The (Very) Comprehensive Guide to COVID-19 Resources for D2C Marketers

100+ pages of resources and everything you need to thrive

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Introduction

In the new age of social distancing, businesses of all sizes are either shuttering their doors or pivoting their marketing strategies to stay afloat. Small businesses, in particular, are hit hardest because they rely heavily on foot traffic and in-person transactions.

However, while the outlook may seem bleak — sales are dropping at a rapid rate, supply chains are compromised, and consumer behavior is changing at warp speed — many of these resilient businesses have made pivots to accommodate their customers.

So, how can your business be strategic with your marketing plans, when the future is so uncertain? How do you put your customers first, when their behaviors are shifting at lightning speed?

The AdRoll team knows that small businesses aren't just the lifeblood of the economy — they also enrich our lives and anchor our communities. To help ease the anxiety surrounding small businesses, we've created a comprehensive guide to coronavirus resources for direct-to-consumer (D2C) marketers. From tips on how to pivot by industry to how to apply for loans, we've got your burning COVID-19 questions covered.

Pivoting Your Marketing Strategy

In this section, we highlight the top challenges D2C brands are facing and answer the following questions: What do you do when your customers stop spending? How do you get the most out of your paid media spend? And how do you effectively transition your offline events online?

When Customers Stop Spending

When challenging times hit, it's natural for customers to be extra careful with their spending. As consumers feel increasingly uneasy, they'll cut back on some goods and increase their emergency savings instead. This has led to a significant impact on D2C brands and small businesses — 96% say the outbreak has already affected them, and 75% say their business has been impacted by fewer sales.

So, how do you navigate your way around this? How do you pivot your marketing strategies in a helpful way while also staying afloat? Here are a few tips and tricks to consider.

Be Proactive in Understanding Why

Conduct an internal meeting with your team to capture ideas and brainstorm. Then, find a way to elicit customer feedback. For example, if most of your audience can't afford to make purchases at this time, you'll know that discounts and promotions are the way to go. Or, if your customers are only buying "essential" items, your team could brainstorm ways to pivot the brand's messaging. Once you get insight into customer intent, you'll be able to settle on a solution that's the best step forward.

A few ways to ask for feedback:

Send out a survey.
Run a customer survey and ask what their top concerns are. Then, build a solution around their responses. Consider this a "Choose Your Own Adventure" of sorts: If your customer is worried about X, prescribe Y (e.g., running a promotion). If your customer is concerned about A, prescribe B (e.g., suggesting a relevant partnership). Leverage this survey to deliver value to your current customer base and layer it into your acquisition strategy.

If you're finding that people are shying away from filling out surveys because they're an inconvenience, think about meeting them where they already are, such as their mobile phones. In fact, SMS is regarded as one of the most powerful channels to request feedback from customers, with higher open rates than email.

Analyze recorded sales calls.
If your company has a sales team, they're probably making a ton of calls every day. Their call logs can serve as a valuable feedback tool and provide insight into why customers have decided to stop spending.

Use your social channels.
Create polls on social channels such as Instagram and Twitter. They're quick, easy, and provide immediate feedback.

Conduct interviews.
Ask your loyal customers whether they'd be open to a virtual conversation — generally, those who invest in your brand are open to giving feedback if you ask them.

Continue to Communicate With Your Customers

It should be noted that customers never really "stop" buying — they're just more likely to postpone their purchase due to financial apprehension. This is why it's more important than ever for brands to continue communicating their added value for when the purchasing moment comes.

Stay top-of-mind with customers through virtual avenues such as display ads, emails, and virtual events. Ramp up your customer service options, and ensure that your customers can reach you, no matter where they are. Remember that it doesn't have to be all business, either — during this time, it's especially important to be extra active on social media. After all, people are required to stay home and are spending most of their time online — why not take this opportunity to provide positive content to help take peoples' minds off the virus?

Reposition Your Messaging

Quite simply, customers stop making purchases when they don't have the budget. To increase sales, ditch the old messaging and create a new one around specific discounts and promotions. Depending on your business vertical, you can get creative with online discounts and offers. For example, if you're a travel brand, offer a more prolonged cancellation phase. If you're a retail business, provide a non-expiring shipping voucher when they complete a purchase to help drum up future business. And if you're a service-based business such as a restaurant, don't fret: You can still encourage customers to make online sales in the form of discounted gift certificates so that they can treat themselves when the coronavirus outbreak has slowed.

Consider Creating Partnerships

Identify popular brands within your industry that customers have a strong brand affinity to (an excellent tool to use is Brand Match, a directory of D2C brands). When a partnership is formed, both parties can use their respective assets and audiences to cross-promote one another to boost brand perception, build brand strength, and offer special promotions.

How to Get the Most Out of Your Paid Media Spend

When the global environment turns challenging, many companies want to react by cutting marketing spend. If brands take away only one thing from this article it should be this: Fight that urge! There is a strong business case to be made for maintaining, and even expanding, your marketing efforts even in an uncertain economy.

Understanding that case requires understanding the totality of your customer acquisition journey, what you're spending and what you're spending it on, what makes a good KPI in a challenging environment, and what your market looks like.

What's the Difference Between CAC and CPA?

Most marketers are familiar with cost per acquisition or action (CPA). Many are also familiar with customer acquisition cost (CAC). Unfortunately, too many use them interchangeably or don't fully understand the difference between the two. That's a costly mistake to make, and can lead to bad decisions and an inability to secure stakeholder approval.

The simplest way to differentiate the two is to remember that CAC is about getting a paid customer that contributes to revenue, while CPA is about getting potential customers to perform some kind of action or to get an acquisition of some kind before a user becomes a customer.

So for example, the cost to sign a visitor up for a newsletter would be a CPA. Same with getting a user to sign up for a free trial. In both cases, even though the actions were positive and could lead to a user turning into a customer, they aren't there yet.

On the other hand, the cost for that user then buying an item they see in a brand's newsletter or upgrading the free trial to a paid subscription would be the CAC. The metric switches as soon as money changes hands, and the CAC is often (but not always) made up of many preliminary CPAs (among other things!)

Why is this important? Two cases can help illustrate:

1. Company A runs a performance marketing campaign and uses free trial signups as the key success metric. The campaign goes gang-busters — every single person who clicks turns into a free user, at a cost of only $5 per click! Conversion rates are as high as it's possible to go, and the CPA is very reasonable for this industry. The campaign is a smashing success, and they should move as much money as possible

into performance ads, right?

2. Their competitor, Company B, runs a similar campaign. Unfortunately for their marketing manager, signups are slow. They're spending a ton on clicks, but only every fifth click signs up for a free trial. The CPA is $25 — much higher than industry standards — and the VP of marketing is starting to walk past the performance office a lot while looking worried.

Which company is running the more successful campaign? It's easy to guess Company A, but in reality there isn't enough information presented to make an informed inference. Company A may seem to have a successful campaign on the surface, but if they are only converting free trial users at a rate of 20%, they're actually spending the same amount for each customer as Company B if the latter converts at 100%. And if Company B spends less per free trial user on the back-end, if for example, they have a smaller marketing team, they may well be significantly ahead of Company A.

That's not to say CPA is not important. CPA can be a leading indicator and a component metric of CAC, and can point to areas where optimization is needed within a holistic customer journey. But it's also not the be-all and end-all metric to build goals around, and is just one component out of many that tells brands how successful their marketing spend is.

Understanding the Customer Acquisition Cost

Measuring CTA is often a fairly easy and straightforward undertaking. Since the actions/acquisitions being tracked tend to be small and non-monetary, attribution often defaults to simple models with relatively short look-back windows, like last-click. That's not to say it can't be more complex, but if the actions being measured are properly discreet and small, simple often works.

Measuring CAC can be a much more difficult process. The standard equation for CAC is:

(Marketing Spend + Sales Spend)/Customers Acquired in Time Period

This is a good foundation, but misses a couple of key points:

1. Brands don't always get customers in the same time period that they spend marketing or sales dollars. Some brands might have a customer journey lasting only a few minutes (see an ad, click the ad, buy the product.) Others might last years (see ad, meet reps at conference, get marketing materials, pass through budgeting, see more ads, watch webinar, talk to sales team, buy product.) Failing to take this into account can register false CACs that can be too high, if a brand launches a new initiative but doesn't allow enough time to see customers from that initiative, or too low, if a wave of customers comes in months after an initiative is paid for.
2. How does a brand define marketing and sales cost? Are salaries calculated in those costs? What about facilities costs and other overhead? Engineering? Creative? If CAC is boiled down only to direct and simple-to-attribute costs, it can appear artificially low in some cases — for example by not taking into account a branding campaign that happened months ago and contributed to a purchase, or by ignoring the cost of sales support salaries.

These factors make calculating a true CAC difficult. This is especially true over shorter time periods — weeks, months, and even quarters. Brands not focused on understanding their full customer journey can often miss large portions of their CAC, leading to less-than-optimal campaign and tactical decisions.

The Business Case to Keep Spending

So what does customer acquisition cost have to do with spending patterns during difficult economic times? And how does it add to the business case for maintaining spending?

Slow-downs tend to bring out the bottom-line obsession hidden inside every executive. When accounts are high, stake-holders feel less pressure to account for every dollar going out. When those accounts start falling, the mood can quickly change to tightening belts and planning for the worst. Every dollar out needs to result in X dollars in. For marketing, this often means hyper-focusing on the day-to-day KPIs and CPAs.

What this laser-like focus misses, though, is that very few companies have a one-stop customer journey. Looking only at last-clicks and direct conversions ignores the sometimes hundreds of touchpoints consumers have with brands before making a purchase. Limited lookback attribution windows ignore the sometimes months consumers take to decide to buy. Especially in the context of an economic slowdown, customers don't stop buying products, but they do slow down their decision making timelines.

Focusing on specific costs per action obscures the research process that goes into buying, and hides the value of being top-of-mind when consumers are ready to purchase. A hyper-focus on direct performance misses the forest for the trees. Instead, smart brands need to:

Understand That Last Click Conversion Rates Aren't All There Is

Even in the best economic times, the single-touch or last-click attribution models fail to fully capture all of the touch-points. Really understanding how spend is contributing to sales often requires looking back two weeks or more. The higher the cost or complexity of a product, and the less essential it is to consumers, the longer their customer journey is likely to be.

Marketers need to review their data and identify how long a typical customer journey is and base channel and spend decisions on this timeframe, attributing spend across the entire journey to the final conversion. By focusing on the total journey, they may find that even high click/low conversion campaigns are an essential part of getting consumers to click that "Buy" button.

Monitor the Competition

Brands need to remember that during a downturn, competitors are going through the same crisis of confidence in performance marketing as they are. During a bad enough downturn, it can seem like the various exchanges and marketplaces look like a ghost town! But as everyone's parents told them at least once, "just because everyone is jumping off a bridge doesn't mean you should."

Instead, consider what happens to a vertical when a large number of brands pull out of performance advertising: ad volumes drop, rates get slashed, and exposure for the brands still left skyrockets. Brands in a position to maintain or even increase spending when everyone else is pulling out are in a strong position to capture significant new market share at significantly reduced rates. Or to put it even more simply, when a customer searches for a product and there's only one brand still advertising, that brand wins 100% of the time.

Scale With Performance

While shutting down campaigns that are still bringing in business might be a rash decision, performance marketing managers can find a happy medium in scaling their spend to current market conditions — both the market for their products and the marketplace for ad placements. As overall traffic decreases and competitors begin to pull out, ad rates drop to compensate. This allows marketers to slowly scale down their spending to match while retaining a roughly similar market share and stay in front of their target audience at the same frequency as before, only for a lower cost.

This approach allows for a compromise between tightening belts and maintaining the status quo of performance. It won't help brands power past competitors, but it will also keep them from losing ground.

Remember That Downturns Eventually Turn Up

Ninety-five percent of purchases are subconscious. Customers often turn to barely-remembered bits, jingles, and feelings of "I think I've seen that before" when they make purchasing decisions. So when they begin making purchases again after a period of restraint, the brands they pick will be the ones that have done the most to stick in their head. If that sounds like "brand awareness", it is. It's real, it's valuable, and it is the secret sauce that allows some brands to turn economic downturns into opportunities for explosive growth.

Because markets recover, panics subside, downturns turn up and decreased spending increases. Eventually, recessions end and consumers start spending money again, and it's often faster than many brands are ready for. The great recession of 2007, for example, only lasted 19 months — just about a year and a half. During those 19 months, consumers didn't stop having wants and needs. Rather, many of them simply postponed larger purchasing decisions, taking the time to research and understand the market they would eventually rejoin.

Car sales illustrate this important point perfectly — after a drop in 2008 and 2009, 2010 saw a huge jump that exceeded the strongest pre-recession year by over 10%. All that pent up demand needed to go somewhere, and it often went to the brands that had spent the most building brand equity while advertising rates were cheap and consumers weren't buying. The message is clear: companies that invest in building brand equity when others are pulling back win big when consumers start spending again.

Shifting from Offline to Online Events

One by one, from basketball leagues and international concerts to sprawling festivals, institutions have faced the same hard question: Is a public gathering worth the risk of spreading the new coronavirus?

The answer, again and again, has been "no."

So, what happens when an event that you planned on hosting, like a conference, tradeshow, or meetup, is canceled?

Take Your Event Virtual

In many cases, virtual events offer a lot of opportunities over offline and in-person meetups:

- They serve as an excellent lead-generating tool because people can easily participate in the event, no matter where they're located.
- They can reduce your cost per lead (CPL) and maximize your ROI. It's often more expensive to arrange traditional in-person events.
- They complement existing marketing strategies. Most in-person marketing tools are restricted by geography and behavior.

- They're an effective way to keep the consumer buying cycle alive because customers aren't restricted to a time or date — they can watch recorded footage at their convenience if they weren't able to make it.

Enhance the Virtual Event Experience

Here are some tips to ensure that your virtual experience can rival any offline event:

- Be transparent and communicate plans early. As soon as you make plans to shift from a physical experience to a virtual one, communicate this plan to your customers ASAP. Use this as an opportunity to gather feedback from customers on what they'd like to see in a virtual format.
- Set up a Slack channel where attendees can connect virtually both before and after your event. In the place of in-person interactions, it's essential to keep the connection flowing with consistent communication.
- Streamline your virtual agenda by condensing your virtual event into only the most important sessions.
- Incorporate interactive activities into the agenda, such as roulette-style meet-and-greets, polls, chat boxes, and supplementary content pieces.

Get Creative (and Scrappy)

As you can see from Betabrand's brilliant pivot, now is an opportune moment to boost engagement rates by hosting virtually. Maybe even create a community via a dedicated Slack channel to host events with your followers. Don't hesitate to think outside the box — one of the biggest perks of virtual events is that they aren't restricted by costs for decor or food. For instance, an apparel shop might host a virtual sip-and-shop where 21+ audience members meet online to enjoy a shared happy hour while viewing the season's newest trends. Before the event, they could run a series of promos to encourage potential attendees to visit the website.

