

frame

Covid-19 Comms Planning

March 2020

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A guide from Frame

Brands across the world are adapting to what the Covid-19 pandemic means to their businesses. Some will have to close or have already closed, hopefully but not always temporarily. Some may prosper as society needs more from delivery and online services.

We've been spending the last week working with our clients to flex and adapt campaigns as the situation evolves.

However, it doesn't mean that communications should stop. Strategically sound, engaging, and creative communications – both internally and externally – will take on even greater importance in a time like this.

In the long term the more businesses are making money and employing staff the better it is for the whole economy. Marketing is what helps drive the demand behind the economy, so we will need new ideas for during and beyond the pandemic.

The way that we communicate these ideas will be so important in the months ahead. History has not been kind to those seen to be insensitive or too opportunistic in a crisis. Tone and type of messaging will be key as brands will be defined by how they conduct themselves.

This guide is our initial thinking and advice on how best to plan brand communications in the coming weeks and months.

The change that's been happening at speed has been unsettling and will continue to evolve. This guide hopefully brings some reassurance amidst the unpredictability. We've found a sense of calm in going back to basic principles and the things we are expert in - how to deliver brand communications that are relevant to people today.



It is our mission to provide even more value to our clients in the weeks and months ahead, so please lean on us and we will navigate these uncertain times together.



What the Covid-19 situation means for communications

We've been reviewing a range of brands and how they've responded to the pandemic and there's been a real mix of approaches.

Many organisations are going out of their way to show that they are doing good for society. Many are also trying to balance the need to ensure continued cash flow coming in with avoiding appearing to be 'money grabbing'. And it is difficult.

Getting the right balance of commercial and communication objectives is more important than ever, we need to protect both businesses and brands during this situation and for afterwards.

The coronavirus crisis will test us all, but marketers need to think long-term and keep building their brands, protecting their staff and honouring their values.

Mark Ritson
Marketing Week

OUR ADVICE

- We need to avoid being knee jerk to the situation when it comes to communications. At the same time, we need to be agile. There is a real need to get relevant messages out quickly to employees, supply chains and customers. But these should be based on sound strategic thinking rather than panic and pressure.
- We need to do what we can to ensure continued income streams for the brands we work with. But we must avoid appearing opportunistic and also ensure we work within the Government guidelines. Any product or service communications should be based on what people might need in the current situation rather than what stock needs to be shifted.
- Internal comms will continue to take on new importance and should have the same planned and phased approach as any consumer campaign.
- Community is important. More and more brands are starting to use comms to demonstrate what they are doing for others in this crisis. Some are doing it well, others less so. Any initiatives should be about genuine help the company is providing based on societal objectives. We need to avoid thinly veiled attempts at brand promotion under the guise of social good.
- Maintaining good hygiene is absolutely critical, so we have instructed our cleaners to implement a more vigorous / thorough approach to agency cleanliness (door handles, light switches, etc.)



Sticking to your brand values matters

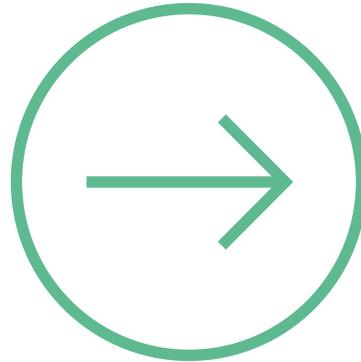
This week there's been much in the industry press about brand values. Respect, integrity, pride, honesty and the like shouldn't just be combinations of words. They should drive how an organisation behaves.

Those like Virgin who've made moves that people don't think align with their brand values are being called out. Whereas brands like Louis Vuitton are being celebrated for making a difference.

As the days go on, we are seeing more and more ideas from brands:

- > **Uber waived delivery fees for local restaurants.**
 - > **Disney released Frozen 2 early on Disney+ to keep kids occupied.**
 - > **Iceland introduced 'elderly hour' at their stores.**
 - > **Gary Neville and Premier Inn have offered up their hotels as extra hospital spaces.**
 - > **Closer to our home, a local coffee brand, The Good Coffee Cartel are asking customers to pay forward coffee as part of their commitment to continue to pay all staff during their closure.**
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**For each of
our clients it
will be about
finding ways to
bring their
values to life...**



**...while
demonstrating
being there for
customers and
employees.**

Here are some more detailed examples; the first is being praised in the media whereas the second is gaining more negative coverage.



LUSH

VALUE STATEMENT

We believe in creating more than just fun, gorgeous products for the bath, body and shower. We believe in making a difference in the world with the choices we make as a brand.

OPERATIONS

INTERNAL

The company says it is working to ensure employees are paid regular wages while stores are closed.

EXTERNAL

Online sales will continue to be available particularly for soap which can be helpful during this critical time.

