

STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING  
IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

# We're Here to Help



**We're all in this together**, traversing this new existence. The tremendous marketing professionals on our team are sharing stories of their clients who, in the face of COVID-19, seeing their business change overnight. The stories are difficult to hear second- and third-hand, and at MLive Media Group, we are working closely with our teams to be sure we are able to adjust in light of the new needs we are hearing from our valued clients.

We've launched a **blog series** to assist businesses as they adjust to these new circumstances. All will strive to succinctly share tips that may prove useful – realizing that we all have limited time to effect change.

→ **VISIT THE BLOG**

# The Toolkit

The world is different. It's foreign. And it's changing so rapidly that keeping up is difficult. Just when we think we have mastered the frequency of hitting the refresh button on the news updates, we realize we are all now responsible for home-schooling. Just when we learn to limit our social media time, our future travel plans are postponed. Just when we thought we had control of our work-life balance, new announcements are made and the exercise begins again.

With uncertain futures, changing customer priorities, and possibly less budget, marketing during a time of crisis can be a confusing and even overwhelming task. Knowing how much to say, what messages to send, and how your audience might react is different than it was days ago. These tips will help you to stay frugal, stay purposeful, and offer a clear direction.

1

## DETERMINE YOUR STRATEGY & BUDGET CAREFULLY

Every dollar must do its part to drive your goals or share your message. Learn how to set a smart strategy that you can afford, even if the budget is "FREE"

2

## USE YOUR CONTENT WISELY

Give more than you ask. To learn more about this topic, read [our blog post](#).

3

## REUSE & RECYCLE

More than ever before, your time, energy and efforts are critical. If you're creating content for one-time use, you are wasting resources. Develop content for multiple purposes!

4

## YOUR AUDIENCE IS HUMAN

Be supportive, offer hope, and drive connection based on what they care about. Don't be "tone deaf" by leaving all of your your communications automated as they were pre-COVID.



COVID-19 & EMERGENCY RESPONSE

# MARKETING RIGHT NOW FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Times are uncertain, to put it mildly. None of us understands yet the gravity of the downstream effects that will be attributable to COVID-19, but all of us are speculating. During this downturn, there are a few marketing tactics you can fall back on; trustworthy efforts that pay off for very little investment (if any). Here's a quick list:

## E-MAIL

If you have an email list going, engage with your audience. Communicating about what is happening in the world and how it's affecting your business is step one. Be genuine but positive. Your customer base will care, even if they don't respond. You can use plain text emails, though the best option for this is an HTML based email, easily crafted with any number of email services like Constant Contact, Emma, or MailChimp. Need advice on getting started? [Check this out.](#) Want to talk to an expert for FREE ADVICE? [We're doing that, too.](#)

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Now is the time that your voice will matter most. Time spent online during this crisis has skyrocketed, with person-to-person contact being relegated to tagging friends, hashtags and posting. Organically, your brand's voice should be present in the feeds of your fans. Remember that email list above? Try list-matching for the first time. Or take advantage of Facebook's [retargeting feature](#). This may be the right

time to learn the difference between [organic, boosting and paid advertising](#) and put them to use for you.

## CONTENT

To support both of the previous tactics, consider what you'll say. Content comes in many forms, and it doesn't need to be hard. But the most important part is that you write it down and follow a plan. [Get started with these tips for beginners.](#)

Stay hopeful. There's no "new normal" yet. Know that what you've considered baselines or benchmarks for marketing tactics are no longer valid, and should be reconsidered. The best thing to do is to reframe your expectations to celebrate small wins or interactions, rather than goal conversions.



# Embrace The Messy Middle

In his 2019 book “The Messy Middle,” Scott Belsky talks about an approach that celebrates the optimization stage. We all know the business caterpillar, and we know the business butterfly. We can easily identify people, projects, or efforts at their beginning stages, and after successful launch. Most business books talk about the importance of planning—ensuring the correct strategy and generating momentum and buy-in. Many describe the key step as optimization—subtle changes after launch occurs, based on audience reaction and engagement. But rarely do we discuss what happens between these two steps in the journey.