Marketing Tools and Trials

While it may seem that finding marketing tools is the last thing on anyone's mind right now, it should be one of the first. As physical businesses are forced to close in response to the crisis, many companies are pivoting to new business models to retain existing customers and attract new ones.

For physical retail companies, this can be a fantastic catalyst for building out a more robust digital presence. Companies that don't currently have an e-commerce component can try out multiple platforms free of charge. Companies that have not invested in social marketing can get free access to professional social management suites. Brands that have not invested much in advertising can take advantage of decreased ad rates and increased access to free tools to begin their digital transformations.

To help small businesses deal with the upended economy, many established platforms and business software vendors are either giving away their products for free or offering extended free trial periods, often up to 90 days. Despite everything else going on, this is the best time to push into new terrain and try to not just survive but thrive.

HootSuite: The venerable social media management and marketing platform is offering free access to their professional level for small businesses and non-profit organizations until July 1, 2020. Hootsuite is one of the gold-standard social media platforms and is worth trying out for companies that have been manually updating their Instagram and Facebook feeds.

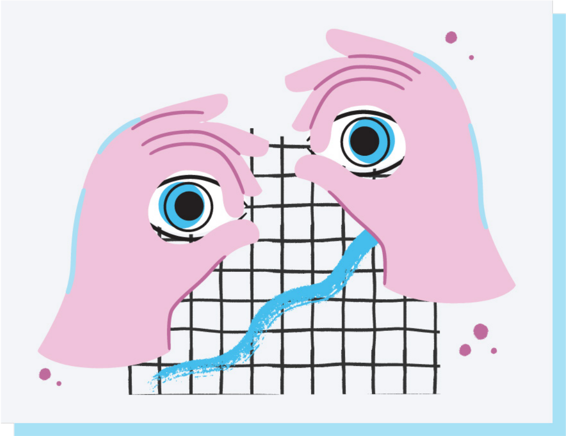
In addition to the free professional plan, the company has produced a number of getting started videos that can help newbies jump on and start managing their social media like a pro quickly and easily.

Shopify: One of the most popular e-commerce platforms for small businesses, Shopify is offering a 90-day free trial for all new customers. The platform allows any business to quickly and easily build out an online storefront, with no coding required (unless you really want to!) The company is also making gift card sales available on all accounts, so even service businesses can take advantage of additional e-commerce cash flow while their physical locations are closed.

In addition to quick and easy online store-fronts, Shopify is also providing funding via their Shopify Capital program, and multiple webinars and live training and information events.

Apple Final Cut Pro X: Looking to take your video production to the next level? Apple is giving away 90 day free trials of their incredibly popular production software. This is especially useful to companies looking to use video as a primary means of communication with customers and clients during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hundreds of business software companies are giving away some kind of free access or trial to those affected by COVID-19. You can find additional software offers here, here, and here.



Pivoting Marketing Strategies by Vertical

In this section, we highlight the top opportunities for the following industries during the coronavirus: online education, home and garden, health and fitness, and finance.

Online Education

It goes without saying that teachers and professors weren't prepared for a global crisis that would require a pivot toward virtual learning. "Surprised" is probably an understatement — schools and institutions around the world are shutting down at a rapid rate in an attempt to contain the coronavirus outbreak. It's no surprise, then, that MarketWatch has dubbed this time as "online education's moment" — a time where this particular industry can help minimize educational disruption.

This also sheds light on other education sectors that have been online for a while — Udemy, for example, offers online classes aimed at professional adults and students. Then there's Duolingo, a language-learning platform, and Masterclass, which provides courses covering everything from cooking and writing to acting and photography. In a situation where most people are confined to their homes with nowhere to go but the web, now is prime time for any online education brand to make a positive impact.

Think about it — you're not bound to supply chain disruptions or manufacturing woes; the internet is already familiar territory. It's time to use this advantage to provide an outlet for others to learn and blow steam through engaging in hobbies.

The Ideal Time for Brand Awareness Campaigns

It's true that during times of economic uncertainty, people are more careful about spending money. Many brands are aware of this, so they've reduced their paid media spend. While it's tempting to follow the same train of thought, consider thinking of it this way: As ad inventory increases (more people spending more time online) and competition and allocated marketing budgets potentially decrease, inventory becomes cheaper.

What this means is that with more people online and more spaces to place ads, it'll be less expensive to stand out. Now is the ideal time to reach new people with brand awareness campaigns — since the first coronavirus reports, we've seen cost per thousand impressions (CPM) decrease by 15% across our networks.

Don't underestimate the power of first interactions with customers. By creating brand awareness and connecting with customers, you have the opportunity to increase customer lifetime value (CLV) and decrease customer acquisition costs (CAC). Essentially, you'll be top-of-mind with consumers when they are ready to make a purchase.

Shift Your Focus to Customer Retention

In addition to people who aren't familiar with your brand, you should also focus on building brand loyalty. Yes, it's essential to plant new seeds, but you also have to take care of your existing garden. Your customers are your most valuable asset — it's more expensive to acquire a new customer than it is to keep one. Here are a few ways to maintain customer retention during hard-hitting times:

- **If you haven't already, build a customer loyalty program.** Think about providing VIP support, free training sessions or webinars, and access to premium features for your most loyal customers.
- **Increase your customer service resources.** During these uncertain times, it's natural for customers to reach out more than usual to ask questions around their subscriptions, etc. Provide additional avenues for them to reach out to your team, such as a live chat option via your website or social media channels.
- **Practice gratitude and empathy.** Your brand wouldn't be where it is today without your customers. With that in mind, it's essential to infuse gratitude and empathy into all of your business decisions. For example, if you're seeing that customers are trying to cancel their memberships or subscriptions due to financial reasons, you can provide an option for them to press pause without any charges. Or, you could even extend their subscription an additional month for free or simply send a heart-felt note thanking them for their business.

Align Your Strategy to Best Reach Potential Customers

When it comes to your retargeting strategy, it's important to be smart with segmentation so that your marketing dollars are spent efficiently. For example, you could target specific site segments or upload CRM lists and have ads that focus on high-value courses to maximize cash flow in the short-term.

It may also be worth it to look into lapsed signups — reach out to people who may have signed up a year or so ago to reengage them and remind them of new classes or package offerings.

Ways to Pivot and Keep Customers Engaged

In the current state of the world, people have a lot on their minds. It's vital to be mindful of this, and think of your marketing strategies in the context of, "How can I help my customers? How can I reduce their anxiety?" It can be difficult to straddle the line between being compassionate and keeping afloat, but you'll find that sweet spot by being creative and taking note of other brands' innovative approaches.

Offer a freemium version. As mentioned earlier, people are hesitant to spend. A freemium plan is an excellent strategy to consider because it's a cross between "free" and "premium" — people are getting your core features at no cost and can choose to increase functionality by paying the subscription fee.

Repackage useful content. Sharing free, helpful content builds great word of mouth and value during times of hardship. A great idea is repurposing online courses into helpful blog posts or social media tips. Or, if your primary audience is K-12 students, you can create downloadable worksheets to enhance their learning experience.

Think outside the box with your messaging. People are cooped up indoors, and their regular lives are severely disrupted — they can't go to their favorite restaurants, painting sessions, or hip hop classes, but they can take an online course for cooking, painting, or dancing. They can find alternative versions of their usual hobbies and end up falling in love with them. Children and teens may not have access to their tutoring classes anymore, but they can take supplementary online courses to fill this gap. The key when pivoting your message is to identify peoples' current pain points and solving them. Ask yourself, again and again, like a mantra: "How can my brand help? How can it fill a need during these challenging times?"

Home and Garden

While it may seem like an irrelevant time for the home and garden industry, this isn't so — as more people are spending time indoors, they're looking to make the best of an unusual situation.

Think about it this way: People can't return to their work offices, so they'll need to build a makeshift one at home. They can't take as many walks in the park, so they'll want to spruce up their space with plants. And since they're not allowed to leisurely sit at a restaurant, they'll require the equipment to whip up their own fancy dinners. Now is the time for home and garden brands to help restore a sense of normalcy to peoples' lives, starting with their homes.

First Step: Shift Your Thinking

When confidence in the economy is shaken, consumers are extra-careful with their spending. With this in mind, you may be thinking that the last thing people need is a sofa or a desk. It doesn't help that home and garden supplies are generally browsed and bought in-store because there's less risk of making a return.

Well, newsflash: Other brands are thinking the same thing, too. And with this train of thought, more brands are reducing their paid media spend, opening up more spaces to place ads. While this tidbit isn't particularly inspiring at first glance, pivot your thinking into this: More people online + more spaces to place ads = it'll be easier and less expensive to stand out.

The Time Is Ripe for Brand Awareness Campaigns

Since the first coronavirus reports, we've found that cost per thousand impressions (CPM) have decreased by 15% across our networks. This means that even with modest budgets, your reach can increase exponentially. And as mentioned earlier, home and garden supplies aren't things that are bought lightly — these purchases require a certain level of thought and financial commitment. Brand awareness campaigns are designed to get in front of people as they're building up to take the plunge. By consistently staying top-of-mind with consumers, you'll be their go-to brand once they're ready to make the purchase.

Make a Point to Build Customer Loyalty

When it comes to building customer loyalty, it might be a little more challenging for home and garden brands. Why? Because more often than not, they're big-ticket items such as furniture or power tools. The consensus is that when the buying cycle is longer, customers aren't likely to return for a repeat purchase.

However, this is a critical time to emphasize customer retention because it's more costly to acquire a new customer than it is to keep one. Reach out to past customers to reengage them and remind them of new discounts and product offerings. Suggest complementary items that go well with their past purchases — for instance, if they bought a chair, perhaps they'll want a matching ottoman next.

Also, consider providing customer loyalty programs or a VIP model to shorten the buying cycle. An excellent example is Costco's Executive Membership Program. It costs a one-time fee of $110 to become a member, and from then on, members get a 2% reward on all Costco purchases. Or, you could offer a significant discount for every third purchase made or a points-based system where customers can receive a selection of free products.

Navigating Supply Chain Woes

The rapid spread of the coronavirus is shutting down factories and compromising supply chains across the world. This is a nightmare for many brands, as they work in tandem with manufacturers overseas. So, what do you do when your supply chain is compromised for the time being?

The first step is to be transparent with your customers. Send an email or submit a proactive press release in which you explain the situation, admit fault, and tell your customers how you'll make it up to them. By clearly managing their expectations, customers are less likely to hold a situation that's out of your control against you.

Next, conduct a thorough audit of your inventory. Run a promotion on secondary products such as plant food or sofa covers, or clear out the rest of your inventory by discounting excess items.

Other Ways to Pivot (and Keep the Spark)

During this challenging time, it's not just consumer behavior that changes — it's their priorities, too. So, how do you help your customers while also keeping afloat? A few ways include:

Discounts: Discounts are a surefire way to grab consumers' attention. Big-ticket items are considered "big" for a reason — they're highly expensive, so people will notice when the price drops. As a bonus, include free shipping for all items or even a discount voucher for the next purchase. Be mindful of what people can and can't afford.

Creative messaging: Ditch your old messaging — under these circumstances, something along the lines of, "Modernize your home's style" won't cut it. Instead, think about what your customers need right now and update your copy accordingly. A couple of examples:

- They're working from home, so they'll need a comfortable office space.
  - Ex. "Office Gear to Help You WFH Comfortably"
- They're cooped up inside and aren't exposed to as much nature as they'd like.
  - Ex. "Bring Nature Indoors"

Useful content: Post helpful content that's relevant to current events on your social media channels and blog. For instance, "Inside a Lot? Clean Indoor Air With Plants," or "Ways to Make Your WFH Space Ergonomic."

Health and Fitness

The coronavirus isn't just a massive blow to the health and fitness industry; it's also bad news for fitness enthusiasts who look forward to exercising as a way to blow off steam, release endorphins, and stay healthy. However, both consumers and brands are rising to the challenge — people are finding ways to work out from home, rolling out yoga mats, and using household items to create makeshift gym gear (water bottles as weights, anyone?). Health and fitness brands are pivoting hard, switching up their messaging, and whipping up new methods of engagement while their patrons are in quarantine.

The ingenuity presented by both consumers and brands is a testament to just how necessary fitness is during these uncertain times, whether it's offline or online.

Question of the Day: What Do People Need?

The coronavirus has brought on a sharp distinction between "essential" and "non-essential" shops and products. While the gym is considered non-essential, it's becoming more apparent that staying fit is a critical component of maintaining a sense of normalcy. People are cooped up indoors, their usual routines are shattered, and for many, the anxiety around the virus is downright crippling.

So as a marketer, ask yourself what your customers need. Of course, there are the bare basics, such as food, but your customers also need a way to blow off steam. And as a health and fitness brand, it's your job to provide alternative avenues for your customers to stay healthy.

Now Is The Time to Get in Front of Customers

During periods of economic turmoil, people are less likely to spend freely and are more prone to saving. Because of this, a significant amount of brands have paused, reduced, or stopped their media spend all together. While their hesitancy makes sense, it's essential for you to:

a.) Consider how your brand is critical to many people at this time

and,

b.) Pivot your thinking to recognize that more people online + more spaces to place ads = a less costly way to catch the eye.

In fact, our team has discovered that since the first coronavirus reports, cost per thousand impressions (CPM) have decreased by 15% across our networks. And while it's easy to dismiss brand awareness campaigns as ineffective, remember that many people are currently searching for a gym substitute, health supplements, etc. — why not stay top-of-mind with them until they're ready to dive all in? Keep in mind that familiar breeds trust — brand awareness efforts can help increase customer lifetime value (CLV) and decrease customer acquisition costs (CAC).

Solidify Brand Loyalty

Gyms are known for their loyalty programs — but how do you extend that virtually? A few ways of doing this include:

- **Keeping members informed:** Always keep your customers up to date on the latest company news. In this case, if gyms are closed for the foreseeable future, let them know ASAP — tell them that their memberships are automatically paused, and then offer alternative fitness avenues. Or, if your fitness shop is only available online, you could offer discounts and free shipping for your products.
- **Ramping up customer service:** It's essential to be available to your customers whenever they need you. This is particularly true in the midst of uncertain times — whether it's through phone calls, social media, or live chatbots, be sure to respond to people within 2 4 hours.
- **Offering external resources:** As a health and fitness brand, you probably have an incredible amount of information at your fingertips. Share articles you've found useful or address questions you've heard.

Ways to (Virtually) Switch Up Your Marketing Strategy

The health and fitness space is crowded, so it's crucial to not only sell your products but to provide an attractive lifestyle and culture, as well. But, how do you go about doing this virtually? Here are a few tips:

Get creative with your messaging. Switch up your messaging and address current events. Instead of just describing how important maintaining fitness is, talk about why maintaining fitness is especially important when you can't stick to your regular routines. Or, if you're a fitness clothing brand, talk about the importance of comfortable clothes when working from home.

