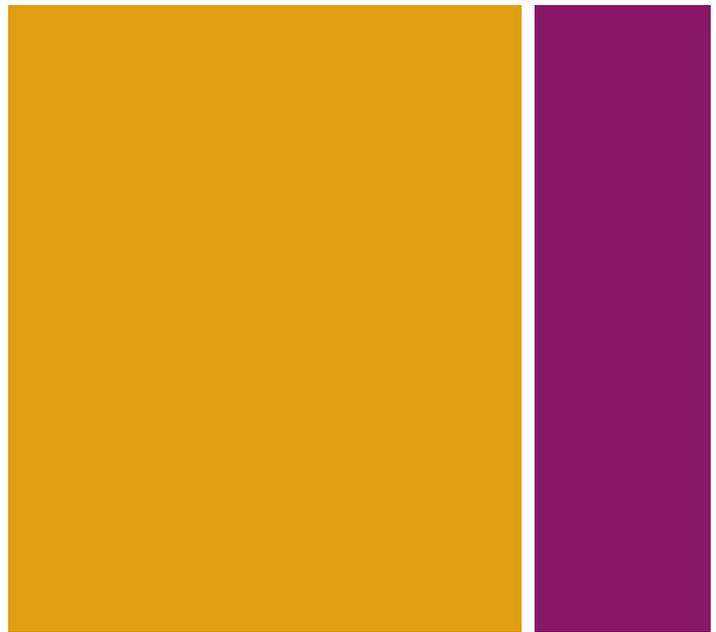
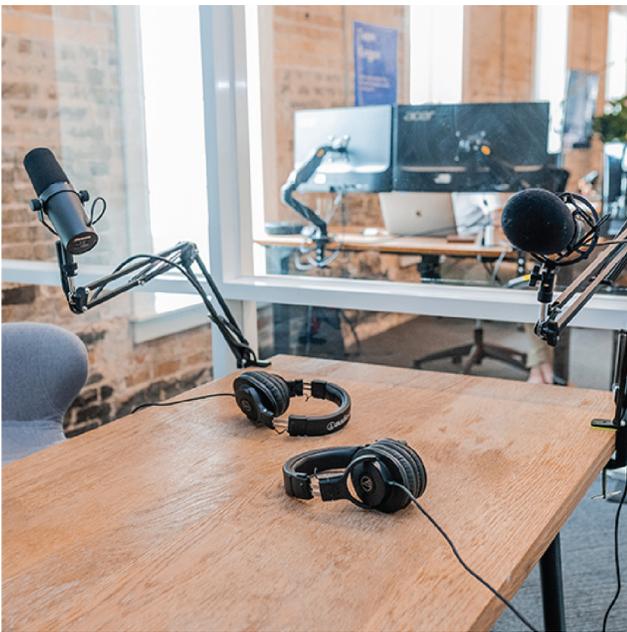
you should have a solid understanding of the industries and sectors you serve and identify trends and potential challenges that may impact your customers. These insights can help guide your marketing program and allow you to pivot in the right direction.

For example, are there impending government regulations that will require your customers to comply with new safety or environmental measures? Is there new survey data available that can convince a prospect to invest in a product or service? While the pandemic seems to be changing things on a daily basis for some organizations, immersing yourself in your customers' businesses will ensure you're in sync with their needs.

Establishing campaign goals: Is the goal of your content to generate awareness among a new sector, capture 20 new leads,

increase market share by 5% or position your company as an expert on an emerging trend? Establishing specific and measurable goals sets the tone of the campaign and helps you determine which type of content (blog, video series, e-book, etc.) will help you best achieve these goals.

It's even more important to re-establish those goals amid this pandemic. If your core customer base includes hotels and restaurants for example, which have seen a major downturn as a result of COVID-19, you may want to shift your goal from lead generation to leadership positioning. Many customers remain confused and worried about how to navigate their businesses through a pandemic and may be looking to you for answers. At the same time, you can aim to capture leads in a new market if demand for your product or service has increased among a new audience.



The Benefits of High-value Content

High-value content helps your target audiences overcome challenges. The content should be educational, entertaining, inspiring, profound and engaging. Remember, high-value content is about the audience, not your business. It can be presented in the form of blogs, articles, white papers, e-books, infographics, e-newsletters, case studies and more.

High-value content provides numerous benefits, such as:

Establishing thought leadership: Thought leaders are well-respected experts in any given field, offering a trusted voice and authority on the subject at hand. Regularly publishing high-value content establishes a business as a thought leader and elevates the profile of subject matter experts that represent the brand. High-value content demonstrates that a business understands the industry, the needs of its customers and provides guidance during critical moments.

Prospects will follow thought leaders to make informed decisions. Additionally, current customers will appreciate the wealth of information that's presented to them via video tutorials, blogs and downloadable guides as they continue to navigate challenging times and seek to overcome new obstacles.