No time is more important than right now than to be willing to live in the messy chrysalis stage. We are truly all in this together, traversing this for the first time in real time. Make your new mantra about identifying ways to improve, optimize and adjust.

## *“What about right now?”*

This list is hardly exhaustive, but provides ideas on adjustments or reframing that are real right now. Which can you embrace?



1

**PERMANENT AND TEMPORARY JOB OPENINGS ABOUND.** IS IT TIME FOR YOUR EFFORTS TO MOVE TO RECRUITMENT RATHER THAN BRANDING? PARTICULARLY IN HEALTH CARE OR OTHER ESSENTIAL SERVICES, FINDING TEMPORARY STAFF CAN HAPPEN MORE READILY. SEE HOW ONE BUSINESS IN HEALTH CARE [CREATED A WIN](#) WITH THIS STRATEGY.

2

**EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT.** IF YOU OFFER ONGOING EDUCATION, NOW MAY BE THE TIME TO APPEAL TO THOSE THAT HAVE ADDITIONAL LEISURE TIME, OR NEED NEW CERTIFICATIONS TO RETURN TO THE WORKFORCE.

3

**CAN YOU “GO VIRTUAL” WITH YOUR SERVICES?** IN ONE INSTANCE, A ROOFER USED SATELLITE PHOTOS TO PREPARE QUOTES FROM A DISTANCE. HOW CAN YOU RE-INVENT?

4

**DELIVERY SERVICES/ COMPANIES, OR BUSINESSES THAT DELIVER THEIR GOODS.** CAN YOU PARTNER WITH A DELIVERY SERVICE TO MAINTAIN BUSINESS? CAN YOU SETUP A DELIVERY PLAN USING YOUR CURRENT TEAM?

5

**PODCASTS/ AUDIO BOOKS/ LIBRARY OFFERINGS.** CONSIDER HOW YOUR CONTENT STREAM IS AVAILABLE NOW. ARE THERE MEANS TO BETTER ENGAGE OR REACH YOUR CLIENTELE (OR NEW CUSTOMERS) BY DELIVERING YOUR CONTENT IN NEW WAYS, LIKE A PODCAST?

## REUSE, RECYCLE

LOOKING FOR WAYS TO STRETCH EVERY DOLLAR, YOU SHOULD ALSO LOOK TO WAYS YOU MIGHT STREAMLINE YOUR CAMPAIGN AND RE-PURPOSE EXISTING CONTENT.

A quality content stream can elevate your search results, improve SEO, and offer measurement and insight for your campaign. It can also **tell the story of how your business is pivoting** to better serve the changing needs of your customers, or **lift up first responders** or essential workers. But how you develop your content makes a big difference to your ability to fulfill at scale and on pace, without losing your mind. The biggest mistake most marketers make is to build something for a single use.

This is the worst habit to have, and the most expensive. It will rob you of time and money unnecessarily and is the fastest way to burnout for your team, not to mention robbing them of valuable time they need for other things. What follows is a few examples of how to use one artifact with a cross channel mindset.





Write a 750-1000 word **blog**. Proofread it, and make sure you've got it nailed before moving forward.

Truncate the blog (A), place this version in the organization's **newsletter email** campaign, with a link to "read on" (A) or "download the full whitepaper" (B).

Provide the whitepaper version (B) to your sales team for them to use as an **attachment in follow-up emails** to clients.

Post the podcast on your **social channels**, using a graphic (C).

Use the graphics and resize them as **social cards**, posting over the course of 2 weeks, linking back to the blog (A) which offers a download (B).

Record a piece of audio and use it as a **podcast**, having a conversation about the content (A) and noting that a download (B) is available "in the comments" in your podcast release.

Take the blog, lay it out in a pretty (downloadable) **whitepaper**, with relevant graphics or illustrated statistics.