Take advantage of social media. As mentioned earlier, people all over the world are starting to get creative with their in-house workout routines. Encourage your members and followers to post videos of their workouts and reshare them on your social media accounts. Remember to always give credit where it's due (and fun, motivating captions are a plus, too!).

If possible, keep your audience engaged by conducting a weekly live stream workout session that people can sign up for. For instance, Nike hosts a weekly community workout live stream that's available for free on YouTube.

Create a virtual community. For a lot of people, it's not just about being fit and the feel-good endorphins; it's about the friendships from the gym community, too. The group classes are more fun when taken with your friends, and the stationary bike is definitely more entertaining with someone by your side. With this in mind, consider creating an online community via a dedicated Slack channel. This way, people can interact with another, share their tips and workout videos, and combat the loneliness of isolation. Ask daily questions, solicit progress stories, host monthly contests — the list of virtual activities is endless.

Provide helpful content. The realm of health and fitness is ripe with opportunities for all kinds of content. You could offer blog posts and social media campaigns that touch on fitness and health topics.

Finance

The coronavirus outbreak has industries across the globe in disarray, and the financial industry is no exception. This includes fintech, banking, and insurance. In the case of fintech, consumers are leaning toward safer investments, which could negatively impact VC funding. With banking, social distancing has forced many branches to either close or limit access, and the insurance sector is being challenged to update their crisis management plans and take steps to continue operations.

There are many moving parts to consider when it comes to these three sectors; however, there are certain marketing elements that remain true across the board during these uncertain times. Let's explore how finance brands can pivot their strategies by focusing on brand marketing and customer retention efforts.

Place Emphasis on Brand Marketing

Compared to other industries, finance might not be considered as compelling. But guess what? The concept of finance might not be, but achieving and maintaining financial health is — it's just that very few consumers want to take action right now. People are prone to putting off non-urgent financial matters to tomorrow, next week, or even a year from now. So, how do you convince people to act during such challenging times?

The answer is by anticipating customers' current needs and placing emphasis on brand marketing efforts in the following ways:

Switch up your messaging

Rather than pushing for immediate conversions, switch up your messaging and talk about how your brand can help. According to Carrie Parker, VP of Marketing at Valassis, this is a time when brands have a lot of "opportunity to deliver real-time assurance, a feeling of connection." When changing up your messaging and copy, think about the three elements of value for consumers during a global crisis. Does your brand offer services or products that can help lessen anxiety, reduce risks, and provide some sense of safety and belonging?

And remember that your brand's voice doesn't have to be serious all the time. For most people, the topic of finance is a jargon-filled nightmare. When delivering information about credit cards, etc., or any other dense topic, it's important to stay light and relatable. For instance, you can refine your brand's tone and voice so that when customers read your ads and copy, they'll think that they're speaking to a friend.

Increase brand awareness efforts

It's a given that during a global crisis, people are more careful about their money. Other companies are aware of this and are reducing their paid media spend. While this doesn't seem like the most inspiring news, consider this: We've seen cost per thousand impressions (CPM) decrease by 15% across our networks. Add this to the fact that more people than ever are looking to get into a place where their finances are stable. All of this begs the question: Why not stay top-of-mind with customers with brand awareness campaigns?

After all, there are now more spaces to place ads, and it's less expensive to stand out. Brand awareness efforts also help you increase customer lifetime value (CLV) and decrease customer acquisition costs (CAC).

Offer helpful (and standout) content

We mention "standout" content because let's be honest — your favorite blogs and social media posts probably aren't from banks. Developing content for finance brands can be a little more challenging — the actual content of financial marketing is usually similar from institution to institution, and you're not showing off "fun" products and services, such as clothes or travel packages.

However, with some pivoting and creativity, finance content can be useful and entertaining. Think about industry information that your customers would need most right now. For example, Nerdwallet recently teamed up with their internal experts to publish a blog post called "Experts' Tips on Handling Finances During Coronavirus." They also sent an expert to speak to NPR in a segment called, "Personal Finance Advice For The Coronavirus Crisis." Put yourself in your customers' shoes when creating content, and think outside the box when it comes to distribution.

Zone In On Customer Retention Efforts

To succeed during these turbulent times, financial brands have to invest in customer retention, which means providing more than just financial services. As fintech brands like Venmo and Stripe become more people-centric and expand their services and offerings, all financial services companies need to keep up by improving communications strategies with customers.

To go above and beyond:

- **Personalize your marketing.** Use advances in technology, data, and analytics to create a more "human" experience for your customers.

- **Practice empathy.** Build trust by adapting to the changing needs of the customer. For example, many banks are offering relief measures for bills, such as waived fees and deferment options for payment.

- **Adopt a more specific and personal communication with customers.** A recent study conducted by Victanis showed that more than two in five financial services customers say they rarely or never receive relevant marketing communications from financial services companies they've used. Consider this is an excellent opportunity to incorporate email marketing into your strategies.

How to Approach COVID-19 Messaging

In fast-moving and uncertain situations, many companies face questions they may not have answers to. In this section, we give you pointers on how to communicate with your customers during a global crisis.

The Dos and Don'ts

As with any emerging crisis, there isn't a template or hard set of rules that every business needs to follow to communicate with customers. However, there are some dos and some don'ts around talking to your customers about the novel coronavirus and how it'll affect your business.

DO put out a statement if your business or your customers are going to be impacted by the novel coronavirus directly or as a result of preventative measures being put in place by local and national governments.

It's hard to think of companies that won't be impacted by the pandemic, but just in case it's important for brands to answer the question: "Will this statement help my customers understand how my products or services will be changing in response to the pandemic, or will it help explain how these changes might impact them?”

DON’T send a statement just for the sake of sending a statement. Even aside from the general recommendation for not filling customer inboxes and newsfeeds with clutter, it’s especially important to avoid this behavior during a crisis.

Brands need to remember that this is a time when many people will be anxiously waiting for important information, or trying to get in touch with friends and family. Anything that clutters their lives without adding value is very likely to give them a negative impression of the sender — one that may be difficult to overcome later.

DO give clear and to-the-point information that the customer needs to carry out transactions with the sender.

For restaurants and groceries, this may be an update on cleaning protocols and food safety. For service companies, this could be an update on remote work availability and any delays or cancellations in service. For retailers, it may be updates on the availability of products and shipping updates. In any case, it’s important to be as specific and clear as possible with what steps you’re taking in response to the outbreak and what this means for customers.

DON’T offer vague reassurances or be unclear about the processes or precautions being put into place.

Brands that don’t have a clear or well-defined set of procedures for reacting to COVID-19 should concentrate on figuring those out before sending out a message to customers. Don’t rush into it, take your time, and think about the different edge cases. Companies should also fight the urge to offer vague platitudes or reassurances. During a crisis, customers don't want to hear these messages — they're looking for concrete, actionable steps that companies they buy from are taking.

DO remember that this is a global health crisis that'll affect hundreds of thousands to millions of people, some of them much more severely than others. There have already been thousands of deaths, and it's likely to increase.

Any messaging put out needs to be compassionate and understanding that this pandemic isn't simply an inconvenience or a disruption to meeting goals. The novel coronavirus outbreak is a serious, global crisis that'll have a major impact on the lives of millions, and on the very way the world does business and operates. Your messaging should give a nod to the seriousness of the situation, not brush over it or avoid it.

DON'T use this as a marketing opportunity or try to otherwise profit off of the novel coronavirus.

Remember that COVID-19 isn't a trending hashtag that brands can attach themselves to. This isn't a chance to pitch a new campaign. This isn't the time for "going viral" puns. This is a serious crisis affecting very many people. Don't use the novel coronavirus as a marketing opportunity.

If you want to create a positive campaign or show solidarity around a positive trend happening, that's fine, but consider your audience and ensure it's what represents their goals and ideals as well — you don't want to create polarizing events by bandwagoning.

DO tailor messaging to who will be reading it and remember that tone and content needs to reflect the audience and the purpose of the message.

Not all messaging is customer-facing. Especially during large-scale crises like this one, there's a need to inform employees, board members, shareholders, vendors, contractors, and partners about what's going on. These messages all have slightly different purposes, and need to be approached from different directions. But also remember that many people might fall into multiple groups, or that a message sent to shareholders might get out and get in the hands of customers. Compose statements bearing in mind that it's difficult to control who the final reader ends up being.

DON'T broadcast the same message to everyone, regardless of their relationship with the brand.

Customers don't need to know how the novel coronavirus might negatively impact Q2 earnings, just like shareholders don't necessarily need to know that a brand is changing their cleaning procedure to minimize risk of spreading disease. Sending out a one-size-fits-all message runs the risk of giving too much information, or not enough. It can make companies sound too uncaring if it's overly down to business, or too unserious if it's overly sentimental without enough hard numbers. Audience matters and all messaging needs to be tied to the right audience.

DO send out updates as often as is needed to convey important information. If something has changed, and audiences need to be aware of it, it's time for an update.

There isn't a right or wrong amount of communication for handling a rapidly-changing situation like the novel coronavirus epidemic. Things can happen overnight that might dramatically change a brand's ability to serve customers — offices might close, whole cities might be placed under quarantine, products might run out or be restocked. If a change is major enough that it might seriously impact customers, it may be time for a new update. If multiple updates can be bundled together without hurting customers, that might be an even better option.

Soul Cycle did a great job at this by creating a landing page where they gave daily updates on the precautions they were taking in each of their 99 studios — from limiting certain items in the bathrooms to cutting class sizes in half, and more. Not all updates have to be mighty — even a small note as things change or progress in real-time is the best way to make your customers feel like they have the most updated information, and that you have their back.

DON'T send updates just for the sake of sending updates.

If the message that's going out is fundamentally unchanged from the message that went out yesterday, it may be better to not send it. Quantity should never take the place of quality — not only can it frustrate and annoy recipients, it runs the risk of getting communications spammed or ignored, making it much less likely that customers will see any truly important updates that go out later.

DO communicate tips, best practices, health advice, and critical information only **if you're qualified to do so, or if you're getting the information from a reliable source.**

It's impossible to stress how important hand washing and social distancing are, no matter how many companies repeat those points. Including these tips or news from the WHO or CDC or other trusted health organizations in company messages is always helpful. However, it's also important to note that if all the message is doing is rehashing information found elsewhere, it might not be important enough to send out.

DON'T spread rumors, include unproven information, or repeat unsourced and unverified claims.

Misinformation in the face of a global crisis like this is incredibly dangerous, and can result in people making poor decisions that lead to injury or even death. Please don't spread any information that isn't verified.

Before Hitting Send

Ultimately, the most important advice about messaging during a crisis like the novel coronavirus is that it's more important than ever to edit communications. Brands need to seriously weigh the impact of any statement made, and decide on a case-by-case basis whether that statement needs to go out or not.

This is a very personal decision, and the answer will depend on the brand, the message, the audience, and the news being communicated. If you find yourself writing something because you feel pressured or because you're hoping to get a reaction, take a step back and think about what you want to achieve. Your communication should be thoughtful and clear — not perfect — but well thought out and true to you and your brand. Following this list of dos and don'ts isn't a guarantee of getting a great reception, but it'll certainly decrease the risk of getting a poor one.

Communicating on Social Media

Let's explore how to put together a strategy that strikes the right tone for your brand and audience. We'll take you through each step with tips, questions, and recommendations to help you come out of this with a custom social media strategy that fits your situation.

Why Is Social Media Important in a Crisis Like COVID-19?

Let's take a look at some data points to see.

- According to eMarketer, Facebook saw a 70% increase in usage of all of its apps in the month of March. People are turning to these apps to keep them entertained, connected and informed while they're spending more time at home.
- Many marketers are pulling back spend in all areas, including social media, but engagement and turning to methods like email and social media to continue to build a brand and engage customers
- People are turning to different channels for different content. For instance, TikTok and Snapchat have been sources of fun, entertaining distraction during this time. Snapchat saw a 47% increase in usage from Android phones in South Korea during the height of the outbreak in March.

These are just a few of the data points that make it clear that now is an opportune time for marketers to double-down on social media with the purpose of building relationships with new and existing customers. That doesn't mean that anything goes, however. Now, more than ever, it's important for brands to approach all of their marketing, social media included, in an intentional way.

Whether you're just exploring social media or you're experienced but trying to navigate this new world, the steps below will guide you to the right solution.

Know Your Audience

This is always a critical piece of any kind of marketing at any time, but it's most critical during times of crisis like this. Marketing relies heavily on empathy, which in turn relies on an understanding of the people you're trying to talk to.

If you've been marketing your brand for a while, you might be tempted to skip this step. You already know your customer, right? Maybe, but do you know them in their current state? Are there additional audience opportunities that you haven't assessed that you could test now?

It doesn't matter who you are — now is an excellent time to take a step back and re-acquaint yourself with your ideal customers. Here's how:

- **Identify the basic information:** Answer questions such as age, location, gender, basic interests, income level, etc. Once you have a basic outline of a profile, go further and ask yourself, "So what?" and "What does this mean?"
- **Find out what your customer is thinking and feeling now.** Do some research, check in with influencers that target your customers, and do what you need to do to put yourself in your customers' shoes. Are they now dealing with working from home? Are they trying to keep kids busy now that schools are closed? Are they trying to stay fit and healthy while in quarantine?
- **Take those answers and take a step back.** Zoom out and forget everything you've done before and everything you thought you knew about your customer. Are there any new opportunities to share your product in different ways with different people? How can you pivot to meet the needs of your customers right now?

This deep knowledge of your customer will set the tone for everything you do, during a crisis like COVID-19 and even beyond. The relationships you build through effectively knowing and meeting customer needs will endure long after the crisis is gone.

Focus Less on You, More on Them

Look, I get it. You're a business and you absolutely have to make money to survive. I'm not suggesting that you forget that entirely. I am suggesting (firmly) that the middle of a global pandemic might not be the best time to focus on the KPIs you've always held dear. Definitely don't discard them altogether, they'll move back toward the top of your list eventually, but it's in your best interest to assess what success looks like now, versus what it looked like before. Here's how that might play out:

- **Before:** ROI is king.
- **Now:** ROI is important, but engagement metrics like clicks, likes, shares, comments, etc. are better gauges right now while people may not be as willing to buy.

- **Before:** You measure and report on the important metrics month-over-month and year-over-year.
- **Now:** We all know they're not going to tell the full story. Sure, keep reporting that way, but present and preserve your data with caveats, comments, and non-KPI success stories.

- **Before:** If something (a contest, a video, partnerships, referral campaigns) doesn't provide the right ROI, it's time to move on.
- **Now:** It's time to double-check those assumptions. Sure, a contest, partnership or piece of content might not have performed according to your KPIs previously, but don't let that hold you back from revisiting it in the current climate.

