

5 Essential Marketing Strategies In The Time of Coronavirus (and beyond)

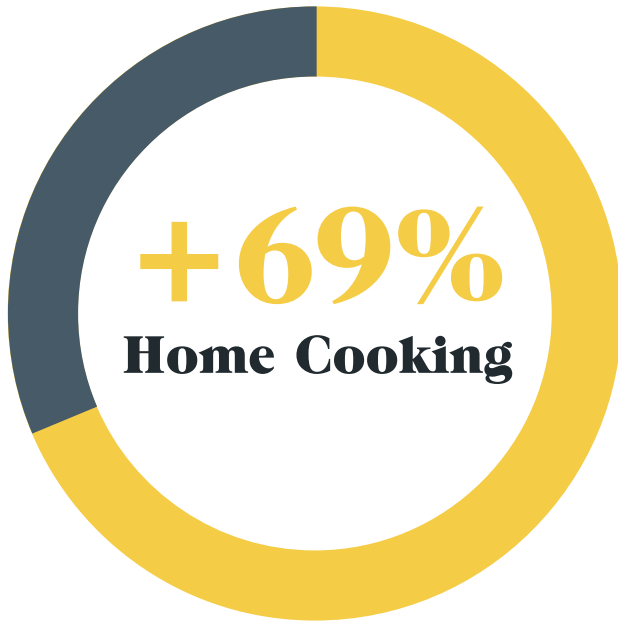
BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL

Seemingly overnight, the Covid-19 pandemic turned business as usual into anything but. In the few short months since the first case was reported on US soil, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally (and perhaps permanently) shifted the ways we socialize, shop, exercise, study, eat and work, pushing more and more in-person services and activities into a digital space.

With everyone sheltering in place and working from home, the consumer demand of CPG brands has never been higher, and brands are scrambling to ramp up advertising and keep up with demand. Everything about the way we shop, from ordering online to sampling in-store, has changed.

Convenience and security is the name of the game, and even the most traditionally brand-loyal consumers are more open than ever to unfamiliar brands. This means that the time to get in front of them is now.





Order Delivery



Order Take-Out



CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IS CHANGING

We've all seen the apocalyptically empty supermarket shelves and the heartbreaking "closed for now" signs on our favorite restaurants and eateries.

While dine-in joints are closing left and right, CPG products are gaining—and fast.

People have to eat, and they are overwhelmingly choosing to do so at home. According to research from Datassential, due to Coronavirus concerns, nearly 90% of respondents indicated they feel safer eating at home and preparing grocery store-bought food themselves.

Of course, it's worth noting that this survey was conducted on March 10, 2020, and the situation gets more severe by the day.

Additionally, while you'd perhaps expect that consumers would be more likely to order delivery or takeout to avoid contact, 16% said they're likely to decrease ordering delivery while just 8% said they'd increase ordering delivery. 12% indicated they'd likely decrease ordering takeout and food-to-go, and just 7% said they'd increase.

The takeaway is that it's not just convenience and reducing contact; consumers have real concerns about the safety of food preparation outside the home. The most significant changes in their habits are a decrease of eating at sit-down restaurants (54%) and an increase of cooking at home (69%).

This means that many people who weren't cooking before are now finding their way into the kitchen. These are habits that will likely stick with them long after the last case of Coronavirus is given the all-clear.

Coronavirus sparked this groundswell change in consumer behavior, but the trend of staying in and cooking at home won't stop once the state of emergency is lifted. The market is teeming with newly minted home cooks, eager to try their hand at everything from sourdough to spaghetti night.

The time to establish relationships with these consumers is now, through smart, adaptable marketing strategies. Those brands that are able to pivot quickly, adapting strategies to offer online ordering, delivery and other virtual services, will have the advantage post-pandemic.

"COVID-19: Coronavirus & The Impact on Eating." Datassential. March 12, 2020.

ACTIONABLE STEPS TO TAKE NOW TO PREPARE FOR THE NEW NORMAL

We don't need to reiterate that this pandemic presents an unparalleled situation for every sector of the economy; seemingly overnight, having your products and services available online is crucial to the survival of your business.

While much feels uncertain right now, this much we know—This isn't forever, but for the foreseeable future, the new frontier is mostly online. Connecting with customers and providing resources during these uncertain times is crucial, but at the end of the day, your goal is to keep your business afloat.

So how do you step up your e-commerce game to meet the demand, without overdoing it when the pandemic ends? We have the answers.

1. THE FUTURE IS ALL ABOUT DTC AND E-COMMERCE

This unprecedented crisis has truly shown us the importance of e-commerce. Businesses that are able to quickly pivot and offer services remotely, such as gyms and yoga studios offering virtual classes or grocery stores offering online delivery, are able to stay afloat even during a citywide lockdown.

