
In a pandemic who do you trust?

**Be careful
where you
get your
information
from and what
advice you
take.**

Fact or fiction?
What should
your brand do?
What direction
should your
marketing take?

You've probably heard the following words and phrases more in the past few weeks than you have in a long time:

Unprecedented **Stay Safe** **Slow the Spread**
Wash Your Hands **Invisible Killer** **Self-Isolate**
Social Distancing **Lockdown**
Stay Indoors

and you've probably also heard and read more opinions on what to do about marketing, advertising, communicating and pivoting your business. The information and content circulating is pretty overwhelming.

I don't know about you, but I prefer, in times like this, to listen to the experts. I'll take my medical advice from the experts in their field please and when it comes to a reality check on the coronavirus data and forecasts, I'll listen to the scientists, thank you very much. It's far too easy to get sucked in by opinion and hearsay and find yourself not knowing what to do for the best. My advice? Listen to the experts.

One thing is for sure: the front-line key workers and health care professionals around the world that are risking their own lives to keep us safe and save our lives are going to be the new celebrated heroes of the 20s. The decade where we fought our biggest fight against a killer virus, the biggest in over 100 years. They will be celebrated for years to come. Truly heroic, historic stuff.

Without getting brutally commercial about it and staying well on the ethical side of business, brand, market-share and gain at a time like this, there is an opportunity for brands to be heroes too. It might sound daft, but, it's a fact. In the past two weeks in the UK alone we have seen widely published lists of the brands that people are talking about, virally, on social media as doing the RIGHT thing or doing the WRONG thing. You can decide which camp your brand falls into.

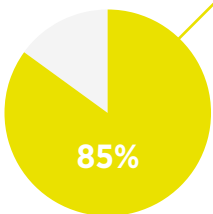
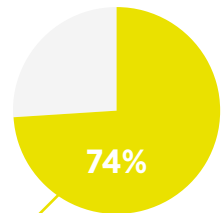
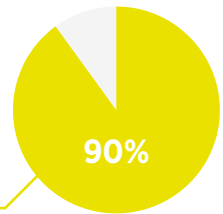
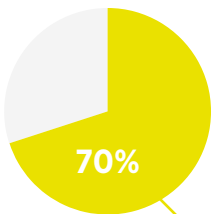
The humane, ethical and supportive routes are winning right now. Here is a quote from Roger Edelman as part of the impressive Edelman Trust Barometer Report that surveyed over 10,000 respondents in over 11 markets around the world between March 6th and March 10th....

“Brands that act in the interest of their employees, stakeholders and society at large will reinforce their expertise, leadership and trust and immeasurably strengthen the bond they have with consumers,”
- Edelman CEO Roger Edelman

There are some big takeaways from the report:

There are a number of facts that really resonated with the team here at i2Media, one being that **90%** of respondents felt that brands should not only tackle social struggles in light of the coronavirus outbreak but also act accordingly to safeguard the financial security of their employees and suppliers.

70% of respondents said that they were following the coronavirus news DAILY at least once or several times each day and that there are worries about the reliability of coronavirus information. **74%** worried that there is a lot of fake news and false information being spread about the virus and **85%** agreed that they need to hear more from scientists and less from politicians. I agree with them.

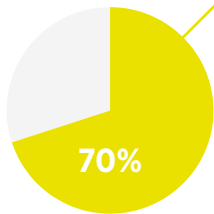
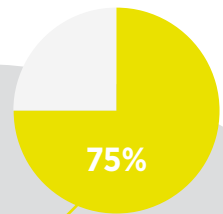
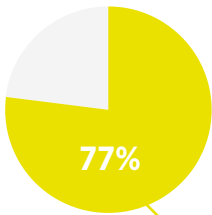


**Internal
reality,
external
perception**

This Edelman research tells us a lot about the humane approach people want brands to take and the Kantar COVID-19 Barometer research also gives us some key insights to how consumers feel about things in the current critical climates. The Kantar research was conducted across 30 markets and surveyed more than **25,000 people** between March 14th and March 23rd.

The Kantar research also found that consumers want brands to be genuine and compassionate and for companies to make staff welfare a major priority. Many also wanted to see brands and companies make donations to support the purchase of PPE for frontline keyworkers and being seen to actively support the effort being made to tackle this global issue.

Interestingly, **less than 10%** of consumers surveyed said that brands should stop advertising – in fact, the top three communication strategies that consumers wanted brands to do during the crisis included “Talking about how the brand is helpful in the new everyday” (77%), “keeping them informed about the brand’s reactions to the new situation” (75%) and “offering a reassuring tone” (70%).



So, ALL brands have a key role to play in communicating, in the right way, to consumers throughout this crisis.