Those are just a few examples, but you can see how revisiting your success metrics might lead you to some new and interesting opportunities. The ultimate goal right now is to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with new and current customers. People may not be in the right position or mood to buy right now (depending on your product), but they will be again eventually. Put yourself in the position to be their first stop as soon as they are able to open their wallets and buying behavior gets back to normal.

You're also setting the stage for your post-COVID-19 strategy. I think we can all agree that this crisis will change things, some of them forever. That definitely applies to marketing. The things you do now could lead to insights, campaign ideas, and strategies that last long after this is all over.

Explore New Things

If you have been wanting to expand your strategy to Snapchat, now is the time to dig in and go for it. If you're not sure how to use Instagram stories but you think it might resonate, now is the time to try. If you're not looking for new channels, but you're curious to see how your customers would react to different kinds of content, more frequent posting or other creative engagement methods, go for it! Now is the time to look for any and all ways to build relationships with your customers.

Not sure where to start? Here are a few ideas:

- **Experiment with new types of content like video.** It doesn't need to be (and in certain situations probably can't be) professionally produced, but a video from an internal expert or influencer showing a hands-on demo of your product could go a long way.
- **Try some of the functionality that platforms have introduced for engagement like polls on Instagram or Facebook.** You can use them to directly benefit you by soliciting product feedback or you can use them purely to entertain your audience.
- **Spend more time listening.** Keep an eye on comments on your post, your competitors, and influencers in your industry.
- **Get your customers engaged with calls for user-generated content.** Whether it's a call for photos or videos of your product in use, or you want to do something purely for entertainment and engagement, customers with more time on their hands who are spending more time online are more likely to engage with you.

No matter what direction you choose, now is the time to explore, look for new opportunities and set the stage for better, more engaged customer interactions now and in the future. While these efforts may not lead to a direct increase in purchases right away, they'll help you stand out, stay in touch and be a source of inspiration, entertainment, and information for your customers.

Expect Uncertainty

No one can give you an accurate prediction of what the immediate future holds for brands and marketers. We know that this crisis will end eventually and we know that, right now at least, there's a lot of uncertainty on a variety of fronts. As such, we can't plan as far into the future as we would have before. We need to be nimble and agile in our approaches and able to pivot to the next thing at any moment. If your organization is already functioning this way, congratulations! You're in a good position. If not, now is as good of a time as any to start.

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **You need to get rid of the baggage that's weighing you down.** I'm talking about the tools you use that serve only one purpose, don't provide the full customer picture and make extra work to get the insights you need.
- **Getting it right is important, but perfection shouldn't stand in the way of getting something done.** Whether that's the words you use in a particular post or a full campaign, make sure you're moving quickly and efficiently, now more than ever.
- **Evaluate your group of stakeholders and how you communicate with them.** Are there better ways to communicate? Are there too many proverbial cooks in the kitchen?
- **How can you stay on top of trends, customer sentiment, and feedback?** Dedicate some time to this on a regular basis and find ways

to gather and track those insights.

Most importantly, don't let the uncertainty stop you from taking action and being present for your customers. There are opportunities to connect and even drive purchases during this time for the brands who are ready, available and active.

Your customers are looking for ways to be social, to connect with others and even to be distracted from everything that's going on. Social media is the perfect platform for brands to engage with customers in this way and create opportunities for now and into the future.

Supply Chain and Manufacturing

When faced with a black swan event, like COVID-19, supply and demand are thrown into disarray. In this section, we go over how to navigate supply chains amid a crisis and provide manufacturing resources to help plug the gap.

Navigating Supply Chains in a Crisis

In the new reality of COVID-19, the full effects on the supply chain are yet to be seen. Here are several tactics that companies can use to proactively manage supply and demand and ward off some of the potential consequences:

Monitor the Situation Closely

In the current #CoronaCrisis, the area of business hardest hit is the supply chain, and no company is left unaffected. Even global giant Apple is forecasting a 10% reduction in iPhone shipments in Q1. Given the heavy reliance on Chinese manufacturers, the majority of consumer goods companies have been or will be severely affected by factory closures and slowed production. Furthermore, the crisis situation is highly volatile, changing from hour to hour depending on the country and even the city in which the supplier is located.

For supply chain managers, this increases the need to monitor the situation and the supply chain closely and in real-time. Analyze both short-term and long-term demand predictions and how much inventory is required to cover them. This will build a foundation for a supply and demand forecast, which can then be adapted as necessary as the situation changes. Digital inventory management systems and supply chain management technologies are vital tools that aggregate data from across the supply network, helping managers create accurate predictions based on the situation on the ground. A survey from October 2019 shows that the majority of companies worldwide have already implemented or are piloting the use of emerging technologies for supply chain management, which is encouraging.

Monitor Inventory Smartly

One way to build resilience in a crisis is to create redundancy in the supply chain. For example, companies can increase their inventory, contract with multiple suppliers, or hire backup staff to cover themselves in unpredictable circumstances. While it is wise to create an inventory cushion to get through temporary bumps and delays, it's important not to go overboard, as redundancy is costly and isn't always the guarantee it seems to be. This is especially true during an ongoing crisis whose end is unclear or not yet in sight.

For example, people who stocked up on hand sanitizer at the start of the pandemic, hoping to profit from it later, ran into strict price gouging regulations on major e-commerce platforms like eBay and Amazon. Not only were they not able to sell their inventory at inflated prices, they weren't even able to turn a profit on the products they had purchased and ended up losing money on the goods they had stockpiled.

Create "What-If" Scenarios and Contingency Plans

With the situation changing at a rapid pace, the future is far from clear. The way to manage the supply chain within this uncertainty is to develop a range of theoretical "what-if" scenarios and map out the actions necessary for each. Imagine the best-case and worst-case scenarios that could occur. For example, if the crisis were to pass within two months, the contingency plan would look very different than a forecast of six months.

Creating effective contingency plans requires analysis of the information garnered from the current status of the supply chain. How much inventory is stored in reserve and how long will it last? Are the suppliers located in affected areas in China? How much inventory is sourced from factories that have shut down or slowed output? It is important to communicate openly with current suppliers to build a workable plan to suit both parties. Decide which suppliers are most critical to maintaining inventory, and find out whether they can ensure supply and for how long. If necessary, start looking for backup suppliers who can fill the gaps that may arise.

During episodes of panic buying, there may be a need to reduce demand or spread it out over a longer period. Explore ways to do this, such as suspending promotions, limiting the number of items, and pacing the availability of products in-store.

Build Flexibility Into the Supply Chain Wherever Possible

A flexible supply chain is capable of responding quickly to changes in the market and fluctuations in demand. However, a black swan event is outside the realm of the normal shifts expected in supply and demand. It calls for a level of flexibility in all aspects of the supply chain, which means having several options and backup plans for manufacturing, transportation, warehousing, and distribution.

Besides disruptions to the supply chain from the manufacturing side, there have also been huge changes in consumer behavior as well. This is due to the large numbers of people worldwide who are in isolation at home, closures of cafes, restaurants, and malls, as well as millions of businesses worldwide that have implemented work-from-home policies. This has led to a massive increase in demand for home deliveries, particularly "contactless" deliveries, designed to reduce the risk of spreading the virus. Companies that are flexible enough to expand or adapt their delivery capabilities will maximize their ability to meet demand.

Maximize Productivity

"It takes 2,500 parts to build a car, but only one not to." This comment by a former supply chain strategist at Tesla highlights just how vulnerable the supply chain can be. Maintaining maximum productivity of the supply chain is critical to a company's ability to meet demand, particularly in a time of volatile crisis. Two critical elements to the supply chain are parts and people, and both need extra attention in a crisis.

According to a Dun and Bradstreet analysis, 92% of U.S. companies have tier 1 suppliers located in the regions of China affected by COVID-19. Moreover, many company executives are not aware of the source of components below tier 1, which can cause unknown disturbances that are difficult to trace or plan for in advance. When a crisis hits, there may be little time to spare in backtracking missing details and parts. It is critical that managers and decision-makers have a thorough grasp of every loop in the supply chain in order to ensure the highest possible level of productivity at all times.

Effective supply and demand management is reliant on a productive workforce. Many companies are facing shortages of staff due to quarantine rules or school closures that leave parents without childcare and prevent them from being able to attend work. Other companies, such as supermarkets and e-commerce brands, are facing skyrocketing demand, with not enough manpower to handle it. This has led to an increase in temporary workers who need to learn quickly on the job. In fact, Amazon is reported to be hiring 100,000 temporary staff to cover massive demand increases. It is vital to have a solid onboarding program in place to help acclimate new workers and maintain smooth productivity even during the most challenging crisis and unusually high demand.

Take Precautions for Employee Safety and Wellbeing

The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted the ways that people interact with one another — in public places and in the workplace. The public health order to maintain social distancing and limit the numbers at gatherings means that people are no longer congregating in malls, attending celebrations or parties, and are encouraged to stay home. In workplaces, this has led to remote working, shift working to reduce contact between employees, and maintaining distances of six feet between staff members. There is also the issue of "stranded employees", those who were visiting regions of the world where the virus broke out and now are not permitted to return to work until after a period of isolation. This can take a toll on the employee workforce, both physically and emotionally, which can have detrimental effects on the management of supply and demand.

Managers should put staff safety and wellbeing at the top of their priority list. This means acquiring necessary protective equipment, such as protective suits, masks, and gloves, and it also means providing moral support. Staff who are unable to meet in person can connect via video conferencing, work schedules can be accommodated for employees with families at home, and managers can regularly check in with staff to ensure they have everything they need to keep working efficiently and comfortably. When considering supply and demand, it is easy to imagine the products. However, the people are just as critical, especially during a period of vulnerability and uncertainty.

The coronavirus outbreak of 2020 is unprecedented in the modern world. Despite the nonstop media coverage, expert commentary, forecasts, and predictions, no one knows for sure exactly how the situation will pan out, nor what the ramifications will be for local and global economies. Companies must face each day with a commitment to closely monitor changes in supply and demand as they occur, adapt contingency plans with agility, maximize flexibility and productivity in the supply chain, and focus on employee wellbeing during uncertain times. By following these key principles, businesses can optimize their approach to supply and demand and greatly increase their chances of overcoming the black swan.

Manufacturing Resources for Plugging Supply Chain Gaps

Companies must have the capacity to respond quickly to gaps in the supply chain so they can continue to deliver goods and services no matter what this crisis throws their way. One of the ways to do this is by sourcing alternative vendors and solutions to fill those gaps and prevent broken links in the supply chain. Here's how:

Turn to nearshoring: COVID-19 has highlighted the heavy reliance of the global supply chain on manufacturing abroad. This has compelled many companies to look to nearshoring to plug the supply chain gaps created by manufacturers located in the epicenter of the crisis.

Nearshoring is outsourcing to manufacturers based closer to home. This increases the stability of the supply chain, as it reduces the distance between the company and its suppliers. Although more costly than foreign production, nearshoring is a smart long-term strategy that can be a supply chain lifesaver during a crisis.

Research and network: A good place to research manufacturing resources is online. A regular Google search will yield plenty of results to explore. There are also directories and associations with thousands of manufacturer recommendations sorted by categories, such as ThomasNet and MFG. Another way is to get referrals or word-of-mouth recommendations from within your network. In addition, consider researching competitors' vendors as you build your list.

Assess risk and locate alternatives for the entire supply chain: It's easy to get distracted by the biggest supply chain gaps. However, it is important to assess the current and future efficacy of every link of the supply chain. While one part of the supply chain might still seem healthy, this could change as the situation develops. Make sure to have alternate vendors in place for every possible gap that may arise.

What to Look For in Alternative Suppliers

Once the decision to source alternate suppliers has been made, it's time to create a shortlist of potential candidates. These are the key qualities to look for when selecting new suppliers in advance of an expected supply chain gap:

Reliability: Make sure the vendor has the necessary infrastructure and operational capacity to maintain a reliable supply. This may be the most important factor, as it will help to avoid similar disruptions to the supply chain that occurred with previous suppliers.

Stability: Check the financial situation and stability of the supplier. This is vital to ensure the supplier has the capacity to provide the goods needed at the right time. It will also indicate the likelihood of the vendor being forced to shut down as a result of the COVID-19 event.

Cost efficiency: During a crisis, cutting supply chain costs may not be a realistic goal. If the vendor is situated locally, it is likely that the costs will be higher than a vendor located abroad. However, the gain in reliability and stability is a valuable trade-off. Cost efficiency is about balancing the issue of pricing with the other benefits gained from the alternate supplier.

Good communication: Any worthwhile vendor must behave like a true partner, maintaining open, clear communication at every stage. This is crucial to assuring the flexibility necessary for a smooth, functioning supply chain, especially during a crisis period when the supply chain is more vulnerable to disruptions.

Here is a list of U.S.-based manufacturers and resources **across various verticals to help overcome supply chain disruptions and maintain smooth-as-possible operations.**

Trends to Prepare For

Which trends looked years away from the mainstream but are now totally normal because of the coronavirus? In this section, we explore how the pandemic is shaping consumer trends, post-coronavirus predictions, and lessons from brands that have thrived in periods of economic turmoil.

How Global Challenges Are Shaping Consumer Trends

Times of crisis tend to leave permanent imprints on the people that live through them. For personal crises, these marks are often similarly personal — idiosyncrasies, habits, quirks. But when the crisis is global, the marks are often left on whole societies, and sometimes on the entire world.

These global scars shape consumer behavior in large ways, changing expectations and norms in ways that seemed unthinkable before they happened. These changes happen fast and can redefine trends and preferences, or turn entire industries upside down. For brands that aren't ready to pivot in response, these changes can mean a slow slide into irrelevance. For challenger brands looking for their big chance, though, these changes represent opportunities to reshape the market.

Of course, things are never that easy. One of the hallmarks of these Black

Swan events, to use a term popularized by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, is that they're unpredictable. How do brands prepare to take advantage of new opportunities when it's impossible to say what those opportunities look like? And what about the ethics of turning a crisis into an opportunity?

Right, Wrong, or in Between?

Let's start by making one thing clear — a crisis is not a marketing opportunity. Global challenges are not the time to think about winning market share, or growing profits, or taking advantage of the situation. It's not a time to change pricing to jump on demand or try to corner the market.

Almost no one, for example, would say that it's a good decision for companies to raise the prices of essential supplies after a natural disaster. Aside from the terrible optics that creates, it's also extremely unethical in the eyes of most consumers — and even most businesspeople.

So this isn't an article about taking advantage of those kinds of opportunities. Instead, this is about the opportunities that come after. Once everyone is safe, the crisis has passed, and life starts returning to a new normal. That new normal is where the opportunities for challenger brands lie.

What Is the New Normal?

