



# Content Marketing in Difficult Times



The COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing recession rapidly created a new environment in which to market. When disasters strike, here are the whys and ways to look on the sunny side and prepare for when the dust settles.

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*creators of content you  
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AN EBOOK TO HELP YOU MARKET BETTER

**When the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant and effective."**

—Stephen R. Covey

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# changing course

**pivot**

DEFINING  
**brand  
messaging**

Brand messaging provides the words and imagery that help customers and prospects understand a company's value (why it is useful) and values (what it believes in). Through content marketing, skilled writers and creatives add the stickiness needed to inspire customers to want to buy a company's offerings.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has been**, first and foremost, an extraordinary human tragedy affecting countless people. Additionally, it has been a devastating blow to both local and global economies.

In early 2020, B2B marketers had to quickly abandon their planned business-as-usual content marketing strategies, or risk losing both trust and customers through insensitivity.

According to an [eMarketer report](#), social media marketing pivoted quickly in March, as advertisers changed creative content and communications toward brand messaging and away from [performance-based advertising](#).

Amid event postponements, companies have an opportunity to increase engagement by globally scaling digital events. Through the power of content marketing, communicating with your audience can remain undisrupted.



# buyers' behavior interrupted

be  
there

## messaging tips

**QUANTITY** | Be considerate of how often you communicate with customers. Segment your audience and send communication on a need-to-know basis.

**QUALITY** | Be selective about what information you share. Stick to helpful updates, such as shipping delays, out-of-stock products, policy changes or solutions that customers may now find essential.

**CHANNELS** | Consider the channels that might be most effective, given the current crisis. Social media has become more important in the short-term marketing mix.

**During a crisis**, workers' day-to-day lives are gravely impacted and their attention is diverted in countless directions.

Depending upon the industry, a buyer's spending ability may be greatly reduced, but the good news is that they may be heavily researching online (more than usual) for when funds are available. In good economic times, **nearly 70%** of B2B buyers are influenced by digital marketing.

Building loyalty in a time of crisis can make or break a brand. Your communication should first be focused on keeping existing partners, as they will be the ones providing growth. Partners should always be viewed as people (not numbers) with whom you nurture solid relationships.

Making a strategic investment in your company by focusing on brand awareness will help build trust, ensuring that when business picks up, your company is poised to maintain and cultivate fruitful relationships.



# shape your new appeal

In a recent survey, U.S. consumers were asked which factors impacted their trust of a brand. The top responses focused on not taking advantage of a crisis to maximize profits, and addressing the well-being of their employees and customers.

Consumers cared less about messages of hope and optimism. Attributes that instilled confidence included a demonstration of steady leadership and prioritizing the safety of customers and employees. Brands that fall short risk compromising their trustworthiness and reputation.

## FACTORS THAT MAKE CONSUMERS TRUST BRANDS MORE IN THE MIDST OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Don't take advantage of a crisis to maximize profits           | 33% |
| Take care of their employees                                   | 24% |
| Take care of their customers                                   | 24% |
| Maintain reasonable pricing                                    | 22% |
| Go above and beyond the safety standards and recommendations   | 21% |
| Don't overreact or underestimate the circumstances             | 19% |
| Help keep me and my loved ones safe                            | 18% |
| Give back to the community, particularly in times of need      | 18% |
| Communicate in a transparent and timely manner                 | 16% |
| Among first to respond in a time of crisis                     | 14% |
| Represent strong moral principles, such as integrity           | 13% |
| Demonstrate expertise in their industry                        | 13% |
| Established track record of responding well in times of crisis | 12% |
| Deliver a message of hope and optimism                         | 12% |
| Empathize by showing compassion                                | 11% |
| Provide a sense of hope  | 4%  |

Source: Qualtrics

# offer empathetic messaging

be  
gentle

Using sensitivity and the right **tone**, nurture customer relationships through non-promotional and positive content (“We understand and we can help by ...”) that provides **educational value** with every touch. Position your company’s core capabilities and **values** at the forefront, and convey how you can assist.

## monitor feedback

To ensure that your brand messaging is being sensitive to a crisis and empathetic to customers, have a process in place to gauge consumer sentiments and review comments across channels. Be ready to change direction if needed.

### **ACHIEVING FITTING SEGUES TO SALES PITCHES IN A CRISIS**

Acknowledge the impact of the crisis with a brief statement.

Let customers know about how you are supporting your staff.

Explain how your products or services can help customers now.

Let customers know about any good deeds you are doing to help your community or other industries.

Use your expertise to educate others on how to do something useful.