Enhancing Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Items like blogs, instructional guides and e-books that offer helpful and educational content can help improve SEO ranking. Since the pandemic started, there has been a sharp

uptick in online use among consumers, up to a 70% increase according to one estimate.¹ The uncertainty of the situation has many people searching for answers. Incorporating keywords and following other SEO best practices, such as updating content regularly and optimizing webpage accessibility, can help improve web rankings and drive more traffic to your organization's website.

Reaching a wider audience: Creating high-value content allows businesses to expand their email lists, which can offer a larger ROI over the long term. For example, when prospects and customers read your blog and then subscribe to your e-newsletter, your company can send regular updates to further engage with these individuals. Nurturing your leads through email marketing and offering insightful content not only positions your company as a leader but may lead to more frequent and larger purchases.

Securing lifelong customers and raving fans: Businesses are more likely to secure repeat business and referrals if they prioritize the customer experience.² It's important to remember that this experience doesn't end once the product reaches the customer or the service is complete. Developing useful content, like e-books, webinars and blogs on trending topics, allows customers to readily access useful information at any time. When they feel valued, they become a customer for life and a raving fan who encourages other businesses to adopt your products and services.



Creating High-value Content for your Customers

How can you create high-value content? First, you want to ensure that the content you're producing drives the conversation forward. Consider the following tactics for accomplishing this:

Blogs: About 47% of B2B buyers read 3-5 blog posts or pieces of content prior to talking with a salesperson.³ Blogs can help clarify information, educate your audience and subtly allude to how specific products, services and ideas can improve the customer's business. Blogging not only enhances your SEO ranking, but it strengthens your reputation as a thought leader. Blogs support the buyer's journey and provide information that eases a customer's mind before making a purchase. Publish blogs to your website, ideally several per month. You can also republish your blogs or link to your content via social media platforms like LinkedIn to expand your reach.

Videos: As of 2017, views on branded content through Facebook increased 258% while YouTube increased 99%.⁴ Providing video content helps increase brand awareness, engagement and message association.⁵ According to Hubspot, 72% of customers would

rather learn about a product or service by video.⁶

Videos can be used to highlight case studies, showcase products, educate customers on industry trends and position your business as a leader. When using videos for social media, compress the video to an appropriate length so that it provides enough information to benefit your customers without being too long.

Infographics and tips sheets: In the event that customers implement products and services that they have not used before, they'll need some guidance to ensure success. Create infographics and tip sheets that use visuals to help alleviate uncertainty about unfamiliar products and services. Develop materials in multiple languages if your customer base is global.

White papers and e-books: White papers and e-books are authoritative guides that present information in an organized manner to educate customers and prospects about complex issues. They demonstrate your organization's expertise on an important

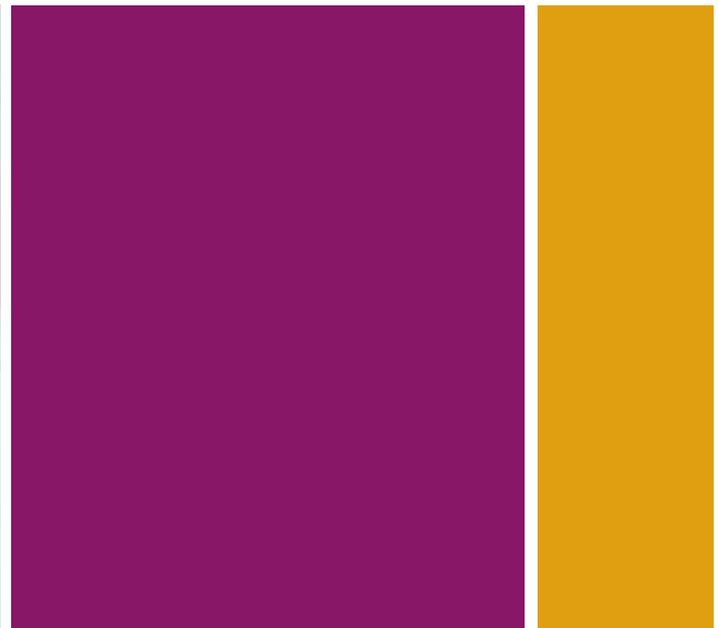
topic, positioning you as a go-to resource. Often, readers are required to complete a form to gain access to the content. This helps capture contact information from prospects that can be shared with sales personnel as leads. However, providing ungated access may be the right approach, as it shows you care more about customers and prospects having access to important information than securing leads.

E-newsletters: An e-newsletter allows marketers to promote a variety of content in one place. For example, your e-newsletter can contain links to recent white papers, blogs, articles, relevant industry updates, and easy “how-to” videos or infographics that help educate and inform customers. In addition to the type of content shared, design and distribution frequency can impact the success of your e-newsletter campaign. Although most customers and prospects receive most of their information digitally, it’s imperative that an organization avoids overcommunicating and focuses on quality vs. quantity. If you decide that monthly is the right frequency for your

business, be sure to continually add high-value content to your website between each distribution so that customers and prospects always have access to the latest information and tips.