## DETERMINE YOUR STRATEGY & BUDGET CAREFULLY

### ADJUSTING FOR A NEW CUSTOMER JOURNEY

Last week, you were a brick and mortar store. This week, you are posting your products on Facebook and providing shipping or curbside pickup. You don't have an e-commerce website—your business wasn't planning to sell that way. You weren't ready for this—we hear you. But what do you do right now to facilitate this change?

Think first about the inventory you have on hand. This inventory could be sold on free marketplace sites like Facebook Marketplace, posting once and noting available sizes or colors in a single post, maximizing your time. Remember that taking Instagram-style photos, using model photos provided by the

manufacturer, or other more professional photos will create a greater sense of desirability. Are your goods handmade? Etsy could be an option. If you are a business that offers perishable goods, you may wish to consider gifting these to employees and their families, or others affected through local nonprofits.

Virtual Payment Options are also a concern. With apps like Venmo or CashApp, finding an inexpensive solution should be easy. If your business was already setup to take orders by phone and payments that way, terrific.

Use your existing feed on Facebook and Instagram to tell the

story of your new marketplace. Boosting those posts will generate more exposure but consider a small investment in paid advertising on the site for a far better conversion opportunity. Need help? We can give you a quick Q and A, for free.

Sell Gift Certificates. Gift card purchases are an easy way to gain capital now that can be used to keep rent paid and utilities active. Consider reviewing your gift card deals used in December, when many businesses offered a bonus, if the customer reached a certain threshold. Panera Bread, for instance, offered a free \$10 gift for anyone purchasing \$100. In this way, you encourage more investment in a single purchase. Under normal

**Every dollar must do its part to drive your goals or share your message. Learn how to set a smart strategy that you can afford, even if the budget is “FREE”**

circumstances, only about 80% of gift cards are redeemed, offering you one more reason to provide an incentive.

In-bound Inventory could be a concern. Have you committed to a vendor and are awaiting delivery of goods? You may have time and opportunity to postpone that shipment. Knowing all businesses are in this together, the promise of an order later is much better than a cancellation now, and many are waiving fees associated with rescheduling to preserve orders already in the system and entice customers not to fully cancel. It's also possible the opposite is true: your suppliers are short of goods you need. Checking in with suppliers by phone or video chat is always a good idea, as you'll need to source new or additional suppliers if needed.

Consider matching gifts of your customers. Numerous restaurants and retailers are matching gifts made by their clientele to employees who are out of work due to the pandemic. By supporting these fundraising efforts, your employees will benefit, and your business will, too.

Create content. Shedd Aquarium did this recently when they let the penguins roam free in the facility. Local restaurants did it when they donated food to an area shelter. Even NASA and the New York Public Library are in on it as they post

about newly available materials at no charge. Organic content, crafted to inform or entertain, not sell something, is best.

And perhaps most important, concentrate on the "after all of this" plan. What will your grand re-opening look like? How will you celebrate your loyal customers that

visit you during this downturn, after its over? A little bit of optimism can truly go a long way.

*Have a particular need? Send us a note at [marketing@mlive.com](mailto:marketing@mlive.com).*

## Among those hardest hit...

### Food & Beverage/Restaurants

You're moving your in-house business to just carryout or delivery, then perhaps to gift certificates only. One MLive Media Group partner, Halo Burger, has committed to using 25% of their gift certificate sales to employee relief funds.

### Travel & Tourism

Our CVB's and destinations have been hit hard. Without overnight stays in local hotels, revenue streams are nonexistent. For our consumers out there, know that there will be a time when you'll travel again, and taking this time to do some planning is a great idea. To our destinations, be great communicators. Describe new sanitation measures. And work with your restaurants, retail and attractions to consider what can be shipped or mailed to potential or past visitors. Sweet treats, a deal for the next visit, or other destination specific items could make a big impact.

### Support Services

A roofing company is now using satellite images to provide quotes for future business. An HVAC company is offering "We'll walk you through it" services, where emergency break-downs might create a virtual chat with a pro. How you respond is important. Begin by examining how life has changed for your customers.