Not every crisis brings about an immediate and obvious change. Some changes are subtle. Some only affect certain industries. Some are difficult to see because they're so big that brands can lose the forest for the trees. But there are some examples that can illustrate what these new normals look like and make them a little easier to spot.

Crisis-fashion

Between 2002 and 2004, most of Asia was on high alert against the spread of SARS. Then Swine Flu in 2009, and Avian Flu in 2013. These epidemics touched Europe and the Americas, but lightly, with fewer cases and far less urgency. Asian countries, however, were on high alert and at high risk — one of the reasons China, Japan, and Korea have been able to respond in such a fast and methodical fashion to the COVID-19 outbreak is because of lessons learned over the last 20 years.

So perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that much of the west missed a slowly growing subculture on the streets of China and Japan: young people, often the most avant-garde and stylish, began wearing face masks as a fashion statement. Starting off as typical one-time-use paper masks decorated with stenciled designs of eyes and moths and graffiti, they soon evolved into high-end surgical masks with designs from the hottest names in streetwear — A Bathing Ape, Heron Preston, Off-White.

As subversive and cool as these masks became, they also pointed to a cultural trend that many missed. On the crowded platforms of the Tokyo Subway, covering the face wasn't about individuality or expression — it was a gesture of respect for the community, a willingness to deal with the discomfort of wearing a mask in order to avoid passing on contagion. That attitude, largely missing from the subways of the U.S. and Europe, made it difficult to spot this underground sensation. Brands who did, however, were able to sell luxury versions of this common staple for upwards of $300 each.

Or it might be helpful to look at a growing trend that took off in late 2018, spurred in large part by the growing unrest and challenging situation Europe has found itself in over the last few years. A growing unease at home and abroad gave people more exposure than ever to the hard work performed by first responders and a sense of dread over what the world was becoming.

By fall of 2018, this became reflected in the elite world of high fashion, as luxury brands big and small put out simultaneous collections modeled after firefighters, paramedics, EMTs, and other figures of stability in an unstable world. The new normal was scary, so people retreated into the comfort of these symbols of safety. Art imitates life, and life just really wanted someone strong to stand watch over it.

Crisis-work

Fashion might be the glamorous end of challenges precipitating changing trends, but it's also ephemeral and hardly "real". But there are some very real new normals that fundamentally change the way people live, shop, and work, too. A great example is the rise of the gig economy.

The financial crisis of 2008 shook the world. It was the largest recession most people had ever experienced, and left hundreds of thousands out of work or working significantly reduced hours. Even after markets stabilized around the world, it took time for hiring to recover.

Enter Uber, Doordash, Postmates, and the like. A breakdown in the fundamental trust people had in large employers lead to a shakeup in what it meant to be employed. Suddenly, all it took to have a job was access to a phone and a car. What it meant to have a job was forever changed, and all it took was some crazy kids on the West Coast recognizing that things had changed.

Whether the gig economy is good or bad in the long run is still open to debate, but it's clear that jumping on the opportunity of a new normal created something both huge and previously unpredicted. In 2018, the gig economy represented $204 billion in gross volume, and is predicted to grow to almost $500 billion by 2023. Good or bad, this was an opportunity brought about by a major global challenge and has resulted in an entirely new way to work for hundreds of thousands of people.

Seizing the Opportunity

Taking advantage of a new normal after a crisis gives challenger brands an opportunity to not just match, but far exceed the legacy brands they are competing against. But if these opportunities are difficult to notice and impossible to predict, how do brands jump on these openings?

Listen to the audience

Spotting an emerging trend requires listening to what brands' audiences are saying. This goes beyond just soliciting feedback from customers. Brands need to understand their audience as a series of waves — the leading-edge sets the trends, the next wave solidifies them, and the last largest wave jumps on board. So brands need to learn who is in that leading edge that their customers listen to and follow. Every audience has their set of early influencers that go on to shape the way that the audience behaves, and finding them is critical to recognizing an opportunity.

Similarly, brands need to understand their audiences' needs, and how those needs change in response to a crisis. The new normal comes with all new demands from consumers, many of which they may not even recognize themselves. When the recession of 2008 hit, no one was thinking "Man, I wish I could own and operate my own unlicensed taxi!" But consumers did want a way to earn extra money in uncertain times while waiting for the economy to recover.

Be flexible

The unpredictable nature of the new normal means that taking advantage of opportunities means being able to change and adapt quickly. For some companies, that may mean having some cash reserves on hand to change manufacturing lines and develop new products. For others, it may mean being willing to cut into established revenue lines in order to support new opportunities. A prime example of the latter is Amazon's response to the

COVID-19 epidemic (pun intended!) The e-commerce giant cut all non-essential shipping to ensure that essentials like food, health, and hygiene supplies made it to customers on time.

Being able to take advantage of new normal opportunities means being willing to sacrifice all of the tried and true approaches that worked in the past. Brands that are able to pivot on a dime in response to circumstances always come out stronger than brands that doggedly cling to tradition and custom. Developing the kind of company culture that allows that kind of flexibility should always be a top priority.

Commit where others hesitate

Jumping into the unknown is always terrifying. This is especially true when economic realities are making caution the most prudent course of action. But brands that don't commit often end up having to play significant catchup to brands that do. Companies that try to slowplay new trends may end up committing resources without reaping the rewards of being a first mover.

And being a first mover is critical for brands trying to capitalize on the changes brought about by global challenges. Because these opportunities are often present in the form of a new market segment, or even an entirely new market, companies that go in first and grow large enough tend to become the defaults. To this day, people using ride-sharing apps still often say "I'll Uber over there"... even if they're taking a Lyft. There is a lot of power in being able to set expectations in a new market, and that requires a full commitment. That could mean investing in marketing and advertising while other companies are cutting back, or launching a product that seems risky and early, or pushing into new geographic areas while others are waiting for them to be ready.

Where Do We Go From Here?

This is all-important to keep in mind as the world braces for the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis, like many before it, will lead to unprecedented changes in consumer behavior, society, and the world at large. While it's happening, brands should do everything in their power to focus on being powerful forces for good, helping communities in need to get through the difficult times. But when the dust clears and the world begins recovering, they need to be ready to jump on new opportunities and tackle new problems as the world comes to terms with the new normal.

Market Trends and D2C Opportunities

In a short period of time, markets and consumers' behaviors have undergone drastic changes due to the outbreak of the coronavirus. From people raiding grocery store aisles to the cancelation of the world's most significant events and mandates for "non-essential" businesses to temporarily close, this pandemic is having a substantial impact on the economy and society as we knew it.

So much so, that the stock market experienced its biggest single-day-decline since 1987's Black Market Crash. During this time, when people are feeling scared and are adjusting their behaviors, savvy direct-to-consumer (D2C) marketers know it's critical to adjust their strategies and communications to support their customers' experiences empathetically.

Here are the top consumer buying behaviors and trends you should be aware of as you're swiftly adapting your D2C growth marketing programs to survive — and better yet — thrive.

Nice-to-Have or Non-Essential Goods are Experience a Dip in Demand

People tend to spend more of their income on items perceived as nice-to-have or non-essential (think things like clothing, shoes, makeup, jewelry, games, electronics, home decor, kitchen gadgets) when markets are strong and stable. In times of economic instability like we're experiencing right now, consumers' priorities shift as they deprioritize buying these nice-to-have items.

Survive and Thrive D2C Opportunity:

If the D2C brand you're responsible for growing falls into this nice-to-have or non-essential category, don't fret. Take a step back, take a few deep breaths, and remember that your brand has a big advantage.

We're all looking for ways to connect and share our humanity. Now, perhaps more than ever, D2C companies have significant opportunities to deepen their meaningful relationships between their customers and their brands. Brainstorm ways your brand and its products can show up and support your customers through these uncertain and scary times. Do this well, and when things start to normalize a little, they'll loyally wipe your proverbial online shelves clean.

Now is also the perfect time to have a little fun and get creative in your digital marketing programs! In the world's effort to flatten the curve, people are stuck at home with little to do and are spending a lot more time online looking for entertainment. What are some creative ways you can enable them to have fun with your brand online?

Essential Goods are Experiencing Extreme Demand

If you've gone to a brick-and-mortar store (or four like me) lately with hopes of buying frozen and shelf-stable foods, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes, or toilet paper, you've probably been SOL. The same thing goes for e-commerce stores when it comes to these types of essential goods, too. Fear of the unknown has sparked peoples' desire to prepare for the worst by buying overly-large quantities of goods that prevent the spread of COVID-19, along with products they think they might need to survive a long-term quarantine.

While extreme demand might sound great for D2C brands offering these types of essential survival products, that's not necessarily the case. Not having enough supply in-stock or customer care hands on deck can quickly lead to angry customers, and this risk is heightened when consumers' purchasing decisions are being driven by fear.

Survive and Thrive D2C Opportunity:

To thrive during this time when your supply likely doesn't meet the demand, prioritize customer care, communication, and expectation management. As critical as it is for brands who provide non-essential goods to deepen their relationships with customers during these uncertain times, the same goes for you, too.

Non-Essential Health and Wellness goods are Experiencing Little to No Change

From period care and vitamin/supplement brands to stress management and at-home fitness brands (and more!), the wellness industry is diverse and vast. In this landscape of COVID-19, one might think that health and personal wellness brands are experiencing extreme demand right now, but that's not necessarily the case.

Although consumers are thinking about wellness, surviving is more top-of-mind than thriving. Wellness brands that are non-essential to directly preventing the spread of disease or long-term quarantine survival aren't experiencing extreme demand in this landscape of COVID-19… yet.

Survive and Thrive D2C Opportunity:

If the products your brand offers aren't experiencing a lot of demand right now, it can be tempting to leverage third-party e-commerce platforms like Amazon that are surging in demand. Don't go there. It's not worth handing over your customer relationships and data. When the craziness dies down and people aren't making purchase decisions out of fear, your brand will miss out big time if customers think, "I bought it from Amazon," instead of, "I bought it from (your brand's name)."

The dust is starting to settle from the shock of sudden lockdown due to COVID-19. Now that people are inside and stocked up on essential items, they're beginning to think about making the most of this experience by looking for ways to manage their health and wellness from home.

Can your brand's stylish yoga pants help a WFH force go from a virtual meeting at 11:30 am to a virtual yoga class at noon? Will your meditation app enable people to manage anxiety during this stressful time? Could the puzzles you provide help people unplug from the noise? Now's the time to restrategize your messaging, introduce your brand to new customers, and double down on existing ones.

Connect With Your Community of D2C Marketers

No matter the types of goods your brand provides, we're all in this together, and there are lots of shimmers of light for D2C brands in this landscape of COVID-19. Let's start by rebranding, "Social Distancing" to "Physical Distancing," because digitally connecting with your community of fellow e-commerce marketers can make all the difference to surviving and thriving in uncertain times.

If you're not already in AdRoll's free #growthguerilla community Slack group and would like to be, let us know by filling out this form. Here, D2C marketers connect to share ideas, get inspiration, seek advice, or just to simply read up.

7 Post-Coronavirus Trends

Whatever was going to happen to digital brands in 2020, it's all been put on the back burner. The outbreak of the novel coronavirus and the COVID-19 illness it produces has completely reshaped everything that this year was going to be about. Between the colossal efforts to quarantine and contain the spread of the disease, the almost nationwide shutdown of China, the near-freeze on global shipping and travel, and social distancing, there is only one news story this year.

But what happens to brands after the smoke clears and people emerge bleary-eyed from self-quarantine? The coronavirus pandemic has already left a mark on society, and in the coming years, it's likely to be a pivot point in the way commerce works. While it's still too early to say what the resulting shakeup is going to look like, these are our best guesses at the top trends that will shape brands in a post-coronavirus world.

China's Decline

Over the past several decades, China has grown to be the world's leading supplier of... everything. From umbrellas to toasters to baby strollers, China now dominates in many major consumer product categories.

When it comes to raw materials, China is even more dominant. And this is before even diving into intermediate production — things like electronic components, plastics, processed metals, and similar products that go into finished goods but aren't required to be labeled with a country of origin. Suffice it to say, almost everything a modern consumer comes in contact with probably made a pit stop in China.

In the early days of the coronavirus outbreak, however, much of China's production capacity shut down due to state-mandated quarantines. Factories furloughed workers, retail stores shuttered their doors, and the entire country seemed to go into a temporary hibernation. For over two months, large swaths of the world's economic growth engine simply went to sleep.

China's quarantine proved to be incredibly effective at combating the further spread of the coronavirus, but it also demonstrated how big a bottleneck the country was to global supply chains and production schedules. More than that, it showed many companies just how volatile and unpredictable the Chinese market could be.

Post-corona, it wouldn't be unreasonable to think that China may lose its place as the most critical market in the world and the source of so many of our consumer goods. This isn't to say companies won't still need to have a strong "China strategy" if they hope to be competitive in the 2020s and beyond, but that strategy will need to be much more cautious and take into account that the country can and will shut down on a moment's notice in response to threats and other global events.

Death of "Just in Time"

Perhaps the second largest trend shaping the way modern companies sell products is the "just in time" economy. The basic principle, as perfected in the 1960s and '70s, is that companies maintain the smallest amount of inventory possible to meet projected needs. As computing technology evolved, so too did brands' ability to project consumer demand, shaping everything from fulfillment to which products were marketed and how.

Of course, the problem with just in time supply chains is that products need to be able to move quickly and efficiently across countries and continents. With much of the world on lock-down and many factories idling under quarantine, even behemoths like Amazon are finding it hard to keep shelves stocked.

For marketers, that means that much of the recent orthodoxy on things like sales, discounts, and promotions will need to change. As companies readjust their inventory to insulate themselves from these kinds of shocks better, it wouldn't be surprising to see a return to 1990's style post-holiday inventory clear-outs and the resurgence of mainline items being sold through outlets and overstock sellers.

Increased Localization

With much of international shipping and travel curtailed, brands are having significant issues moving products and people from region to region. In a connected global economy, that spells big trouble. Even products that are proudly made wherever they're sold often have components that pass through a dozen countries before being assembled at the destination.

Brands looking for lessons out of the coronavirus pandemic are starting to seriously consider vertically integrating local supply chains, ensuring that products "Made in the USA," for example, are also made out of products made in the USA.

For marketers, the significant difficulty will be in educating consumers on why the new breed of hyperlocal products is different than the old "Assembled in X" ones. After years of preaching about locally-made goods, it may be a challenge to walk back some earlier claims to promote the new even-more-made-in-X labels. This trend is also likely to increase market separation even further. After years of product offerings converging — you can find the same sweater in Japan and the U.S. and Brazil — hyper-localized production may lead to the kind of fragmentation between regions that was much more common in 1999 than in 2019.

