

**BBDO KNOWS**

**GET CRISIS SMART**

*How brands are  
responding to  
coronavirus*

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On March 27, 2020, the United Nations launched their first-ever open brief calling on creatives everywhere for help in responding to the coronavirus pandemic: “We are in an unprecedented situation and the normal rules no longer apply. We cannot resort to the usual tools in such unusual times. The creativity of the response must match the unique nature of the crisis – and the magnitude of the response must match its scale.”<sup>1</sup>

As the coronavirus continues to spread, so have expectations for brands. Four months on from the first case of COVID-19, aka the coronavirus, being identified in Wuhan, China, marketplaces everywhere have turned upside down.<sup>2</sup> The cost to the global economy is estimated at \$1 trillion.<sup>3</sup> As the pandemic continues to have the most tragic human consequence and cause disruption in our lives (with almost three billion people around the world now in lockdown),<sup>4</sup> it has quickly become more than just a public health crisis in the hands of world leaders. We are all impacted, and we are all responsible for helping, as people, our behavior matters. As advertisers, we find ourselves in fully-fledged “what does this mean for brands” mode. Beyond the immediate crisis phase, brands must now face their next stage of response:

“It’s fair to say the general approach from brands to coronavirus until now has been one of caution, but we’re past that stage now. It may well end up riskier to do nothing.”<sup>5</sup>

Recent Edelman research has revealed that businesses alongside governments are considered important leaders in the battle against coronavirus. In fact, people expect business and brands to get involved. A recent Edelman survey found that 45% of people believe it will take both governments and businesses working together as a team, to succeed.<sup>6</sup> Over the past few weeks it has become clear that how brands show up now matters. Not showing up is not an option.

Over the past few days and weeks, we have seen many brands successfully navigate the most challenging of circumstances by stepping up and contributing. Here we look at five ways brands are responding, and effectively showing up in this new, never normal context:

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<sup>1</sup> The Drum, “United Nations issues global call to creatives to help spread the word on the coronavirus”, 26 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>2</sup> Kantar, “COVID-19 Checklist for brands”, 17 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>3</sup> WE FORUM, “This is how much the coronavirus will cost the world’s economy, according to the UN”, 17 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>4</sup> WE FORUM, “Nearly 3 billion people around the globe under COVID-19 lockdowns”, 26 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>5</sup> Global Web Index, “Brand purpose revisited: How brands should respond to the crisis”, 26 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>6</sup> Edelman, “Trust and the Corona Virus”, 10 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

*How brands are responding to coronavirus*

## 1. SHOWING UP MATTERS

Playing it safe, or simply doing nothing is not an option. Brands are expected to act, beyond simple acknowledgement. Sarah Douglas, CEO of AMV BBDO in London, suggests two ways that brands can behave in the crisis. “The first is in practical help. Acts not ads.” Another way can be to focus on joy. “Brands have always had a hugely significant role to play in driving culture and this is even more relevant in times of crisis.”<sup>7</sup>

For Jack Daniels, the approach has been two-fold. Not only supporting with a practical act in the form of production of hand sanitizer through its distillery, Jack Daniels has also responded to the crisis with a “timely message of optimism and hope” in a new spot from Energy BBDO, “With Love, Jack”.<sup>8</sup> Featuring user-generated footage of real human interactions, the video celebrates “humanity at its best” with moments of authentic social connection and resilience despite the many barriers that social isolation can present.

Josh Gross, co-chief creative officer of Energy BBDO expands: “We’ve all had to rapidly adapt to this new reality, and we discovered this magical thing where people are finding really creative and beautiful ways to stay connected during this time of social distancing.” As the impact of the virus affects everyone, such messages of hope and resilience can help elevate the sense that “we are all in this together” and provide much needed positivity and joy.

## 2. SUPPORT ON THE BASICS

As people are navigating a new version of their normal, offering even the most basic support can make all the difference. Ford recently pulled all national ads promoting its vehicles to replace them with a new campaign in response to coronavirus, including an initiative to give all Ford credit customers relief with the ability to defer payments. The two new spots, “Built to Lend a Hand” and “Built for Right Now” leveraged existing and historical assets to help accelerate production, when a typical approach wasn’t going to cut it. As Matt VanDyke, director of U.S marketing for Ford Motor Co. explains, “it became clear we were at a tipping point where we expect typical messaging in the marketplace isn’t going to work the same way.”<sup>9</sup>

Since airing, the campaign has been well received. According to Ace Metrix, 58% of viewers reported a positive change in perception of Ford.<sup>10</sup> During what is forecast to be

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<sup>7</sup> CNBC, “‘Acts not ads’: How firms should market themselves during the coronavirus crisis”, 27 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>8</sup> Campaign, “Ad of the Week: Energy BBDO’s first work for Jack Daniel’s celebrates making social distancing social”, 26 MAR, 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>9</sup> AdAge, “Ford pulls national vehicle ads, replacing them with a coronavirus-response campaign”, 16 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>10</sup> AdAge, “A regularly updated list tracking marketers’ response to coronavirus”, Retrieved 28 MAR, 2020 [LINK](#)

*How brands are responding to coronavirus*

a down period for many industries; automotive included, Ford's move signals how marketers can contribute purpose-led work, demonstrating a commitment to supporting customers through the challenging times, even when they too are enduring challenges.

