

BBDO KNOWS

GET CRISIS SMART

Brands, Now & Next

As we emerge from lockdown and into a state of “no normal” the world looks very different. Brands and consumers are adapting to a new reality, while navigating huge challenges. For brands there is the added weight of expectation. From the very start of the crisis there have been an overwhelming expectation for brands to support and to do so in a purposeful way:

“Covid-19 has created a philosophical dilemma: if your brand isn't your products and your products are not your purpose, then what are you?”¹

Now, more than ever, it is vital for brands to define and serve a purpose. 77% of global consumers want brands to ‘talk about how they're helpful in the new everyday life’.² Professor L.C. Megginson Professor emphasises that brands that will survive are the “most adaptable. Knowing what is currently top of mind with consumers is absolutely key.”³

CONSUMER SHIFTS

From the onset, there has been an expectation for brands to support consumers. Although many previous ideals have evolved over the past three months, several trends will endure and should not be ignored:

- 1) Our notion of “iconic” has been redefined; frontline workers (namely medical, transport and retail staff) have cemented their status and respectability as global heroes, and rightly so, shifting power away from the cult of social media influencers and celebrities in a way that has never been seen before
- 2) Our ability to trust has been put on the line; experts have become key stakeholders in the hierarchy of truth and news reliability, a trend pre-dating the crisis as indicated by Edelman⁴
- 3) Our view of the world has become more localised; a result of our growing love for our neighbourhoods, wanting to help to stimulate the local economy (globally, China are champions of ‘buy local’ at 87%) and as a safety precautions become a major driver of concern (one in three worry whether they are at risk from imported produce)⁵

¹ Adweek, ‘Purpose-Driven Brands Need to Change Their Approach Post-Covid’ [LINK](#)

² Kantar ‘COVID-19 Barometer: Consumer attitudes, media habits and expectations’ [link](#)

³ Quoted in Kantar, ‘What people are looking forward to most, post-pandemic (part 2)’ [LINK](#)

⁴ Edelman, ‘20 years of trust’, [LINK](#)

⁵ Kantar’s COVID-19 Barometer May 14, 2020 [LINK](#)

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- 4) And our expectations of brands have risen higher than ever before; consumers are looking to brands to become a compass helping us navigate change and rebuild society post-coronavirus.⁶

Consumers want to hear from brands. Early in the crisis we argued that brands need to show up in four key ways, which have endured – the emphasis might have shifted but brands still have a role to play in helping reassure, support, facilitate and flex:

BRANDS MUST REASSURE

It is non-negotiable that brands must show up, and 65% of consumers agree that hearing brands' responses to the pandemic is reassuring.⁷ We've seen brands deploy three weapons of communication to reassure throughout the crisis: information, humour and nostalgia. British Gas' 'Here to Solve' campaign strikes the perfect balance of information, humour and levity. The ad playfully allows the viewer to see the mechanics of the job from the engineer's point of view, while demonstrating how British Gas have adapted their day-to-day service during lockdown. Foresight Factory highlights that, globally, nine in 10 consumers want brands to keep them fully informed about changes to brand operations related to coronavirus.⁸

AMV BBDO launched the 'Not so unprecedented' radio campaign for independent bookstore Daunt Books. The campaign uses a literary lens to reassure people that "we'll be alright" and features extracts from classical works, including Albert Camus' novel 'The Plague' (1947) and Daniel Defoe's 'A Journal of the Plague Year' (1722) to highlight uncanny parallels to the current pandemic. The campaign ends with the line "Find out how our unprecedented times are not so unprecedented."⁹ Brands need to continue to reassure as people continue to seek guidance in the face of extraordinary uncertainty.

BRANDS MUST SUPPORT

British *Vogue* showed their support for the new wave of influence by dedicating the front cover of their July issue to three frontline workers. Editor in Chief, Edward Enninful, expressed deep gratitude; "I can think of a no more appropriate trio of women to represent the millions of people in the UK who, at the height of the pandemic, in the face of dangers large and small, put on their uniforms and work clothes and went to help people."¹⁰ It goes to show saying thank you goes along way.

⁶ Kantar, COVID-19: Impact for Brands, June 5th, 2020 Webinar

⁷ Edelman Trust Barometer/Foresight Factory | Base: 1,000 online respondents per country aged 18+, 2020

⁸ IBID.

⁹ The Drum, 'Daunt Books: Daunt Books by AMV BBDO', [LINK](#)

¹⁰ Vogue, 'The July Issue Is Dedicated To The New Front Line', [LINK](#)

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With the pandemic dominating news and mental availability, accessible health and wellness products are expected. In a bid to support people against growing coronavirus fatigue and the detrimental effect the pandemic has had on mental health, charity CALM has launched a free Google Chrome extension; 'CALM Covid Blocker', which blocks coronavirus-related content from web browsers. Since the start of lockdown, CALM, a charity that works to prevent suicide, has seen record-breaking demand for its helpline. CEO Simon Gunning states that the "24-hour news cycle can be detrimental to our mental wellbeing as it can be a constant source of anxiety and worry."¹¹ Brands need to continue to support people, while our unique state of limbo plays out, impacting both our mindsets and behaviours.

BRANDS MUST FACILITATE

As people transition back to a new version of their reality, they need workarounds and resources – acts, not just ads. Edelman finds that 62% of people agree that "our country will not make it through this crisis without brands playing a critical role in addressing the challenges we face."¹²

In the wake of people looking to adopt animals to curb rising loneliness, Pedigree and BBDO New York launched a virtual adoption program.¹³ 'Dogs on Zoom' is dedicated to helping shelter pets find homes forever, and taps into Zoom hype by letting potential dog owners "interview" pooches for adoption in the safety of their homes. For those that do make a match, Pedigree is covering the full adoption fee. Similarly, brands need to consider how they can act, not just create ads, in order to make people's lives easier and accessible.

BRANDS MUST FLEX

Brands have begun flexing for good, in order to help them future-proof their business models, and most importantly, to help keep connections alive with consumers as physical connections are limited. From Tesco's virtual queues and pubs sanitising customers upon entry with a spraying machine, to hair salons implementing Perspex dividers between workstations, brands are having to redesign for social distancing.

The fashion and luxury industry have had to shift with agility. Like many retailers, Harrods has an excess inventory. In order to address this, they shifted their brand positioning for the first time ever by creating an outlet; a new pop-up store at London's Westfield White

¹¹ Campaign, 'Coronavirus live blog: 23-29 May', [LINK](#)

¹² Edelman Trust Barometer 2020

¹³ YouTube, [LINK](#)

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City shopping mall. This is an unusual brand move for Harrods, which is known for catering to the wealthy and has shied away from expanding its retail footprint.¹⁴ Brands must offer the flexibility people crave. These are uncharted waters, and what you do defines who you are, not what business you are in.

WHAT THIS MEANS

It's critical to reflect reality in the moment and to strike the right tone at the right time. Covid-related ads have a fast sell-by-date, and two weeks ago is too little too late. Brands with strong DNA will always endure, as AMV BBDO's work with Maltesers demonstrates - the brand has simply pivoted their brand positioning 'Look on the Light Side' with relevant messaging to create their recent uplifting campaign 'Isolation life'. The role for brands remains the same: support and reassure; and as life restarts facilitate and help consumers find the flex. Coronavirus is now the context, not the content, brands must shift according to our context.

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.

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¹⁴ Media Room HUB, 'Harrods Is Solving Its Excess Inventory Problem, Here is How' [LINK](#)