### Education

NASA has allowed children schooling at home to access their archives. Yale is offering a free course online. Hillsdale college has Shakespearean lectures available in on-demand video format. Can you offer services through your website? If you're an educational institution that typically recruits on-campus visits, can you offer a virtual tour, or a face to face with program leadership via webinar or conference call? While the method may have changed, the need for your services hasn't.



# WE ARE ALL HUMAN

## KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE AND REFLECT THEIR NEEDS IN YOUR MESSAGE.

With uncertainty comes reprioritization. In times of recession, crisis, or trauma, all people will reflect on what is essential and what can be considered expendable. While Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the basis of our psychological approach, circumstances drive a stronger interpretation and in turn, a greater sense of responsibility. Preservation mode kicks in, and we choose differently based on what is true in the present, that will ensure a future tense. But we all interpret these changes differently.

Harvard Business Review describes this shift, "As priorities change, consumers may altogether eliminate purchases in certain categories, such as household services (cleaning, lawn care, snow removal), moving them from essentials, say, into expendables. Or they may substitute purchases in one category for purchases in another, perhaps swapping dining out (a treat) for cooking at home (an essential). And because most consumers become more price sensitive and less brand loyal during recessions, they can be expected to seek out favorite products and brands at reduced prices or settle for less-preferred alternatives."

As a result of these changes, we must tailor our changing business models, keeping new audience personas in mind.



### THEN

### NOW

SELF-ACTUALIZATION

ESTEEM

LOVE & BELONGING

SAFETY NEEDS

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS

EXPENDABLES

POSTPONABLES

TREATS

ESSENTIALS

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



# TAILORING YOUR TACTICS

	ESSENTIALS	TREATS	POSTPONEABLES	EXPENDABLES
PERSONA #1 <b>SLAM ON THE BRAKES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize price; hit wallet friendly retail price points</li> <li>• Offer smaller pack sizes for less money</li> <li>• Expand retailer private labels</li> <li>• Promote low-cost value products</li> <li>• Introduce fighter brand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shrink sizes</li> <li>• Hold prices down</li> <li>• Advertise as a “you deserve it” small indulgence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer layaway plans</li> <li>• Provide low-cost financing</li> <li>• Promote exceptional deals</li> <li>• Challenge penny-wise, pound-foolish behavior (such as dangerously postponing a tire replacement)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer do-it-yourself alternatives to doing without</li> <li>• Continue awareness advertising (for instance, for future vacations)</li> </ul>
PERSONA #2 <b>PAINED BUT PATIENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a lower-priced option</li> <li>• Hit retail price points</li> <li>• Promote bonus packs to encourage bulk-buy savings</li> <li>• Emphasize dependability of branded product or service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reward loyal consumers, even if they consume less (for example, offer frequent patron points)</li> <li>• Advertise products as morale raisers</li> <li>• Advertise products as affordable alternatives to more expensive luxuries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer simpler models, lower prices</li> <li>• Promote lower-operation cost models</li> <li>• Promote repair services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue awareness advertising</li> <li>• Invest in core product improvements that will accelerate customers’ reentry into the market</li> </ul>
PERSONA #3 <b>COMFORTABLY WELL OFF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue awareness advertising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize outstanding quality</li> <li>• Advertise as a product you deserve because you are successful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote savings from buying now</li> <li>• Advise customers they’re “missing out” by postponing a purchase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable discreet purchasing that avoids the appearance of flaunting in front of less wealthy people</li> <li>• Advertise benefits of impressing wealthy friends</li> </ul>
PERSONA #4 <b>LIVE FOR TODAY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue awareness advertising</li> <li>• Remind consumers, “You can’t live without it”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer convenient automatic credit card billing</li> <li>• Promote as opportunity to seize the moment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer monthly payment plans</li> <li>• Promote quality-of-life benefits of buying now</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer exciting new products and promote as “must have”</li> <li>• Advertise as products you can aspire to buy when your income grows</li> </ul>

SOURCE: HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

## ASSUME YOUR CONTENT WILL BE CONSUMED OUT OF ORDER

### CONSUMERS WILL DETERMINE THEIR OWN PATH

We are living in a time when news updates, regularly released statistics, and data modelling has us tied to our laptops hitting the refresh key repeatedly. We are all unsuccessfully resisting the urge to spend too much time in social media. But know this: whatever content you publish will be consumed in an order you can't control.

