

A microscopic view of several viruses, likely coronaviruses, rendered in shades of blue and teal. The viruses are spherical with prominent, spike-like protrusions on their surfaces. They are scattered across the frame, with some in sharp focus and others blurred in the background, creating a sense of depth. The overall color palette is a gradient of blues and teals.

# Defend and build

Insights and responses to navigate your brand through the pandemic and beyond

# Introduction

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We are living and working in a time of unprecedented uncertainty and, without doubt, our one overriding priority should be to save lives and keep people safe.

There is also a general acceptance that our lives, our world view and our society will never be the same again.

As we head into the peak of the coronavirus pandemic in the UK, we face a new version of normality and our economic resilience will be vital.

For brands to emerge and help to drive the economic recovery they need to learn from the past, adapt to the present and anticipate the future.

We've been working with brands of all shapes and sizes for 35 years so we're offering some insights, learnings and responses that help you steer your company through the lockdown and into a bright new future.



# What we can learn from the past

**The Great Depression in the 1920s** – Post was the leading cereal brand but it cut its marketing spend. A challenger brand called Kellogg's doubled its marketing spend and emerged to own the category.

**The recession in 1981** – brands that maintained or increased their marketing activity had sales that were 256% higher than those that didn't by 1985.<sup>1</sup>

**The recession in 1991** – McDonald's reduced its marketing budget unlike Pizza Hut whose sales grew by 61% compared to a 28% decline for the golden arches.

**The economic crash in 2008** – 60% of brands that 'went dark' during the economic downturn saw brand use decrease by 24% and brand image by 28%.<sup>2</sup>



1. McGraw-Hill  
2. Millward Brown

## Insight:

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It's never been more important to listen to your customers and consumers.

Of 25,000 consumers surveyed, only 8% said that brands should stop marketing to them. 77% say they want brands to talk about how they are helping in everyday life and 70% say they want their brands to offer them reassurance.<sup>1</sup>



## Response:

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1. Align yourself with good e.g. John Lewis has created a Wellbeing Area in the new Nightingale Hospital in London for use by frontline workers and volunteers.
2. Showcase the efforts you are making to help impact immediately on the crisis. Fundraising, increased CSR activity and amended production processes e.g. Burberry is using its global supply chain to fast-track 100,000 surgical masks to the NHS.
3. Consider the opportunity to offer your customers moments of positivity and respite from the endless cycle of negative news e.g. Penguin Random House UK is sending free books to some of the communities most affected by the crisis, including families on low incomes and older people facing isolation.



## Insight:

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**Offering tangible support and assistance to your customers today will deliver loyalty long after we are through this crisis.**

**People are confined to their homes and are becoming increasingly anxious, fearing for the safety of themselves and their loved ones. Brands that understand this and empathise will strengthen relationships with their customers.**



## Response:

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- 1.** Make it easier to shop from home - people might avoid visiting stores, but this just means they'll shift their attention to online shopping as long as home delivery services still operate. The best course of action is to go above and beyond for your loyal customers. For instance, offering free shipping.
- 2.** Be generous with your loyalty programmes – consider extending loyalty point expiry dates and lower the point-price of rewards.
- 3.** Relax your rules on refunds, guarantees and cancellations e.g. Premier Inn proactively offered free cancellations on all their non-flex bookings before the lockdown was announced.

## Insight:

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Consumers are looking for their brands to offer them clear, specific information about where, how and when to get the things they need.



## Response:

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1. Give people credible, detailed and current information about your delivery timescales, your customer service commitments, response times and stock availability.
2. Acknowledge the new reality and tell your customers openly and honestly what you are doing to keep your staff, your supply chain and your customers safe.
3. Wherever possible introduce personalization into your touchpoints to provide an even greater sense of companionship and support.

## Insight:

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Content strategies need to change if brands are to demonstrate empathy and understanding.

If they get it right, brands will secure strong trusting relationships now and in the future.

NEW  
HABITS

## Response:

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1. Review your current evergreen content and ensure that it is respectful and sensitive to the current crisis.
2. Build a new content programme which delivers content which will actually help the everyday life of your consumers e.g. health brands on how to exercise at home, toy retailers offering simple game ideas for families to bond over.
3. Avoid bottom of the funnel conversion content to side-step accusations of insensitivity.

## Insight:

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Consumers are clearly demonstrating the difference between essential and discretionary purchasing.