Domination of Online Shopping

Online retail has been slowly gaining market share since the 1990s. In February of 2019, online shopping actually managed to beat offline general merchandising stores (department and other non-specialized big-box stores) for the first time. With so many people trying to minimize their exposure to the outside world, this trend is likely to get supercharged in 2020.

Of specific note are sectors that have been steady holdouts against the inevitable march of Amazon and similar e-tail giants. Things like groceries, household goods, medicines, and personal grooming products — products that many people still feel more comfortable picking out in person rather than trusting the web.

These groups of products have been resistant to the encroaching digital economy. While categories like electronics and books are already purchased online as often as not, food and beverage lag at only 3.2% e-commerce market share. Health, personal care, and beauty aren't much further ahead, with only 11.1%. A prolonged period of social distancing and quarantines may go a long way towards convincing people to try the web when buying groceries or shampoo.

D2C to the Front

Direct to consumer (D2C) brands have been making a splash for several years now as the future of retail. These brands, which bypass standard distribution channels to focus on an integrated path from production to consumer, have hit almost every retail sector — from mattresses to fitness to health.

While younger consumers have readily adopted D2C brands for much of their news, eagerly shopping at Everlane and Bonobos and Warby Parker, older consumers have remained reluctant to jump on board. And despite the many breakout brands that have gained widespread international acclaim (Casper and Peloton, for example), many D2C brands are still largely less well-known than their established competitors.

The global pandemic is changing that. Brands like No. 2 (which sells toilet paper directly to consumers) are seeing a major lift from coronavirus. As consumers shift more of their spending from in-person to online, D2C brands are likely to get a significant boost. It may be enough to fully transition these brands from quirky underdogs to major household names.

Everything Goes Digital

With gatherings restricted in just about every major city in the world, it's safe to say that any conference, event, meeting, and other in-person gatherings are going to be postponed at least until the second half of the year. That's on top of sales visits, plant tours, vendor visits, and all of the personal touches that go into running a brand.

Brands are scrambling to figure out how to recreate the in-person experience online, turning to a mix of webinars, presentations, teleconferences, group Slack channels, Twitter chats, and other digital communications channels. Everything is going digital faster than ever before.

It's still too early to tell if these approaches will take off, but at no time in the past has there been such a widespread disruption in the way companies do business. This push, though born out of practicality and necessity, may finally be what pushes business past the conference and onto the internet. This is especially true for B2B industries, where change has been slow, and marketers have been reluctant to let go of the convention floor.

Distributed Workforces: The New Normal

Are employees more productive at home, or do they spend most of the day goofing off? Does coming into an office improve efficiency or damage morale? Business writers and sociologists have been going back and forth on these questions since the internet made it possible for a sizable portion of the population to work from home. The results have been mixed, which hasn't stopped managers from forming opinions one way or another.

However, with so many workers working from home (WFH), the world is about to see whether large-scale WFH is really feasible. There are some serious concerns, not least of which is whether the internet can physically handle it. But there's also a lot of excitement, especially from younger workers who've been struggling against reticent older bosses.

After the worst of the pandemic passes and offices reopen, it's entirely likely that many companies will suddenly realize that paying for unnecessary office space may not be the best use of company resources. Moreover, they may realize the many benefits of remote work — access to broader talent pools, improved employee morale, fewer sick days, and the many other benefits of letting employees work from home. In the end, distributed workforces are likely to be much more common after this pandemic than before.

Looking to The Future

The coronavirus pandemic is likely to go down as one of the most significant events of the last 100 years. It's already impacted the world in unprecedented ways, and that impact is likely to continue to grow. Black swan events, especially ones that hit the entire globe, tend to have unanticipated consequences that are difficult to predict ahead of time and leave marks that may take a full generation or more to understand fully.

Either way, brands need to prepare for the world after coronavirus to be drastically different than the world as it was at the end of 2019, and they need to be ready to adapt to those differences quickly.

How Winning Brands Keep Winning in a Recession

"I was asked what I thought about the recession. I thought about it and decided not to take part." These are the famous words of Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart, who instinctively knew what every successful entrepreneur knows — booms and recessions are an inevitable part of life.

From the Great Depression of 1929 to the post-WW2 recession, the 1980 meltdown, the 2000 dot-com bubble, and the 2008 housing bust, one thing is certain — economic crises come and go. For brands to endure, they must find the ways and means to ride the waves and come out winners on the other side.

When a company is facing an economic downturn, there is no time for despair. Rather, take a look at how other brands have succeeded in the past, and examine the tactics and strategies they used to come out stronger. Here are four examples of brands that did just that during the last major recession of 2008.

Netflix — The Perfect Product

During a recession, consumers have less disposable income and try to reduce expenses wherever they can — sometimes even drastically. As a rule, though, people also want to maintain their lifestyle and regular routines as much as possible. The solution? Finding cheaper alternatives. In the 2008 recession, that's exactly what Netflix offered.

In 2009, at the height of the economic crisis, Netflix shares were up 57% over the previous year, its earnings had jumped 24%, and its subscriptions numbered over 9 million. This is in stark contrast to the Blockbuster video rental chain, which saw a $374 million loss and closed hundreds of stores in that same period.

During the recession, Netflix provided the perfect product at the ideal price. These were still the days when Netflix was mainly a home delivery DVD rental company. The company's streaming services were new and novel, enabling subscribers to access a wide range of content in their living rooms. A key to their success was that both the streaming and DVD rental services were priced far more affordably than regular video rentals and expensive cable subscriptions.

Despite the economic downturn, consumers weren't willing to give up on home entertainment. And Netflix was right there with just the right medicine — an affordable and convenient product.

Amazon — Don't Stop Innovating

Throughout the recession period of 2007 to 2009, Amazon's stock declined 9%, compared to an overall average market decline of 36%. The e-commerce giant defied all expectations in 2009 with profits up 68%

from the previous year.

The key ingredient of Amazon's astonishing success was innovation. In the months leading up to the start of the recession, Amazon launched a diverse range of products and services that all contributed to the health of the company in the longer term.

The Amazon Kindle, for example, came onto the market in late 2007. It was the first e-reader to really achieve popularity among consumers, with the first edition selling out in just 5.5 hours. On Christmas Day 2009, sales of e-books outpaced sales of printed books for the first time. The release of the Kindle to the international market was a huge boost and even allowed the company to reduce the sale price, which spurred further sales. But it wasn't just the Kindle alone that made Amazon a legendary survivor of the 2008 recession.

The launch of Amazon Prime in 2006 was also a huge contributor, providing the company with an assured monthly income based on the popular subscription-based model. In addition, Amazon Web Services (AWS), its cloud-based computing platform, was launched just a year before the onset of the recession. The entry of a new technology product to the market at that time might have backfired. However, it proved to be another weapon in Amazon's innovation arsenal that helped it thrive in difficult market conditions. Although revenue growth from AWS was slow (under 30% in both 2008 and 2009), it was still growth — which is the coveted prize for any brand in a recession.

Starbucks — Focusing on Customers

In the 2008 recession, Starbucks could've been a spectacular brand fail. However, smart pivoting of its marketing strategy at a crucial time made it a brand to be remembered. During the economic downturn, Starbucks was struggling to survive, closing hundreds of stores and firing thousands of employees. Consumers were turning away from the coffee king, whose pricing was more expensive than other coffee shops and even fast-food chains like McDonald's, who improved their coffee products in an attempt to compete for market share.

However, in early 2008, Starbucks changed its CEO, and with it came an abrupt — and lifesaving — change of focus: "away from bureaucracy and back to customers."

The brand started turning its stores into welcoming hubs, and launched a new campaign called "My Starbucks Idea," an online portal where customers could create a profile and contribute ideas about what they wanted from the Starbucks experience. This gave customers a direct line of communication with the brand, helping Starbucks build a fan base and a community-centric experience that drew people in. Compounded with an active social media marketing strategy, Starbucks transformed its brand perception from "expensive and detached" to "cool, caring, and value-added." Customer and community focus — these are the human values that will survive even the most difficult crisis.

Airbnb — Time for Disruption

During a recession or other crisis, brands that disrupt the way consumers normally behave and provide a fitting solution are the ones that perform well. Take the current novel coronavirus crisis and the web-conference platform Zoom. Demand for the product is soaring (along with the company's share price) as millions worldwide are working from home and social distancing forces people to connect over the internet.

Airbnb's rags-to-riches story also started with an idea based on a need — this time the high cost of travel accommodation. The company began in San Francisco as a way to host attendees of a designers conference who were visiting the city. A few friends offered visitors a cheaper accommodation alternative — an air mattress on the floor of their loft apartment for $80 a night. The transformation from idea to massive global growth was kickstarted — incredibly — during the 2008 recession. By 2012, the company was believed to be valued at $2.5 billion.

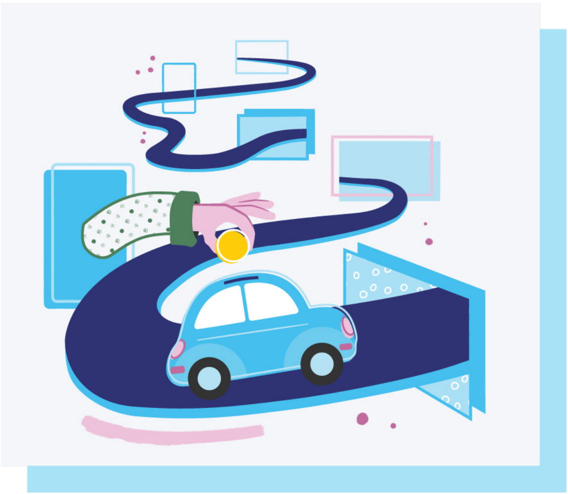
After many stops and starts, Airbnb succeeded in disrupting the travel and hospitality industry. Now, faced with the complete slowdown of the travel industry and another potential recession in the wake of COVID-19, Airbnb hosts are adapting the brand concept with other disruptive ideas. For example, in Israel, many Airbnb hosts are renting their properties for longer periods at a reduced rate to people who need to be in isolation. A brand that's ingenious and agile enough to disrupt a market over and over again can also succeed during periods of uncertainty and upheaval.

Recessions Bring Challenges — and Opportunities

Every recession is unique, coming in its own time, under different circumstances, and with consequences that are not fully felt for years. In the 2008 recession, for instance, luxury brands suffered, yet were quick to bounce back, mostly due to the fast recovery in Asia. The impact on the fashion industry, however, was long-lasting.

According to Vogue, high-end fashion retailers changed from ostentatious to more democratic, streetwear designs. Low-cost clothing retailers, like Target and Walmart, also did well, while the mid-level brands were the ones most impacted by lost revenue and forced closures. The relationships between the wholesaler, retailer, and consumer changed forever. It could even be argued that the 2008 recession, combined with the rise of online shopping, paved the way for the D2C market — in fashion and other verticals — that is now booming.

With economic uncertainty in the air, the next recession will once again put brands to the test and alter the face of the consumer market. The challenge for every brand is how to navigate the crisis and come out a winner. Whether it's focusing on customers and community building, innovating new products that will stand the test of time, or adapting products to the consumer mood, get inspired by the brands that can already say "been there, done that."



Financial Help and Resources

Governments are making unprecedented moves to help small businesses amid the COVID-19 crisis. This section covers everything you need to know about current relief packages, how to apply for loans, and more.

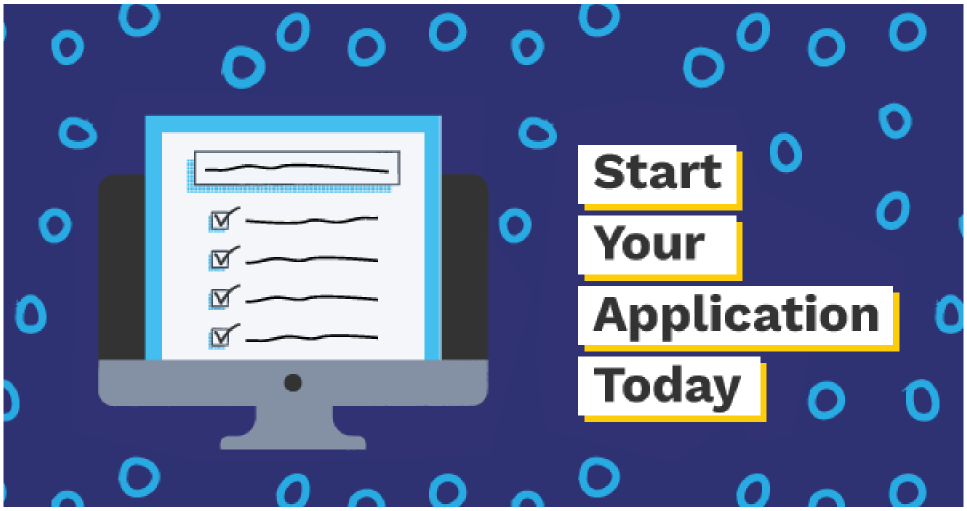
Paycheck Protection Program (PPP): What Is It and How Do I Get It?

On Friday, March 27, 2020, the U.S. government passed a historic relief package to help Americans through the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic stimulus package, coming in at a record-setting $2 trillion, is the largest emergency appropriations bill ever passed. Packed in the monumental piece of legislation are provisions to assist homeowners, regular Americans, and businesses — with over $349 billion specifically designated for loans to small businesses that need relief.

That last provision is the one that we'll be focusing on in this report. Small businesses have been hit incredibly hard by this pandemic. Many are dealing with quarantines and forced closures that have left them unable to operate. Those that are still open are having to contend with limited inventory and major disruptions to global supply chains. And on top of everything else, uncertainty about the future course of the outbreak and an unprecedented level of job losses has left consumer spending depressed on everything except the bare essentials like food, cleaning supplies, and (inexplicably) toilet paper.

But getting access to the money made available in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) isn't as straightforward as just calling your local bank and asking for a loan. There are conditions on who qualifies, what the money can be used for, how much is available, and how it will be repaid. This guide will help business owners understand what the CARES act means for them and how they can take advantage of this opportunity.

If you need help with your PPP applications, we've partnered with Womply to help you fast-track your Paycheck Protection loan!



What is the CARES Act?

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) is a bill passed by the United States Congress and signed into law by President Trump on March 27, 2020. The bill is a $2 trillion package of assorted relief measures meant to support the American people and the economy of the United States during the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The CARES act includes a wide range of provisions that seek to support the American economy from top to bottom. Included in the act are:

- Additional unemployment benefits of up to $600 a week added to the unemployment checks received by furloughed workers for a limited time; an extension of the time workers can receive benefits by up to 13 weeks; and opening up the program to gig economy workers for the first time ever.
- A direct payment of up to $1,200 for individuals earning less than $99,000 per year, plus payments of up to an additional $500 for each of their dependents.
- $500 billion in funds set aside to assist distressed companies through special loans, grants, and other economic injection programs overseen by an inspector general and a congressional panel.
- $349 billion in guaranteed Small Business Administration (SBA) payroll assistance loans.
- Miscellaneous additional appropriations for hospitals and healthcare workers, state governments, etc.