The benefit
of building a
**“powerhouse
brand”**
within your
marketplace.

From the reports in an ADWEEK article published March 31, about NIKE and the brand performance surrounding the pandemic it's clear to see the driving force behind the current run for Nike is down to the absolute power of their brand and their ability to engage well with audiences in an agile, empathetic way.

The headline was pretty good and hit a chord in the current climate:

TOP STORY!

AGAINST DREARY RETAIL BACKDROP, NIKE OFFERS A RAY OF HOPE

Athletic goods giant's third quarter results better than expected.

The story goes on to say, that even with most of their Greater China stores closed from the end of January, Nike managed an impressive revenue performance and managed to even offset some of the decline in China...

“Nike surprised investors last week when it reported better than expected third-quarter results, with revenues up 5% globally to \$10.1 billion during the period, offering a bit of good news in an otherwise grim news environment for the retail sector.”



+5%

“In particular, the athletic goods juggernaut reported only a 5% decrease in sales in Greater China for the quarter ended Feb. 29, despite having to shutter retail locations and curtail store hours as part of efforts to contain the coronavirus”



-5%

They cited a number of reasons for this unexpected but welcome performance. The first one highlighted here was the brand’s ability to pivot quickly and communicate effectively with people as they were in lockdown at home. A quote from Nike CEO John Donahoe...

“At a time when people were confined to their homes, we moved swiftly to leverage our digital app ecosystem and Nike expert trainer network to inspire and support consumers across China to stay active and connected while at home,”

**IF YOU EVER DREAMED OF PLAYING
FOR MILLIONS AROUND THE WORLD,**

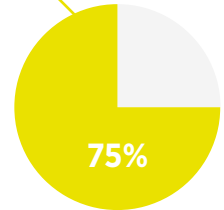
NOW IS YOUR CHANCE.

Play inside, play for the world.



Image from ADWEEK ‘Nike Rallies Sports Fans to ‘Play Inside, Play for the World’ article March 21st 2020

Other factors that were helping the brand's performance included the fact that the China disruption was late January, so quite late in the reporting period [although by the middle of February 75% of Nike stores were closed across China.] As a result, it didn't close all of its stores in China, whereas all other Nike stores have been closed since March 16.



“At the peak in February, roughly 75% of Nike-owned and partner doors in Greater China were closed, with others operating on reduced hours,”

Also, a larger percentage of Nike's revenue is delivered through online purchasing in China than in the US. So, their eCommerce function was pretty key too. However, it was noted that ONE of the four reasons for this performance was BRAND STRENGTH.

“brand strength” also played a role in Nike's performance in salvaging sales in China, an advantage less desirable brands lack.

“Brand Finance*, for example, has named Nike one of the most valuable brands in the world—if not the most valuable—for several years running”

*(the world's leading independent brand valuation consultancy)

For years marketers have talked about “Brand”, “Brand Value” and “Brand Equity” and maybe, just maybe, as we now face what is arguably the biggest challenge of our health systems, economy, wellbeing and future, the absolute and real tangible value of a brand is going to be finally recognised.

What do
consumers
want from
brands right
now?

There was an interesting article published March 20th, 2020 by Ogilvy one of the world's biggest and most respected marketing agency networks. A large proportion of the content focused on how to manage social brand messaging, but some of the wider insights were pretty valuable too...

“Modern consumers are savvy. They demand transparency and see through posturing”.

“However, unless the nature of your product inherently puts your brand at risk of coming across as insensitive, opportunistic or profiteering, we do not recommend going dark”

It's being widely suggested that brands make sure they are very empathetic, aware and caring towards the audience and how they will feel about your brand and its message is critical. The Ogilvy report went on to highlight:

“Steer away from hard-sell content that directly promotes product, and shift focus to how your brand can provide value for consumers”.

On March 27th a FORBES article about messaging and brand marketing during a crisis had some advice that we thought was very valuable. They talked about Nike's advertising campaign about social distancing that promoted Nike's workout app, the very driver of a decent revenue performance for product too we assume.

The article also had some words of advice from the VP of retail at Osorio Group, Mike Osorio. He said;

"Brands and retailers need to play the long game. This is not about getting a sale today, it is about maintaining and nurturing authentic relationships with existing customers, while being out there with authentic messaging that is true to your brand DNA. Inauthentic messaging is being panned across social media, while authentic and often cheeky (but not crass) messages are hitting the right chord."

