

**BBDO KNOWS**

**GET CRISIS SMART**

*COVID-19 One Year  
On & Beyond*

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It is now more than a year since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The anniversaries of one-year lockdowns and first diagnosed cases have been marked all over the world. Until now, time has been largely abstract and marked by cycles of grief: we have suffered human loss personally and collectively; and we have witnessed the death of long-held routines and liberties as we knew them. The year has been testament to our endless capacity to adapt. Although each of us has our own experience of the pandemic, we will be united by the mark it will leave on the history of humanity. “Just as the terms “prewar” and “postwar” are commonly used to describe the 20th century, generations to come will likely discuss the pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 eras”<sup>1</sup>

Now, as vaccine programs roll out across the world, we look forward with hope. It is possible to imagine life beyond lockdowns and restrictions, if not beyond COVID-19 itself. While none of us truly knows what comes next, certain consumer needs, behaviours and beliefs are likely to endure. We consider three potential legacies of COVID-19: consumers’ individual and collective resilience; the dramatic acceleration of digital adoption; and the elevated role for business.

## 1. BUILDING RESILIENCE

The pandemic was a real-life experiment in resilience – for individuals, businesses and whole economies. Individuals acquired new skills and new coping mechanisms. Businesses learned that the unimaginable can happen and conversely, that they must be prepared for anything. Everyone discovered the need for “creating resilience by design, not disaster.”<sup>2</sup> Amidst these learnings, significant challenges have been established ahead. Mental wellbeing needs to be rebuilt after a year of loss and disruption. Financial health must be strengthened while incomes and jobs are under risk. As Sarah Douglas notes, resilience-building is never finished:

“Resilience is a muscle, you have to keep building it.”

– Sarah Douglas, CEO, AMV BBDO

Going forward, many will need to reconfigure professional resilience to acquire in-demand skills in the post-COVID job market – according to McKinsey up to 25% more workers than previously estimated will need to switch occupations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The next normal arrives: Trends that will define 2021—and beyond, McKinsey, [Link](#)

<sup>2</sup> Recovery and resilience post COVID-19, European Commission, [Link](#)

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey, The Future of Works After COVID-19, [Link](#)

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Over the past year, businesses and brands have gone to great lengths to support people during challenging times. The opportunity to show up in meaningful and relevant ways will endure beyond the pandemic. Helping people build their resilience in any capacity (financial/physical/mental/social/professional) has the potential to strengthen consumers' emotional connection with brands, and in turn improve businesses' resilience.

Maltesers' recent ad is [a great example](#) of the brand's commitment to supporting women's mental wellbeing. Created with AMV BBDO, the ad is playful and empathetic, in a way which is true to the brand.

## 2. ACCELERATING DIGITAL ADOPTION

Analysts agree that the acceleration of digital adoption won't be reversed. Nonetheless, it's important to consider how this will play out when lockdowns end completely. Many will go offline and eagerly return to activities that were out of reach over the past year. Across markets, consumers consistently say that they are most looking forward to the return of social interactions and the re-opening of restaurants. However, the return to in-store shopping is not high on post-lockdown agendas. Recent research has found that digital engagement will continue to rise across all industries post-COVID.<sup>4</sup> Thus, digital customer experiences will be an ever-growing focus and investment area for businesses.

“We have covered a “decade in days” in adoption of digital.”

- McKinsey<sup>5</sup>

In-store experiences will remain important but will have to evolve and be fully integrated with the digital ones. In fact, 84% of customers expect brands to offer a seamless experience between online and in-store shopping.<sup>6</sup> Brands will need to help customers find new ways of doing business, and design these to exceed expectations.

## 3. ELEVATING BUSINESS

We've seen businesses of different sizes across categories step up and make their contribution to helping tackle the pandemic's challenges. This has elevated the way businesses are perceived by the public. When trust in governments, NGOs and media dropped at the end of 2020, businesses came out as the most trusted institutions globally.<sup>7</sup> This is unsurprising given that many businesses offered support (both

<sup>4</sup> The Digital Consumer: Shifting Expectations and Digital Readiness, Appnovation, [Link](#)

<sup>5</sup> McKinsey, How COVID-19 Is Changing Consumer Behavior Now and Forever, [Link](#)

<sup>6</sup> The Digital Consumer: Shifting Expectations and Digital Readiness, Appnovation, [Link](#)

<sup>7</sup> Edelman Trust Barometer 2021, [Link](#)

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voluntarily, and by government mandate) for vulnerable customers, often at the expense of revenues.

As the crisis comes to an end, businesses must establish sustainable commitments to society in the long-term, so that their positive impact is financially viable:

“Brands are often seen as more reliable than government entities [...] trying to help in any way they can. But of course, all that must come with a sense of transparency and purpose.”

- *David Gross, Strategic Planning Director,  
Almap BBDO (Brazil)*

The post-pandemic world will wrestle with more inequalities than before which will need to be bridged. People and societies will require continued support.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDS**

As we move through 2021 and beyond, both people and businesses will face a challenging, transitional reality and will be driven by complex and contradicting needs. Reconciling these tensions will be a priority for all. Brands that help consumers find balance will in turn find balance and success for themselves.

## **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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