The $349 billion in guaranteed loans are designated the Paycheck Protection Program loans. They are similar, but not identical, to the SBA 7(a) program (more on the differences later). These loans are especially interesting because they are able to be converted to grants if certain conditions are met by businesses that take advantage of them. That makes them a very powerful tool for companies trying to wait out the crisis — if used correctly, up to the entire loan amount can be forgiven.

There are a number of caveats that go along with these loans, however. Not every company will qualify, and the amount that can be borrowed is strictly controlled. Additionally, if conditions aren't met, then businesses may be on the hook for the entire borrowed amount.

What Is the Paycheck Protection Program?

The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) is a $349 billion program authorized by the CARES Act to provide small businesses with the money they need to continue paying employees during the COVID-19 crisis. The goal of the program is to avoid as many layoffs as possible, and to encourage small businesses to maintain payrolls.

There are some key differences between traditional SBA loans and the PPP program, however. The biggest one is that paycheck protection program loans are forgivable up to the total amount of the loan. That means that if borrowers meet all of the conditions, they won't have to pay back any of the loan they receive. This alone makes the PPP an incredibly powerful option for small businesses.

In addition to loan forgiveness, the PPP has some additional benefits over other SBA loans. Some of the key benefits include:

- Payments on the loan are deferred for six months. Businesses that take out these loans won't have to begin repayment on them until six months after they receive the money. Note, however, that deferment doesn't eliminate interest, which will continue to add up over these six months.

- The interest rates on these loans will be capped at a fixed 1%, significantly lower than the interest on standard SBA loans or conventional loans which currently start at about 5.5%.

- The term of the loan is capped at two years, beginning with when the money was received. Keep in mind that even though the first payment isn't due until six months from receiving the money, the loan term is already in effect at that point per the latest available guidance from the treasury department. However, this can change as the program evolves.

- For loans that are not forgiven within the forgiveness period, the term will be extended to up to 10 years, and the interest rate will reset to up to 4%. These terms are still significantly more favorable than most SBA and conventional loans, so this shouldn't be seen as a disincentive to apply for the program.

- There are no prepayment penalties, so businesses that end up paying the loan back early will not be charged any additional fees. There are also zero loan fees from the SBA itself, in contrast to traditional SBA loans.

- Unlike conventional SBA loans that require collateral and personal guarantees from business owners and executives, the PPP waives these requirements.

How Does Forgiveness Work for Paycheck Protection Program Loans?

The most standout feature of the PPP is the ability for borrowers to get their loans forgiven. Up to the full amount of the loan can be converted to a grant, if certain conditions are met. Because this program was specifically created to help small businesses avoid layoffs, most of the conditions for loan forgiveness are geared around maintaining payrolls and keeping businesses operational during the crisis and any resulting quarantines.

To understand how loan forgiveness works for the PPP, it's important to understand what the loans are supposed to be used for. These loans are meant to cover operating overhead during the coronavirus pandemic. Specifically, businesses that receive these loans are supposed to use this money on:

- Payroll and related costs. This covers the checks employees receive, as well as most benefits including sick leave, vacation time, insurance premiums, and retirement benefits. It also includes state and local taxes paid on compensation, and also covers separation compensation like severance pay.

- Of particular note, compensation for purposes of the PPP includes tips, commission payments, and similar incentive compensation.

- Mortgage interest payments on commercial real estate. Note that payments towards the principal are not included here — this program specifically only covers the interest.

- Rent, which includes lease agreements and other kinds of commercial rental agreements.

- Utility costs. This category has the least information, so it’s unclear exactly what would be covered under utility costs.

- Finally, the PPP loan can be used to pay interest on any debts your business held before the start of the PPP coverage period.

In order for the loan to be forgiven, businesses have to spend the loan money on these qualifying expenses. This will be verified by examining financial information during the eight-week period covered under PPP, as well as by comparing payroll figures during the covered period to an earlier period. Additionally, there are a number of exceptions that can reduce the forgiven amount. These include:

- Any reduction in headcount over the covered period.

- Any reduction in pay for employees earning less than $100,000 per year of over 25%.

Companies will have until June 30 to return their payroll to where it was before February 15 in order to avoid any of these forgiveness penalties. In simple terms, companies will need to have the same payroll on July 1 as they did on February 14 in order to qualify for the maximum forgiveness. Due to the nature of the program and the limited resources available, the SBA expects that at least 75% of the loan amount will be used for payroll, though it’s unclear at this time if using less will result in a penalty.

The process for loan forgiveness is relatively straightforward. Companies need to submit a request for forgiveness, as well as all supporting documents, to the lender servicing their loan. These documents will include proof of payroll and an employee headcount like federal, state, and local tax filings; documents showing any payments on rent, utilities, mortgage, or other qualifying non-payroll expenses; and a certification from a company representative that all submitted documents are accurate and true. Once this request has been submitted, lenders will have up to 60 days to make a decision on forgiveness.

It may seem, in fact, that for all intents and purposes these loans are actually grants. Businesses should avoid thinking of them as such, however. This is an unprecedented program that was rushed through legislation, before the mechanisms for supporting it were fully planned or put in place. That means that even businesses that fully meet the qualifying criteria for loan forgiveness may be on the hook for some payments as the forgiveness process is ironed out.

Qualifying for a Paycheck Protection Program Loan

The PPP loan follows similar qualification rules as standard Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, but with several important caveats and exemptions. The key criteria for being eligible for a Paycheck Protection Program loan are:

- The business must have been in operation at least as of February 15, 2020. Organizations formed after that date will not be eligible.
- The organization must be a small business as defined by the SBA, a non-profit or veterans organization [either a 501(c)(3) or a 501(c)(19)], or a tribal business concern. Additionally, other business types may also qualify, provided they meet the employee and revenue maximum outlined in the requirements.
- Sole proprietors, individual independent contractors, and the self-employed are also eligible for this loan.

- The organization must have fewer than 500 employees, with some exceptions. For example, Accommodation and Food Service businesses — those that fall under the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 72 — will be eligible if none of their individual locations employ more than 500 people.

- Revenues must not exceed the revenue maximums outlined in the Table of Small Business Size Standards.

- Affiliate rules will be put on hold for certain classifications of businesses. These rules are typically in place to prevent subsidiary companies that are majority-owned by larger companies from taking advantage of SBA services. However, for this program, certain franchises will be eligible that would otherwise not be.

The eligibility rules may seem like a mouthful, and there has been significant confusion on who exactly is eligible, but the shorthand seems to be: any registered business or non-profit with fewer than 500 employees (or fewer than 500 employees per location) that was operational on or before Feb. 15, 2020 qualifies for a Paycheck Protection Program loan.

However, keep in mind that this program is being assembled hastily and is subject to change suddenly and with little warning. This means that for many businesses, the best option is simply to apply and see if their application is accepted.

Applying for the Paycheck Protection Program Loan and How Much Can Be Borrowed

Applying for the PPP loan was designed to be a straightforward process. Small businesses and sole proprietors can apply through an authorized SBA lender beginning on April 3, 2020. Independent contractors and the self-employed can start applying on April 10, 2020. While all participating lenders need to be approved, the approval process will remain open throughout the program period — companies that currently have relationships with banks that are not approved should consult with their representatives to see if they are planning on seeking authorization.

For most businesses, the loans will be made through their primary bank, as almost all major banking institutions in the U.S. are authorized to make SBA loans. In fact, going through an existing banking relationship will likely be the easiest route for getting approved quickly.

The maximum amount of the loan will be determined via a straight-forward formula: 2.5 times a company's average monthly payroll from 2019. As with every other component of this program, there are a few important caveats:

- Salaries are capped at $100,000 per year for calculating payroll expenses. That doesn't mean employees making over $100,000 will be excluded — just that only the first $100,000 of their salary will count.

- There is a hard cap of $10 million for the maximum loan amount, though that should be easy to avoid as that assumes the maximum number of employees (500) at about the maximum counted salary ($96,000 per year).

- Temporary employees, part-time employees, and other similar costs are included in this calculation. Independent contractors, however, are not included.

- Companies that operate on a seasonal basis or that were not open for all of 2019 will have a modified period from which to draw an average payroll. Seasonal companies will be able to optionally use a time period between February 15, 2019, and June 30, 2019. New companies will have the option of using January 1, 2020, through February 29, 2020, as their period.

So for a company that averaged $50,000 per month in payroll costs across 2019, the maximum loan amount that they would qualify for under this program would be $125,000. However, if one of those employees was the CEO who earned $200,000 per year, the monthly average would be reduced by about $8,333 since only the first $100,000 annually would count. They would then qualify for a loan of only $104,167. In short, only about the first $8,000 per employee counts towards this monthly average.

Applications, samples of which can [be found here](), will be required to be submitted with documents showing payroll for 2019 and potentially all the way through Q1 of 2020. For most companies, this will be federal, state, and local tax filings, as well as any unemployment insurance filings. However, it would not be a bad idea to also gather any paperwork showing employee compensation, including offer letters or employment contracts, as well as a P&L statement for the period in question.

Finally, applicants will need to make a series of certifications, found on the form linked above. These attest, under penalty of fraud, that the business has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and needs the loan in order to maintain payroll or cover the other qualifying expenses, that funds spent on qualifying expenses will be forgiven (again, noting that only 25% of the funds may be used on non-payroll expenses,) that the business will not seek to get another loan under this program, and that all tax documents provided are accurate and the same ones submitted to the IRS.

Financial Resources to Help Brands and Their Founders

To help get brands through this uncertain time, we've put together a list of resources and services being made available to challenger brands to help them not just survive this crisis, but also thrive. These resources will help brands navigate this challenging environment, and position themselves to thrive when the world starts to recover. Just as important, the health and wellness section will help founders, executives, employees, and entrepreneurs overcome the personal challenges that come with managing a company through a turbulent time.

Financial Resources

AdRoll and Womply accelerated PPP Loan - For small businesses looking to accelerate their application for a PPP loan, AdRoll has partnered with Womply to speed up the process. Womply and AdRoll have helped hundreds of thousands of small businesses and challenger brands, and now are partnering to help them take advantage of this opportunity. Since there's a limit on funds allocated for the PPP program, applying and getting approved as soon as possible is critical.

Small Business Administration COVID-19 Resources - Aside from the PPP, the SBA is offering a number of additional programs to help companies deal with the financial fallout of COVID-19. These programs are primarily structured in the form of low-interest SBA-secured loans that can be applied for through any recognized and accredited SBA lender. These include:

Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) Emergency Advance - The EIDL Emergency Advance is a grant of up to $10,000 offered by the SBA to assist businesses facing immediate cash crunches by providing limited assistance until a full EIDL loan has time to process and be approved. The SBA claims that grants are being paid out within three days of being applied for. However, reports on Twitter suggest that the large number of requests have led to a substantial backlog.

The amount of the grant appears to be based on the number of employees a business has, though specifics have not been released yet. The grant will also offset any forgivable portion of a PPP loan companies might receive in the future. EIDL grants and loans can be applied for and received even if a business is also applying for a PPP loan.

The advance also counts against any EIDL loans that businesses take out. These EIDL loans are always available. However, they have been modified under the CARES Act. Modifications include:

- Approval can be based on just the credit score of the business owner, rather than on the business credit rating
- No personal guarantee required for loans under $200,000
- No real estate collateral is required
- The requirement to have been in business for at least a year has been waived

Express Bridge Loans - These loans are meant to provide a short term cash infusion for businesses impacted by COVID-19. The biggest advantage of the bridge loan program is the speed with which approval and receipt of funds is supposed to take place.

SBA Debt Relief - The SBA will pay all principal, interest, and fees on existing SBA loans for up to six months. Additionally, the SBA will automatically defer loans until December of 2020.

Additional information on components of the CARES Act can be found in this [helpful infographic from Charles Schwab](#).

Non-Government Financial Resources

Aside from financial help from the government, multiple large companies are offering grants for brands impacted by COVID-19. These grants are often smaller than programs like the PPP, and are often more specifically targeted than SBA programs.

These grant programs are often tied to specific localities where the grant-issuing organizations are based, though there are a few that offer grants everywhere in the country. The application process and acceptance criteria vary depending on the specific organization issuing the grant, and all grants are being given out on a first-come, first-served basis.

Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and Verizon - The Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) has partnered with Verizon to give out $2.5 million in $10,000 grants to small businesses, especially women and minority-owned businesses in underserved areas. LISC, a product of the Ford Foundation, is a community lending and support organization for companies that have difficulty finding conventional lenders.

GoFundMe and Yelp - GoFundMe and Yelp have partnered together to provide a small business relief fund. This fund provides matching grants to companies that successfully raise at least $500 using the GoFundMe platform and verify that they have been negatively affected by government action (primarily forced shutdowns and quarantines.)

Amazon Neighborhood Small Business Relief Fund - Companies operating out of Bellevue, WA with fewer than 50 employees and less than $7 million in revenues can take advantage of Amazon's grant program for local businesses. However, only retail and service companies open to the public will qualify, so corporate offices and manufacturing facilities don't count.

[Facebook Small Business Grants Program]() - Companies operating in regions where Facebook operates that have been in business for at least a year and have between two and 50 employees can apply to receive grants from Facebook's $100 million fund.

Additional funding for businesses, artists, and nonprofits is available through localities, smaller organizations, states, and even city organizations. A great list of places to start looking [can be found here]().

Keeping Employees Healthy and Effective When WFH

You know the saying, "Don't bring your work home with you?" Well, when tough times call for it, there might be little choice. In this section, we highlight how to maintain productivity and engagement while working from home (WFH).

How to Maintain Balance and Productivity

While some workers relish the thought of WFH, it could be a challenge to stay focused when you're perched on a couch instead of at your office desk. We completely get it, so we've compiled a list of tips and experiences that might help you remain productive (especially if you need to work from home for an extended period).

Make sure you're as reactive as possible to any Slack messages. This also applies to GChat or whatever messaging platform your company uses for communication. With everyone working from home, it's not possible to quickly walk to someone to ask a question, so your colleagues might be more dependent than usual on your quick reply to finish what they're doing. Make sure you have your notifications on and reply in a timely manner.

(Psst – one of the best perks of WFH is that you aren't restricted to the lunch spots near your office. You can now pop by your favorite neighborhood pizzeria, but be sure to leave a status update so your peers know they should expect a little wait!)

Be wary of procrastination threats. When WFH, hundreds of distractions threaten to steal away your precious productivity (we're talking about sites such as Youtube, Facebook, and yes — even the dishes, long-postponed housekeeping tasks, etc. You'll be surprised at what lengths people take to procrastinate). At least in the case of digital distractions, a useful tip is to block a couple of domains that you can't resist using a Chrome extension (only during working hours, of course).