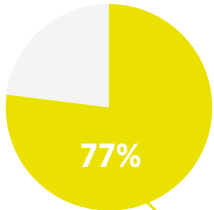
Great advice and backing up a theme from respected sources. Another takeaway was a great insight from Brandon Rael, Director at Alvarez & Marsal. He said that,

"There will ultimately be an end to this pandemic and our new normal will begin,"

Adding that,

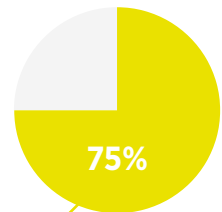
"While that reality may seem far away, consumers will remember the messaging, as well as the actions, companies have taken to look out for their needs."

To us, this is one of the most compelling insights. After this is all over and we attempt to return to “normal”, consumers will remember. They really will. That will also drive their purchase decisions and for some brands that might, unfortunately, spell their demise. Not directly from the Covid-19 but from their lack of communication, or worse, their ill-judged communication.

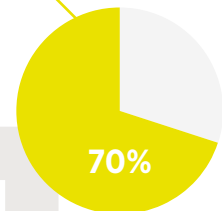


Remember this insight from the Kantar report?

Interestingly, **less than 10%** of consumers surveyed said that brands should stop advertising, in fact, the top three communication strategies that consumers wanted brands to do during the crisis included “Talking about how the brand is helpful in the new everyday” (77%), “keeping them informed about the brand’s reactions to the new situation” (75%) and “offering a reassuring tone” (70%).



In an article on March 19th in CAMPAIGN, Jason Kanefsky, chief investment officer at Havas Media said:



“A larger portion of advertising investment will need to be focused on building and maintaining a meaningful relationship with consumers rather than driving near-term sales”

“There is a risk of losing brand equity when advertising goes dark, and an opportunity to use this time to build and reinforce a brand’s relationship with their customers and prospects. It’s critical to understand what your customers are looking for right now - it might be reassurance about your store cleanliness efforts or your support for affected employees, rather than your core product.”

We are at a point in the time curve on this unwanted journey where we can do something different, to take control, to be compelling, to resonate, to show how much we care and that we are there for each other. Your brand needs to find its supportive voice. Now more than ever before.

We are sailing right in the eye of the storm. Now is not the time to go below deck and stick our heads under the blanket. We have to speak up. We have to power up the brand message. We need to do this if we want to get to the other side of the storm, with the boat intact and in order to sail (and thrive) in the calmer waters of a bright new future, stronger, wiser and much more engaged with our customers. What a great vision – lets' keep it alive.

Remember that we may feel that this current coronavirus battle is unprecedented, and we would be justified in that thinking, but there are some interesting points to note from the latest Kantar report from April 1st 2020 and one of them is the fact that in the US, the last time the country closed and repositioned industry was in 1941.

Here are some lessons from the past, courtesy of the April 1st 2020 Kantar Report “The Impact COVID-19 on the retail landscape” Be clear to your clients, shoppers, and customers:

- **You are supporting their lives in difficult times.**
- **You are repositioning to support critical solution.**
- **You will still be there for them when this ends.**
- **You are part of the overall story that is emerging.**

Be selective and creative in how you convey these messages. Too much is too much at this time of isolation.

Here is our checklist to help guide you with your brand communications:

1

Listen MORE

Listen to what consumers are saying and what communications there have been in your social channels and your competitors'. Garner examples that you have seen of brand communications that are sitting comfortably and that feel balanced.

2

Be EMPATHETIC

Re-evaluate all of your ads and content (all content including all website pages) for tone, message and emotion.

3

Be TRANSPARENT

Communicate openly and often and make sure the tone is always on "the new" point. In all ads, the tone target is 'empathy' and creatively show the brand's caring, supportive nature. You can gently reinforce your brand's value in the changing world.

4

Be AGILE

This is an ever-changing new landscape for brands and commerce. We all have to be more agile. Make sure you adapt and adjust your strategy frequently. The playbook is being reinvented constantly. Beware the fake news environments of social media. Reach audiences in a safe and positive environment.

5

Be a FORCE

Really consider how your brand can have a positive voice that can demonstrate EMPATHY and support and don't shy away from rising to the occasion and making sure your brand is heard.

At **i2media**

TRAIN TRAIN FOR HER FIGHTERS ONLY

we have a team of marketing-focused people that work across Brand, Creative, Design, Content, Digital and Audience. We are obsessed with and committed to; engaging with a targeted and engaged audience within Health, Training, Nutrition and Sport. We work with brands around the world. We are all working remotely, and our focus is to ensure the safety of our team and then deliver for YOU, our client. Helping you create the right content, the right message, the right tone and the right way to engage an “at home” audience that wants to hear from your brand.

i2media, publishers and owners of TRAIN, TRAIN for HER, Fighters Only and the World Mixed Martial Arts Awards.



Need further help with your brand communications?