If your business does not yet have an online presence (or your website does not currently have e-commerce functionality) now is the time to get your website up to speed.

Many consumers are new to the online experience, and are placing orders online, logging into remote work meetings or using food delivery apps for the first time. Your goal is to streamline the user experience and the path to purchasing, to make this transition from in-person to online as seamless as possible.

Now is the perfect time for a little self reflection: Evaluate what you need to do to make your customers' online shopping experience as convenient and foolproof as possible.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

By making the e-commerce process easier for your customers, you'll build strong relationships that will carry over once the pandemic has lifted.

- Can customers purchase your products directly on Instagram and Facebook?
- Do you offer online ordering directly through your website?
- Is your Amazon storefront in shipshape, with captivating images, smart copy, and an FAQ section?

2. SEO STILL MATTERS

Customers can't buy your product if they can't find you online. During your e-commerce audit, ask yourself: how is your SEO strategy, and how can you make sure you show up in relevant consumer searches and get those folks into your sales funnel?

In a time where everything feels like it's changing, one piece of good news is that many of our old metrics still stand. Search engine algorithms are not impacted by global pandemics, meaning that Google is still actively assessing the best resources for search results and prioritizing SEO optimized content. Answer the SOS call of the day—such as “How to Make Sourdough”—and you shall be rewarded.

3. RAMP UP EMAIL MARKETING EFFORTS

Since the outset of this pandemic, every email inbox has been flooded with Covid-19 updates of questionable relevance. The emails that cut through the clutter are the ones that provide real solutions, whether it's a discount code, free shipping, or a thoughtful home cooking strategy.

If your business is providing something useful that people need, especially a timely service like no-contact delivery or [an ebook of pantry staple-friendly recipes](#), people want to know! And sending that information in an email will make it easier for customers to reference later.

Ads and social media posts are scrolled past in a second, but an email lives forever in your inbox. In fact, 62% of consumers actually prefer email communication from brands.* With more people online than ever, scrolling for solutions, offers, resources and deals, the time to make those connections with customers is now.

*Deals Drive Greater Engagement on Shoppers' Favorite Brand Communication Channel: Email" eMarketer. April 23, 2019.

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4. BUILD COMMUNITY WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

The word “community” might feel a little different now than it has in the face of other natural disasters—we're not able to rally at food drives or show up at friends' houses with casseroles. Instead, community building and support is happening online. As isolating as social distancing and self-quarantining can feel, none of us is truly alone in this experience.

Now is the best time to invest in building and nurturing a strong, engaged online community where your customers, followers and fans can share resources, connect and support each other. Now more than ever, clients and customers are turning to social media for updates on closures, shipping information, product availability and more.

Social media is an immediate and effective way to communicate with and support your customers, and alert them of any new developments or changes in your operations. It's also a great place to run ads, announce promotions or sales, test the waters and poll your followers on new products or services they'd like to see, and offer support as we navigate this global situation together.

5. PROVIDE VALUE AT EVERY INTERACTION

Now is the time to be highlighting timely and relevant services. If your brand offers online shopping and delivery, let your customers know! If your services or products have a timely benefit, people want to know about it.

Your goal should always be to provide value at every interaction, and that value needs to be relevant to the current and ever-evolving challenges our communities are facing. If your business can provide solutions for people, like roadside pickup or no-contact local delivery, even better. That is the ultimate value.

Your consumers are listening, and brands that provide value now will foster true brand loyalty that will carry over long after the pandemic has ended. Going the extra mile and creating additional value—for example, by providing planned menus, shopping lists and tutorials for your customers—will make an enormous difference.

Don't be afraid to publish content you know will be a resource, even if it has nothing to do with your product directly. Teach people how to batch-sauté and freeze spinach, meal prep bananas for smoothies, and make homemade stock.

The value you provide to your consumers in a time of uncertainty is, well, invaluable. Down the road, when this is all over, they will remember. Beyond that, if your business is able to donate resources, make sure this community activism is well publicized so that people can take advantage of your generosity and so that your business receives recognition for the good work you're doing. Everyone could use a heartwarming story about a good deed right now, so don't be afraid to share yours!

WE CAN HELP

At Heart Creative, we have built our business by taking care of your business. We have developed customizable strategic support packages to optimize your plan of action during this complex time. Don't hesitate to contact us if we can help; whether you're an established client or new around here, a consultation call with us—on the house—is the first step in making the transition a little easier!

Email us at hello@heartcreative.co and let's do this together.