Marketing Amid a Pandemic: 3 Ways to Adapt to the Paradigm Shift

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Faced with the coronavirus pandemic and a difficult economic climate, almost every industry finds itself undergoing a major paradigm shift, from local retail stores having to dramatically ramp up their online capabilities to major global brands grappling with supply chain challenges and changing consumer behavior.

For marketers, this moment of upheaval has meant rethinking well-planned strategies, with a new emphasis on helping ensure their businesses survive the uncertainty ahead. As a marketing and investor relations professional in the automotive tech industry — where supply chains are consolidating and innovative technologies are rapidly reshaping the driver experience and market demands — navigating transformational change was at the core of my job even before COVID-19. Now, as a broad swath of other industries confront similar challenges, here's how marketers can adapt their strategies to fit the new normal of remote communication and swiftly changing industry trends.

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1. Build and nurture genuine relationships

Though relationships — internal and external — have always been at the heart of effective marketing, nurturing those connections is uniquely challenging in the era of remote work and Zoom meetings. The ways we maintain connections with our clients, partners and other marketers look significantly different than they did pre-pandemic — and like it or not, our new reality requires us to go the extra mile.

Joining online networking groups is one great way of staying on top of key trends and conversations. I'm a part of several of these groups, including the Cybersecurity Marketing Community, as well as groups for women and those in the automotive industry. These groups may not be a one-to-one substitute for the events and conferences that have always been the lifeblood of our industry connections, but they've proven to be vital sounding boards and sources of insight and support during these unusual past few months.

With many still working primarily or entirely from home offices, it's all too easy not to reach out to clients, partners or fellow marketers unless there's a specific "ask" or business item at hand — but this is a mistake. It's OK — in fact, it's critical — to simply check in from time to time. Not every communication must come with a mission or an ulterior motive. Given that we no longer have the luxury of meeting clients and colleagues in person, it's important to make our virtual connections more natural and meaningful.

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2. Rebrand, refresh, be resilient

The past few months, as overwhelming as they have been, have also offered humanity a time for reflection, both personally

and professionally. Countless people have seized upon this crisis as an opportunity to break out of old habits, take on new projects and re-prioritize.

As marketers, this moment gives us the opportunity – in fact, it requires us – to think critically about our brands' messaging, to finally start attending to tasks we may have been putting off, and to pivot our brands' strategies to focus on ensuring resilience in an ever more turbulent world.

Now is the time to think big picture. What is your business's fundamental identity? Where is your industry going, and how does your brand fit into that trajectory? What experience, tools and insights can you bring to bear to ride out the storms ahead? In answering these questions, you'll likely discover opportunities to tweak or even substantially overhaul your messaging. By adjusting course as needed, you'll show much-needed market leadership while demonstrating one of the most critical traits for businesses confronting unsettling climates: the flexibility to adapt to new and unexpected situations.

If you can develop a resilient brand as the world has turned upside down, you'll be well-positioned to thrive when the crisis is finally in the rearview mirror.

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3. Experiment with ideas outside your wheelhouse

It may be tempting to treat this moment as a time to go back to basics – and indeed, many argue that now is not the time to branch out or experiment with ideas beyond your core business offering. But now is actually precisely the time to do so.

Rolling out new offerings can be a great way to elevate your

brand’s profile and thought leadership. At GuardKnox, we recently launched the GK Cyber Academy, offering lessons from experts in cybersecurity across the globe via Zoom. I even focused in on my own passion for all things exercise to offer an array of online fitness sessions known as “GK Fit.” Providing your team’s expertise and sharing its passions with both new and existing audiences conveys a powerful message: Your company cares about more than simply making money or selling a product.

Be *you*

Let’s face it: Marketers aren’t going to steer their businesses through this moment by following a rule book. There’s no user’s manual for marketing during the double whammy of a pandemic and a global recession.

The best thing marketers can do to help their companies stay on the right path is to be genuine and authentic. While these times may call for refreshing your branding and messaging, don’t let this crisis alter your company’s core DNA. And no matter what new strategies you opt to pursue, always remain flexible. Marketers must ensure that their plans give their companies the freedom to evolve — but quickly — in the face of changing circumstances.

This time of accelerated change is taking us to unexpected destinations. But with new, creative approaches to overcoming the obstacles on the road to success, we’ll empower our teams and our clients alike.

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