Case studies: Case studies are a great way to highlight positive customer experiences. These stories enhance credibility and allow prospects to envision the success they can achieve through implementation of your solution.

When developing case studies, frame them around solving a problem. Discuss the customer’s challenge, present the product or service as the solution and explain how it functions and what sets it apart from the competition. Showcase quantitative benefits like cost savings and increased productivity and qualitative results like improved employee morale and customer satisfaction. With many budgets remaining tight, customers and prospects will focus on and appreciate quantitative savings that improve their bottom line.





Invest in Social Media Marketing

The pandemic has increased the amount of time people spend online, which creates opportunities for brands to increase reach, engagement and sales. According to a survey of 300 marketers at for-profit companies in the United States, produced by Deloitte, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business and the American Marketing Association, online sales grew 43% during the pandemic between February and May 2020.⁷

The Deloitte study also found that 84% of respondents used social media for brand building, while 54% have used social media for customer retention during the pandemic. With customers shifting their buying habits and being more open to digital offerings and experiences, businesses should utilize their marketing budget to invest in social media now more than ever.

But how do you stand out in an already crowded marketplace that's seen an influx of traffic since the pandemic? Adhering to social media marketing best practices can help, including:

Keep it short and sweet: Since the average consumer's attention span is eight seconds,⁸ you need to get to the point quickly. Promote the "Too Long, Didn't Read" (TLDR) version of thought-provoking content along with a link to read more rather than posting content in its entirety. Consider using short video clips

and visual infographics to convey information quickly.

Engage and be conversational: Social media should be used to develop relationships with customers and followers. It should never be a one-way street. Businesses should respond to questions, concerns and complaints in a timely manner, especially during a pandemic, to ensure that customers know they're heard and cared about by the business. Encourage engagement by posing questions, tagging followers and other accounts and seeking user-generated content for your own channels.

Use multimedia: Creating and publishing multimedia content can help you earn and keep your audience's attention with an added interest factor. Utilizing Instagram Stories, Twitter polls and Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram Live will ensure that your social media campaign is not monotonous and dry.

Add personality: Not everything in your social media feed needs to be educational or profound. With the current state of the world, it's important to be human and bring something that could potentially brighten a customer's or follower's day. Just remember to strike the right balance so that you are indeed offering useful information via these channels along with inspiration and fun.



Setting the Right Tone: Empathy Is Key

The coronavirus pandemic has left people in a more vulnerable state. Given how overwhelming the pandemic is for many people, it's important that companies pay extra attention to the way they communicate to avoid coming across as tone deaf. Communicating with genuine empathy shows that your business not only cares about customers but understands their experiences.

Companies can achieve empathy by:

Reevaluating future campaigns: Whether it's an advertising campaign, contest, product launch or social media campaign, it's important to pause and ensure that the messaging aligns with the current climate. Failing to take the COVID-19 pandemic into consideration may come off as insensitive and in turn, damage a brand's image. For example, Ford made the choice to pull some of its national ads once the pandemic started.⁹ The company then pivoted by creating a new ad campaign and program designed to assist customers affected by the pandemic.

Focusing on the positive: Though the world may feel like it's full of gloom and doom, developing a positive message of hope allows businesses to tap into their human side. Customers will feel more connected to a brand if they perceive that the business truly understands their challenges and wants

to help. As an example, Chipotle executed positive messaging via their social media channels and went live on Zoom to offer a safe space for those who were struggling.¹⁰ Additionally, Guinness provided a message of positivity, recognizing that this year's St. Patrick's Day celebration would be different and committed \$500,000 through the Guinness Gives Back Fund to help communities.

Lending a helping hand: Giving back to others doesn't always require a financial investment. Lending a helping hand could simply be reaching out to your customers and providing employees with guidance. Whether it's mental health resources or regularly scheduled webinars that allow customers to seek answers, providing a helping hand shows an organization's commitment to customer and employee wellbeing.

If there's anything the novel coronavirus pandemic has taught us, it's that nothing is certain. Therefore, it's imperative that businesses learn how to be flexible and adapt as inevitable changes occur. The effects of COVID-19 will affect how businesses operate long after the pandemic is over. Pivoting your strategy, developing high-value content, investing in social media and learning how to be empathetic can keep your organization ahead of the competition.

Boosting your B2B brand and making business to business personal

About Mulberry Marketing Communications

Mulberry Marketing Communications is an award-winning international business-to-business (B2B) marketing and communications agency. Mulberry offers a full range of services, including strategy, brand, public relations, social media, content marketing, research, video and design. For more information, visit www.mulberrymc.com

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