

# CAN'T THINK ABOUT MARKETING AT A TIME LIKE THIS?

By Trevor Reed; Reed Marketing Communications Design

If you are a business leader responsible for marketing your business, marketing may actually be the last thing on your mind. Business today is no longer about thriving ... we're all just concerned about surviving. Our top priority is protecting the health and wellbeing of ourselves, our employees, customers, and our families. Then we have the financial health of our companies, most of which — being categorized as “non-life-sustaining” from a certain perspective — have had to shut their doors. As a result, we're left with trying to stay informed about the complex and ever-changing assistance programs that might be able to help lift us up out of this hole when the health risks begin to subside.

Under these circumstances, your tactics and messaging may need to change, but your marketing strategy shouldn't. Let me explain. At its most basic level, marketing is about communicating value. And what is the best way to do that?

1. Understand your audience and the problems, challenges, and fears they face.
2. Position yourself as the expert who can help them overcome these obstacles.
3. Provide a clear blueprint for how customers can achieve success.

You can apply this basic formula to your marketing strategy regardless of whether we are in a time of crisis or a time of prosperity. Only your message and the methods you use to reach your audience may change as conditions warrant. So, while trade shows have cancelled, advertising budgets vanished, and doors have closed, don't make the mistake of going dormant. There are opportunities to put your business in the right position for the up-swing that will happen. Stay positive! Below are some ideas.

- First and foremost, reach out and connect with current customers. Don't try to sell them anything. Just check-in and see how they're doing.
- Review your brand identity. Does it accurately reflect the image you want to convey to customers? Does it stand out from your competition? Do you apply it consistently across all of your marketing communications? If the answer is “no” to any of these questions, take some time to identify what you can do to change that. **Bonus:** If timed right, a brand refresh may express strength and resiliency to customers.

- Review your messaging. Do you show empathy towards your customers' problems? Do you demonstrate the authority to help them solve those problems? The more relevant you are, the more your messaging will resonate and inspire action. Consider incorporating the three-step formula above into your marketing communications.
- We've all experienced the desire to update our websites but could never find the time to get around to it. Now you have no excuse. Can't afford to spend money on a web developer right now? That's okay, just take some time to examine your site and outline the changes you want to make so you'll be ready when the time comes. If you've refined your messaging, at the very least, you'll want to update your site to reflect those changes.
- Speaking of your website, does it include content that is actually helpful to your ideal customers? If not, create a content development plan and begin implementing it right away. If you do have great content, are you generating leads from it? Are you capturing those leads in your CRM and using marketing automation to build prospect relationships and inspire further engagement? If not, take this time to upgrade your lead-generation system. You'll be glad you did as the economy begins to bounce back.

While you may need to cut back your marketing efforts, you don't want to completely abandon your marketing. It will only make it that much harder to recover when this crisis is over.

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