It's even more important to be thinking about the new psychological impact of your customers, shown in the table from Harvard Business Review, found on Page 10. Multiple

artifacts are best, as is a mix of media types. These will keep people interested and offer the element of repetition needed to achieve an appropriate frequency.

With a smartphone in hand, consumers can see a product in their feed, and immediately move to

discovery around that product. And its availability. From a single impression in display, the user's response is to Google, Bing, or Yahoo, often looking for user

**But know this: your customer is 100% in control of his or her own journey, and he won't slow down to consume your video or written content in the order you'd hoped.**

reviews and user generated content (UGC) to complete the research. Product videos on YouTube are cited by 90% of consumers as influential,\* with more than half describing that

online video has helped them decide between brands. But equally important right now is the product's availability and the means of obtaining

it. Your customers might be hoarding toilet paper, out of fear of its availability down the road. Be sure you are asking these questions up front.

"Awareness" isn't the thing you think it is. It doesn't always come first. Imagine that you are searching for an urgent service. Will your organization's content appear in the search results? How many times? Is there video content, images and written materials? If five videos appear and the fifth appears most relevant, that's the video that will be clicked and viewed. Now is the time to append or amend your content to describe virtual options, delivery features, or timing of shipping.

Ensuring that your brand's content is relevant to a search and that there's enough material

*\*Source: Forbes*



for your prospect to click from piece to piece or channel to channel is the best tactic. This is also the way to have enough in your eco-system for it to appear in front of your user in a natural way. He may stumble upon a podcast, that mentions a blog in the comments that he later checks out. Or sees a post in social media that clicks back to a whitepaper, where a product video is embedded.

The right way to mix this media is going to be different based on your industry or audience size, but a little trial and error will help you get it right and hone your content game. A content strategy is buckshot, not a silver bullet – even Marvel took 22 films, 59 hours, and 11 years to tell a complete story arc. Each piece should be a standalone, interesting or informative and shareable piece of a larger arc.

***“I don’t have a content plan, and I need to act fast. What do I do?”***



## CONTENT IDEAS DURING COVID-19

### **Quickly and Succinctly Describe How your business has adjusted.**

If you are a roofer and are now providing quotes via satellite imagery and with no in person visit, say so. If you are a winery and are shipping every order for a penny, say that. If your restaurant is now exclusively drive-through, say that.

### **Describe Safety Steps your business has Deployed.**

How are you responding to sanitation requirements and directives from the Center for Disease Control? Tell your clientele. Bullet points are best—don’t be wordy.

### **Share How you are Taking Care of your Employees.**

One restaurant is using the sale of gift certificates to fund an employee relief fund. A theme park is donating all perishables to a soup kitchen. Tell your customers what you are doing.

**Send Messages Of Hope.** From major financial institutions, messages are around mortgage relief. From community organizations, statements of “together we are better.” From news organizations and individuals, “Look for the helpers.” Do this. Be a beacon of positivity, even if it’s hard.