### 3. REFRAME THE PROBLEM

People are looking for trusted brands in testing times to offer much needed guidance. On March 21, Nike took to social media to reassure people that through the crisis, there is still a place for play and sport, declaring "If you ever dreamed of playing for millions around the world, now is your chance."<sup>11</sup> Despite the many limitations of social distancing, Nike instead repositioned the practice of self-isolation as an exciting opportunity for people to showcase their skills on a broader stage, encouraging everyone to "play inside, play for the world". Communications followed the brand's commitment to spend more than \$15 million in support of Covid-19 response efforts across the globe.<sup>12</sup> Nike utilized their platform and message to reframe the problem of limitations during the crisis as an opportunity to do our bit.

### 4. FACILITATE THE WORKAROUNDS

As people continue to adjust to the new normal and its many constraints, there is a role for brands to help stakeholders manage through limitations and overcome them with workarounds and resources beyond continuous consumer support or reduced costs.

Mattel has just launched a new, free online resource 'Mattel Playroom' inviting parents and caregivers to encourage kids to #KeepPlaying, despite these difficult times. Updated on a weekly basis, the site will offer activities, content and tips from Mattel brands such as Barbie, Fisher-Price and Thomas & Friends.<sup>13</sup> Richard Dickson, president and COO of Mattel, hopes that the playroom will help alleviate pressure on parents and preserve the power of play for kids: "We recognize the unique challenges that parents and caregivers are facing right now both working and playing from home and have designed the Mattel Playroom to be a valuable resource for them."<sup>14</sup> Assisting customers and particularly vulnerable communities with focused utility that addresses needs beyond simple add-ons can be an effective way for brands to contribute meaningful value during a crisis.

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<sup>11</sup> Nike, Instagram, "Now more than ever, we are one team. #playinside #playfortheworld", MAR 21 2020, [LINK](#)

<sup>12</sup> AdAge, "Nike Encourages People to 'Play Inside' to 'Play For The World'", MAR 21 2020, [LINK](#)

<sup>13</sup> Mattel Newsroom, "Mattel Invites Families to #KeepPlaying with the Launch of the "Mattel Playroom," a New Digital Resource for Parents and Caregivers", MAR 31 2020, [LINK](#)

<sup>14</sup> As above

## 5. FLEX AND SERVE

During the crisis, what you do defines who you are, not what business you are in. From alcohol brands, to retailers and luxury brands, we have witnessed companies with the right expertise and means of production pivot their efforts either helping to fulfil shortages in essential items or provide support in other ways.

Recently, CHE Proximity in Australia flexed their energies beyond the everyday to help build a Covid-19 Simulation tracking app in support of accelerating skills and training among health workers as they transition to the front line. Currently live and in use at the Royal North Shore Hospital, the app has been described as “an easy-to-use, practical app that helps train nurses and doctors to manage Covid-19 patients. It’s fast, it’s accurate, and it’s built to safely treat those affected.”<sup>15</sup>

We are also seeing brands effectively pivot on communications too. With the Olympics now postponed until 2021, one of its major sponsors, Visa, has acted quickly to pivot its campaign to still make use of content featuring Olympians that it had already part-produced, but act with sensitivity to the crisis. The campaign titled, “Do Your Part Like an Olympian,” from BBDO New York reflects a series of videos in which athletes such as skateboarder Sky Brown perform difficult sporting techniques followed by easy safety measures like hand-washing.<sup>16</sup> Prior to the crisis and subsequent Olympics cancellation, the campaign was to follow the same creative construct “this isn’t easy, but this is,” with the intention of contrasting such athletic acts with the ease of using a Visa product. However, as Chris Curtin, Visa’s chief brand and innovation marketing officer explains, the current crisis presents many more worthy messages of focus, and call for things that can help protect everyone:

““Right now, there is something bigger than the games and we all need to be united regardless of nationality, sport or gender.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Che Proximity, LinkedIn, 26 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>16</sup> AdAge, “Visa rolls out Olympian-themed campaign, despite games’ postponement”, 31 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)

<sup>17</sup> As above

*How brands are responding to coronavirus*

As we enter a new phase of brand responses and move past the mitigation of shock and panic it is clear there is an important role for brands to play. Whether it be through simple acts, providing basic support, adding reassurance, facilitating workarounds or championing flexibility, showing up now matters. As the UN further encourages, right now, “[we] have the power to change the world... It is not too late. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something. Together, we can save lives, protect resources and care for each other.”<sup>18</sup>

## **ABOUT BBDO KNOWS**

BBDO KNOWS is a planning resource for the BBDO network.

BBDO KNOWS offers thinking, strategy, insights and inspiration on key categories, key themes and consumer segments.

If you are interested in learning more about the way BBDO thinks please contact **Melanie Norris, Global Planning Director**, [norrism@bbdoknows.com](mailto:norrism@bbdoknows.com).

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<sup>18</sup> Campaign, “United Nations tackles Covid-19 with first 'open brief to creatives everywhere'”, 27 MAR 2020 [LINK](#)