Just in case you need to be reminded: you can't be productive for 8 hours in a row. We know that when WFH, you might feel the need to always be on. However, it's especially during these times when it's extra important to carve out some time for yourself. Make sure you take your time to have lunch (ahem, not behind your laptop) and take short breaks. Set goals and rewards for yourself — for example, if you finish a specific task, you can treat yourself to a nice walk and cup of coffee.

Show your face! Assuming that your internet connection is good enough, always try to go into meetings with your webcam on. We know, we know, sometimes It's very tempting to just listen in while doing other stuff at the same time, but hear us out. Turning on your webcam during meetings helps you:

- **Be more engaged.** Turning on your webcam enables you to be more present. It also holds you more accountable for engaging with meetings. This way, you can't mask the fact that you're working on another project and folding laundry all at the same time.
- **Feel less isolated.** Sometimes, the WFH grind keeps you from talking to anyone face to face for hours at a time. When you see a friendly face (or two, or three), it could really help with feelings of loneliness.
- **Gauge others' reactions.** When the webcam is on, you're able to gauge how others are feeling, based on their facial expressions.
- **See colleagues' furry friends.** We don't know about your company, but ours has a lot of adorable dogs. Seeing a friendly critter boop their way in front of a webcam always helps to brighten up your day.

Create a dedicated "office space." Your work environment can strengthen interpersonal relationships and do wonders for your productivity. This is why it's particularly important that when you're not in an office, you're comfortable in your working space. So, whether that's placing a plant on your dining table or closing out the living room as your "office space," do whatever you need to feel "at work."

Get comfortable. When you're working from home, feel free to wear pants! In fact, it's highly encouraged.

It's OK to change your work environment. Take the term "working from *home*" loosely. In between meeting blocks, it's sometimes super nice to head down to a coffee shop and grind away at a project (or even lounge poolside if there's excellent wifi available). Just be mindful of the noise levels in case you need to make any calls.

And lastly — be positive! When circumstances lead you to work remotely full-time, it helps to stay upbeat. So, break out those emojis and exclamation points (!) when socializing with colleagues. Participate in fun, non-work related conversations in general channels and post photos when your teammates call for them.

When Life Gives You Lemons...

You can make some really, really good lemonade (while working from home). If you're new to working remotely, we hope that these tips from a home-office pro can help you create balance and maintain your productivity.

Maintaining Culture and Staying Connected

Many of us enjoy going to an office because of the culture, the ability to interact with our teams and let's be honest, the more consistent wifi and free snacks. But did you know that culture can be shared just as easily virtually? Here are some tips we've implemented that you can try with your remote team.

Create a Brew Crew

One of the best luxuries of a WFH situation? No commute. But regardless of travel time from your bed to your kitchen, everyone still has their morning routine, and that involves coffee. Rather than lay in bed and catch up on Slack or email, set up virtual coffee check-ins first thing in the morning. Go to your favorite corner shop or get your French Press ready, grab your coffee mugs, and dial in. Use the time to check-in, talk priorities, share highlights from the weekend, and get ready for the day ahead. Just because you're remote doesn't mean you have to sit and sip in your robe alone. As Folgers would say, the best part of waking up… is coffee with your team.

Don't have a big team to chat with every morning? No worries, Slack's got your back. Just install their Donut app for virtual programs like Coffee Roulette to get randomly paired with another employee at your company for a coffee date. It's an easy way to connect with folks outside of your team without the awkwardness of introducing yourself (even though you've seen each other in the hall for the past six months).

Make Meetings Personal

A perk of meetings done from home is the lack of conference room shuffling. People show up on time, and you're not caught scrambling for a room. The con? It's easier to lose attention spans, especially with people hiding behind an avatar on a screen.

So, mix it up a bit. Aaron Dignan's book, *Brave New Work*, has brilliant tips and worksheets for starting and cloning meetings in exciting ways. For example, start your meeting with an interesting ice breaker that each person on the call has to answer (ideal for ~10 people or less). Spend 2-3 minutes going around and answering, then dive into the agenda. It's a fun way to start the meeting and learn random facts about your coworkers at the same time.

Slack apps like Plop and Icebreakers are other fun extensions that you can add to your usual workflow to randomly prompt questions for teams to answer too. Even for teams that have worked together for a while, they're great ways to keep the dialogue going in ways that aren't so tactical and deadline-driven. As Aristotle would say, the more you know, the more you realize you don't know — so get to knowing!

Show Face

Another key way to keep the culture going in an all-virtual world is requiring more face-to-face time. If you have a 30-minute presentation to share, you can guarantee about half of your attendees are going to check out and multitask, so find ways to keep them connected and engaged. Ask attendees to stay on video, or if it's a large group, request that they go on video when they have a question or thought. Even muted thumbs-ups and head nods can serve as ways of acknowledging speakers and following along.

Leaving Easter eggs in your decks can also create some mid-meeting humor and make sure people are still following. Or, better yet, scrap presentations all together by sending the deck over later and focus the time on interactive sessions where you can brainstorm, whiteboard on your wall (at your own risk), whatever it takes.

Slack video is another excellent tool for those of us who like to overuse Slack. If you find yourself writing paragraphs – or my favorite, the stream of one sentence consciousness — pick up the phone and call. Use tools like Slack video to give a quick in-message ping that feels more natural and has the benefit of a live discussion and face-to-face time.

Find a Collective Sound

Don't forget the power of music and how it connects us. Music sets the mood, helps us focus, and creates an office vibe that's the perfect level of loud for Goldilocks. But when you're working from home, often the most fitting playlist seems to be a collection of solo ballads like "All By Myself."

And for those of us who don't have the joy of roommates adding to our cue or randomly changing the music on Sonos, don't worry — there are apps for that. Slack's Jukebot lets you sync Spotify and create shareable playlists everyone can listen to — and bonus, they'll even throw in surprise songs from time to time. Another way to get that office vibe is to create a music channel and start sharing playlists with your coworkers there. Discover new artists by having different employees pick their favorite songs or curate playlists based on different days or themes. Music connects us, so make sure you keep the volume up and on, even if you're home alone.

Hold Time for Happy Hour

Thirsty Thursdays can be just as thirsty at home as in the office, so host end of week happy hours across your teams and use it as a way to decompress and connect. Encourage your team to grab a White Claw, shake that martini, or grab their latest kombucha brew and hop on Google Hangout. Together you can toast to a successful week, share updates from the day, and take the edge off. Did you spend a long week with a team you haven't worked with before? Give cheers virtually. Did your direct report kill it this week with their goals? Buy them a virtual drink (and make sure to really buy them one later).

What Did We Learn?

Company culture is all about the people, so creating and maintaining culture is just as important in the office as it is outside of it. Don't change your habits or what makes your company great because you're not all in one place — challenge yourself to think outside of the screen. Work can be hard and stressful, but at the end of the day, we all get by with a little help from our friends.

How to Effectively Manage Remote Teams

While WFH may seem like a simple enough work scenario, it can be challenging for many managers to grapple with, especially since many have never managed fully remote teams before. You might feel as if you have little to no control over the situation or that connecting with and gaining trust from your team is difficult. These concerns are valid and must be addressed because working remotely is the way of the future workplace. Here are some tips on how to seamlessly manage remote teams.

Set up regular check-ins. This may come off as a micromanagement tactic, but it's actually a critical component of remote management. Having regular check-ins helps align team members towards specific goals, fosters open communication, and combats miscommunication.

Try to have check-ins once in the morning to discuss your top one to three priorities for the day and call out any blockers. Then, have another check-in at the end of the day to discuss progress towards your priorities. These check-ins also help your team to set a beginning and end to their official workday so that it's easier for them to switch on and off from work mode.

Set up regular *fun* check-ins. Yes, there are such things as fun check-ins! For example, you can host a weekly virtual happy hour for your team. It's just what it sounds like — a group video chat where each team member has a beverage in hand. Or, you could host virtual 1-1 "coffee dates," where teammates socialize in pairs. You could even commit to spending the first few minutes of weekly team meetings to catch up. The point of these little "meetings" is to focus on topics that aren't work-related. They're the best possible substitute for the serendipitous conversations that happen in hallways and break rooms.

Explicitly define your norms. What's the expected response time for an email? For a Slack message? If you happen to be really busy all day and the only time that you have to think creatively is in the evening, you might end up sending a lot of Slack messages to your team late at night. Make sure they know that they don't have to respond to you in real-time!

Be responsive to your team on Slack. Although your direct reports are out of sight, they should never be out of mind. It's important to be available and responsive to your team, no matter what communication platform you're using. Unlike the office, where they can lean over their desks to ask you a quick question, your direct reports are now heavily dependent on your response time to finish their work.

Trust your team. There's often uncertainty around the quality of work that's produced from home versus the office. After all, there are plenty of distractions around the house — what if they're watching Netflix instead of working? What if they're busy doing household chores instead of being present in a meeting? Well, you can put those fears to rest, because the truth is that most remote workers feel that they get *more* done when working remotely.

If you check in on your direct reports constantly or consistently ping them to ask about the progress of certain tasks, you might be demoralizing or even alienating them. Trust that your employees will manage their time effectively. If that means taking a short break to visit the grocery store, or taking ten minutes offline to fold their laundry, it shouldn't be a problem as long as they're still getting the work done.

For further transparency, consider setting up WFH guidelines — for example, text messages are only for urgent situations, emails must be responded to within a day, and no calls or meetings are allowed between certain hours to ensure that nobody is over-working.

Recognize accomplishments. Even though it isn't feasible to present something like an "employee of the month" trophy, it's still important to acknowledge remote employees' achievements. Perhaps you can come up with a recognition program where they're rewarded for reaching individual goals, or you can call out their achievements via company-wide emails or general Slack channels.

Encourage direct reports to give you feedback. This is a difficult time for all employees — understandably, it takes some getting used to. Encourage your direct reports to provide you with feedback on what you could do to make their day-to-day tasks go by smoother. Ask them what could be done to help them feel more connected to the team — is it by starting with a fun icebreaker before every team standup, hosting a virtual movie night, or picture sharing? If they're reluctant to answer or give any suggestions, you can offer a variety of options through a poll or survey.

Health and Wellness Resources

With everything going on, founders and executives are scrambling to provide help for their businesses and employees. Most aren't nearly as concerned about their own health and wellness. That can be a big mistake — stress makes bad decisions and lowers effectiveness. This is especially important for people under quarantine who may be cooped up and not moving around much.

However, several fitness and wellbeing platforms and services are offering free deals for people who need to take a break, raise their heart rate, and sweat out some anxiety.

HeadSpace - The workplace wellness company is offering free guided meditation and exercises to employers and employees. While meditation may not be everyone's cup of tea, it can be a useful tool to take a break between applying for grants and recenter.

ClassPass - The pioneer of on-demand fitness and activity programs, ClassPass is offering thousands of free on-demand workout videos to members new and old. They are also paying 100% of live-streaming fees directly to the studios hosting them, giving workout buffs a chance to support local studios and instructors.

DoYogaWithMe - For people into yoga, DoYogaWithMe is offering free two-month memberships to its premium service for all new and existing members.

Stressful times can make it difficult to think about personal wellness, but business owners need to understand that taking care of themselves physically and mentally is critical to success. Aside from the benefits of exercise, getting active while in quarantine can save us all the embarrassment of having to get the waistlines on our business suits taken out when things start to reopen.

FAQ

Here are our community's most asked questions, along with answers and effective management strategies from our team of marketing experts. Find additional content to help guide your business through COVID-19 on [our blog].

Should I stop media spend?

Rather than stop, take a step back and pay close attention to campaign performance and efficiency spending. It's now more important than ever to remain top-of-mind with customers as they spend more time online. While stopping media spend might be your first instinct, you must be careful that this doesn't have a negative impact on your purchase rates. Read more [here].

What if shoppers aren't shopping for my product?

It can be tempting to leverage third-party e-commerce platforms. However, it's not worth handing over your customer data and relationships. Instead, you can:

- Create partnerships so that both parties can use their respective assets and audiences to cross-promote one another to boost brand perception, build brand strength, and offer special promotions. (To explore potential partners, use [Brand Match], a directory of D2C brands).
- Offer online discounts and promotions.
- Adjust your messaging so that it comes from a place of empathy. Brainstorm ways your brand and its products can show up and support them through these uncertain times.

Read more here.

I have a brick and mortar, and no one is coming into my business. What should I do?

Whether your community is on a mandatory lockdown or customers are staying safe by self-quarantining, levels of foot traffic have significantly reduced. The good news is that we live in a digital age. With more people at home, they're spending more time online. This presents a new opportunity: start a digital presence *or* strengthen your existing digital presence. Read more here.

My supply chain has been compromised, and I have no product to sell. What should I do?

The first thing that you should do is keep your customers in the loop. When your team has the appropriate response ready, send out an email. Communicate clearly (and often) as updates are being made. Consider creating a proactive press release that explains the situation in full, admits fault, and goes into detail around how you'll make it up to them. Your customers are more likely to understand the company's circumstances if you're transparent. Read more here.

You can also find a list of manufacturing resources here.

How do I address COVID-19 concerns that my customers are having?

Don't be overly optimistic or pessimistic — be honest. Be as specific as possible with the steps you're taking in response to the outbreak and what this means for customers. Send out updates as often as is needed to convey any significant changes. For messaging tips, read more here.

How can I engage customers with my brand in a fun and helpful way?

When customer engagement takes a dip, provide timely and helpful content that's relevant to your followers. Share useful tips specific to your industry to show that you care. Host virtual events or webinars, and/or create a dedicated Slack channel for your brand's community. Read more here.

People hear about coronavirus non-stop. How do I address the situation without adding to the noise?

Since the outbreak, people have been bombarded with emails — it's starting to get noisy. Communicate with your audience about how your brand is managing COVID-19, but meet them where they already are (like on organic social or your website).

My brand is seeing a sales surge — how do I keep the momentum going?

It's true that when an unusual global event strikes, some products are naturally going to be winners — and for little reason other than circumstance. Read more here for tactics to help brands and D2Cs sustain an unforeseen topical surge.

How do I show customers my gratitude during these challenging times?

While you may no longer have the ability to connect with your customers face to face, there are many ways you can continue to strengthen your relationships by expressing your appreciation online. Read more here.

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About AdRoll: AdRoll levels the playing field for ambitious direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands. More than just ads, the AdRoll Growth Marketing Platform includes email marketing, AI-driven product recommendations, and cross-channel measurement. The all-in-one platform serves as mission control for marketers—unifying their data, channels, and measurement—so they can reach the right customers with the right messages at the right times. More than 37,000 customers globally use AdRoll to grow their business while controlling their own destiny. To get started for free today, visit www.adroll.com. AdRoll is a division of NextRoll Inc. and is headquartered in San Francisco, with offices in Dublin, New York City, Salt Lake City, and Sydney.