**As much as is possible, consider sending short videos or photo visuals. Engage all the senses to the degree possible.**

#### **METHODS TO USE:**

- Social Media Organic Posting
- Paid Social Media (even if you have no budget, do this. Even \$10 will help you get the word out)
- Website Home Page and Contact Us Page
- Press Release or other communication with local publications
- Email Newsletter to Customers

#### **METHODS TO USE:**

- Social Media Organic and/or Paid Posting
- Website Home Page and Contact Us Page
- Email Newsletter to Customers

#### **METHODS TO USE:**

- Social Media Organic and/or Paid Posting
- Website Blog
- Email Newsletter to Customers
- Any existing commercial or digital media should be swapped to this messaging

#### **METHODS TO USE:**

- Social Media Organic and/or Paid Posting (the more visual the better)
- Website Blog
- Email Newsletter to Customers
- Any existing commercial or digital media should be swapped to this messaging

# We're In this Together

Generating a content or creative strategy can be scary. Knowing just what to do, how much to do and say can be daunting. Your approach doesn't need to be complex. The premise is easy — give more than you ask and invite engagement. Your posts should fall into two areas: Give and Ask. On the next page, find a graphic describing these concepts and the proportions of your campaign they should exhibit.



## GIVE

During the Covid-19 pandemic or during any time of crisis, very little (if anything) should be asking for a sale. Not everything is about a call-to-action. Brands that offer relevant information or something entertaining will garner the most interaction. Watch these posts carefully — when your audience comments, respond! Knowing that a brand will join in the conversation, is when a customer feels most connected. Tell your story. Share your grief. Share positivity messaging, and how you are helping people. Tell the world how your business has changed.

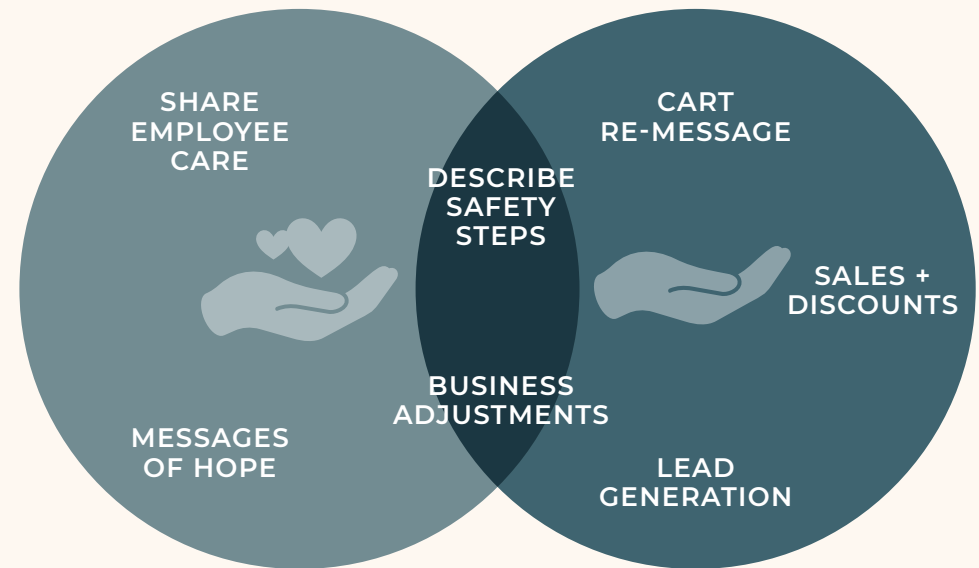
## ASK

When you're asking, the post includes discounts, re-messaging from the cart, or lead generating calls to action. These are important to your business's success, but should be part of a healthy communication plan, not its entirety.

Ideally, these are the posts being boosted or promoted through paid efforts.

### GIVE

*Content that gives only benefits the consumer. It's meant to entertain or educate, making the consumer better or happier, while steering your brand narrative. Use your organic feed to GIVE to your audience. Boost your post to increase visibility.*



### ASK

*If it has a call-to-action, you are asking your consumer to do something in response to your post. Your ask content belongs in ads, and is targeted to your audience and those like them.*

### GIVE + ASK

*Drive revenue while providing a consumer benefit with this combined post type. It could appear organically or in paid media, depending on the tone and appeal of the content.*





# WE'RE HERE TO HELP

We thrive on partnership. On invention.  
On solving marketing riddles. Reach out to  
us at [marketing@mlive.com](mailto:marketing@mlive.com)



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