## Response:

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1. If you have the option within your brand portfolio, switch your marketing focus to those products which are in high demand and which you have the ability to supply.
2. If your brand is discretionary, avoid the rush to short-term sales activation as longer-term brand building will pay dividends long into the future.
3. Instead of costly ATL brand-building, consider engaging initiatives that reflect the mood of the times. They will keep your brand salient and create positive emotional associations that will prime or remind future purchasers when markets recover.



## Insight:

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Millions of consumers have changed their physical behaviour and with it their media consumption patterns.



## Response:

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1. Brands should consider modifying their media mix. Digital entertainment is spiking so brands may want to amplify their use of ad-supported premium video streaming.
2. Brands should not fear adjacency to negative news stories because consumers are jostling to stay informed as news consumption peaks.
3. Consider spending more on social marketing to capitalise on the increased time people are spending by on social media. Align your social content and assets – made for mobile, vertical, short-form video, etc. Above all, ensure your brand responds authentically, based on its brand positioning, values and tone of voice.

## Insight:

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In particular, digital consumption patterns are changing at breakneck speed.

Facebook app usage is up 37%, Whatsapp by 40%, Twitter Direct Mail has increased by 30% and Houseparty downloads have soared by 735% in the last week of March 2020 alone.



## Response:

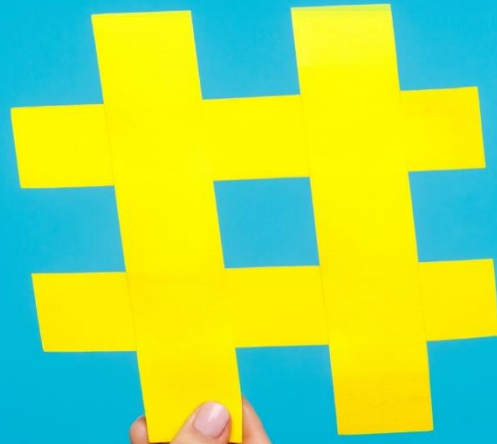
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1. Utilise eye-catching visuals to grab the attention across visual platforms such as Instagram and Google Display.
2. Deliver data-led content to provide insightful and entertaining information for prospective audiences to consume, engage and share.
3. Use digital platforms to nurture customers at the awareness and consideration phase. This will help to grow remarketing lists for the future.
4. Be positive warm and genuine - now is a time to bring people together in any way possible. If you have a good news story, share it!

## Insight:

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Consumers' social conversations are critical barometers of what is acceptable and relevant and what isn't.



## Response:

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1. Brands should amplify their measurement of sentiment and conversation trends to adapt messaging and content.
2. Consider building specific dashboards to monitor and observe cross-platform conversations, community sites and e-commerce pages to search for relevant and appropriate opportunities.
3. Adjust your touchpoints dynamically to respond to events and facts as they occur to increase traction, cut-through, relevance and brand trust.

## Insight:

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Consumers will engage more readily with brands that have clearly changed their positioning tactically to make a positive impact.

Brands should consider sacrificing pure product messages in favour of sensitive headline messages that still provide solid brand linkage.



## Response:

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1. Nike adopted a new message “Play inside, play for the world” in order to promote social distancing and show a commitment to public safety.

2. Guinness shifted its St. Patrick’s day focus away from celebrations and pub gatherings towards a message of longevity and wellbeing.

3. Tesco has completely changed its ATL content to focus on the steps it has taken to keep staff and customers safe, giving an entirely new meaning and resonance to its slogan “Every Little Helps”



## Insight:

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Whatever sector you operate in, the success of your brand in the future, will depend increasingly on your approach to and participation in the idea of a community.

Community and society thinking are here to stay and brands will need to think harder about how they can contribute to the communities they serve.



## Response:

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1. Assess your core values, mission statement and purpose and consider how you can contribute something which is aligned to them.
2. This activity may well start with a short-term, tactical response to the crisis e.g. LVMH are producing hand sanitisers at scale and should continue to align with this cause through the crisis and beyond.
3. Consumers will likely always remember how Ford, GE and 3M partnered to repurpose manufacturing capacity and put people back to work to make respirators and ventilators to fight coronavirus.

## Some final words of optimism

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Many brands have adapted and transitioned amazingly quickly to new ways of working. If regularized, this can lead to new efficiencies, new sources of innovation and even margin improvement.

Working from home is a proven concept for millions of workers. It will permanently result in more online training, more Zoom conferences and fewer face-to-face meetings, reducing air miles and pollution.

You are not alone. All brands are having to think, operate and embrace new ways of working. We are sharing our knowledge and learning together.

**To find out more about how we can help  
your brand not just survive but thrive,  
contact us on 0800 612 9890**