COMMUNICATIONS

ACT OF KINDNESS/ GIVE COMFORT

LUSH were offering free hand washing to the public amid the outbreak of coronavirus, prior to store closures.

We've got loads of soap and plenty of hot water

Mark Constantine
Chief Executive



virgin atlantic

VALUE STATEMENT

Keeping our people and our customers safe and secure is at the heart of all we do. We have three core values - working for the good of our communities and our planet, creating a culture of respect and trust in the wider world and providing experiences that make people feel safe, cared for and listened to.

OPERATIONS

INTERNAL

Asking its staff to take eight weeks off unpaid, caused lots of negative media around Richard Branson's net worth.

EXTERNAL

Cut 80% of flights, asking for £7.5b government bailout. Negative coverage around the wider Virgin business could accommodate its airline without public intervention

COMMUNICATIONS

ACT OF KINDNESS / GIVE COMFORT

Virgin Atlantic has announced it will not charge passengers a fee for changing flights for travel booked from Wednesday March 4 until Tuesday March 31.



The basic principles of comms strategy apply (even more so)

As marketers, we know how to communicate brands. What we now need to do is adapt that expertise to how to communicate well in this situation.

As with any communication brief, we need to have strategically sound plans based on knowledge, research and insight. We use desk research to gauge current sentiment and what's working and not working for our competitors. We can use online surveys and quick

polls to ask customers or staff what they think. These are all things which can be done at speed if required and which are important in making sure we get the message right. The brands that do get it right will build long-term advocacy.

We still need to clearly define communication objectives and align ideas and comms activity to these. There'll be different objectives for what we need to communicate this week and month versus what we need to prepare for later in the year.

Good briefs lead to good work. Solid knowledge and clearly defined objectives lead to better creative briefs. Getting the brief right is important at any time but especially so when ideas need to be sensitive to the situation.

Evaluation of communications helps us to understand what is working or not working and why. We should continue to put in place measurement and tracking as relevant. This may mean adapting shorter term metrics or smaller scale surveys.

To be effective, brands need to be continually listening to the customer and deliver real action rather than just words.

WARC



A customer first mindset is more important than ever

Our approach to comms planning to achieve future brand and revenue growth needs to start with the customer.

Understanding people and how they will be feeling and behaving in the coming weeks and months will be critical to the success of brand communications. We need to understand people in real-time before we can devise plans for how our communications may have an affect on brand sentiment or spending behaviour.

Everyone is feeling anxiety and uncertainty. Brands need to demonstrate they understand and the genuine role they can play in helping people navigate this.

People are starting to feel news and social media overload. Yet social is one of the easiest channels brands can reach people on. We must balance the desire to get product or service messages out with avoiding flooding the airwaves.

Recessionary behaviour has kicked in and will continue to do so. Online shopping is set to increase further but people will start to focus on the basics and spending on essentials; through fear of what the next few months hold and through necessity as people lose jobs. We need to be more creative than ever when choosing which products to promote and how to do it.

These factors combined mean it's not about pushing product in the short term. It's about demonstrating service or product for when customers need you. It's about understanding the relevant ways to promote your product and being there at the right time.

Consumers will look for brands to show up for them and act as a pillar of stability through this crisis and beyond. Beyond strategies that emphasise product safety attributes, and ensuring the availability of needed products like hand sanitiser and soap, brands should look to spaces where they can authentically step up for consumers and employees.

Global Change Accelerators
WGSN



Defining strategic comms priorities and plans

Phasing of all comms plans has taken a new shape. Marketing budgets may be in the process of being cut. We understand the pressure our clients are under right now.

During a pandemic, we now need to focus on what is needed this week, this month and the next three months and develop plans for each. While these are short term in phasing, the objectives should be long term. We still need to build brands, we still need to look to the future. Especially in lockdown where, for some brands, short term sales pushes may be futile.

People don't expect to stop hearing from brands. We know that only 2% think brands should stop advertising now. But also that people are being overloaded with messages. Relevance will become even more important.

Kantar
2020 Coronavirus research

Planning will be based on defining for each strand of communications:

- > **Who do we need to communicate with**
 - > **What do we need to tell them or do for them**
 - > **Where will our messages be**
 - > **When is the right time to communicate**
 - > **How will we evaluate what's working**
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At the same time, we should be developing post-pandemic longer-term planning so that we can switch on relevant campaigns when people start to explore the world again.

This is unlikely to be exactly as we had planned for Spring campaigns as we know from history that people will form a new normal.

People will want to go out, to shop and to treat themselves and others again; perhaps even more so. But the way we do some things may change, perhaps in the short term only.

We need to be prepared for the new normal rather than expecting a direct return to the status quo.