Promote new or existing solutions that customers may now find essential.

Be as transparent as possible and stay true to your brand in all communications.



# adapt to a new reality

## meet goals

[B2B TECH INDUSTRY]

## today's challenges

### **FEWER NEAR-TERM DEALS**

Real opportunities are harder to find because tech buyers will put a higher bar on what is worth pursuing.

### **LONGER BUY CYCLE**

Tech buyers are more intensely scrutinizing all spending.

### **INCREASED COMPETITION**

Same number of tech vendors/ reps are chasing a smaller number of deals, in addition to competition from adjacent markets.

**While planned 2020 initiatives remain important**, marketers must now also focus on staying resilient. With a longer buying cycle, marketers need to create more content to keep the right buyers engaged with their solutions at every stage.

These tips will help you review, refresh and leverage your existing content so that it is adapted to today's new reality and positions you as a trusted resource.

- Review Google keyword search trends related to your business to identify any changes.
- Augment your existing content marketing to better position your offerings around pain points businesses are now facing.
- Prioritize which of your existing content marketing assets need to be at the forefront, and refine your calls to action.
- Offer a greater quantity of assets related to customers' pain points for more credibility in a varied media mix.
- Review and reprioritize personas to those with spending capacity amid the crisis.
- With face-to-face events reduced, provide sales teams with more digital content to engage prospects.
- Amplify messaging that resonates most with your audience on social media.
- Use content syndication to increase reach and brand awareness.
- Realign editorial calendars as needed.

# when the message is off track

## hard lesson

**In the very early stages of the pandemic**, many U.S. companies promoted their products and services using their unchanged barrage of digital promotions ... all of which lacked the social awareness or an empathetic tone to what we were experiencing. From small to large enterprises, when the pandemic's gravity was realized weeks later, most pivoted their marketing communications skillfully and quickly, but some fell short.

Here's a real-life example of what *not* to do in a crisis and how this unnamed company rebounded. (To protect privacy, let's call the company Acme Inc., the owner Melanie, and the customer Kevin.)

Acme Inc.'s company values seemed to align with Kevin's, which, in the past, allowed him to trust and use Acme's services repeatedly. During the initial stages of the



# when the message is off track

## hard lesson

pandemic, Acme relentlessly cranked out digital salesy promotions pushing services that were not helpful for the times, and with nary an empathetic nod to the crisis. At first, Kevin thought perhaps the Acme team's inaction to change focus and messaging was due to denial about the black cloud hovering above us all. (Many companies went dark for a spell.) Or, maybe the recent investments Acme had made in staff and space had clouded the company's incessant charge forward. With no change in Acme's communications, in time, Kevin felt a visceral annoyance and disappointment by their insensitivity ... and questioned whether he would ever do business with Acme again.

Timing and an intelligent response to a crisis are critical. We all know that people do business with people they trust. Acme could have benefited greatly by conferring with marketing or media relations professionals to guide its tone and messaging, or followed the example of larger companies that have access to such a brain trust.

Kevin reports that Acme finally abandoned its business-as-usual promotions, changed its tone and messaging, and began to offer ways to help other businesses during this crisis through a series of free training videos.

Time will tell if these late actions mitigated the damage to Acme's reputation so that, once again, customers like Kevin view it as an authentic and trusted resource.

# engage with stories

## words + imagery

**By nature**, people love (and remember) **good stories**. That's why your marketing content should include them whenever possible. Anne Saita, editorial director of Twirling Tiger Media, says, "One of the best ways to convey dense or dry data is to open with a quick narrative and then move into the numbers. Those figures will suddenly carry more weight and leave a lasting impression, even if all the reader remembers is the story behind them."

Use **creative thinking** in your marketing to get noticed. And, collaborate with creatives to reap the benefits of the enhancements they bring to a project. The **results of a recent study** show that 74% of your B2B marketing peers value and realize how critical creativity, craft and well-executed production is to the success of content marketing.

Rip a page from author Margaret Atwood's credo and apply it to your content marketing. In a **MasterClass trailer**, Atwood discusses how "people are always coming up with new theories of the novel, but the main rule is ...

# hold my attention."



## PROVIDING CONTENT CREATION SERVICES

If you are short on time or in-house talent for creating content worth reading, Twirling Tiger Media can help—on big or small projects.

Twirling Tiger Media strategizes, writes and designs for all industries with clarity and impact. We create advertisements, native articles/sponsored content, blog posts, case studies, ebooks, magazines, media announcements, success stories, web content, webinar-to-PDF assets, white papers and more.

### MORE WAYS TO LEARN

#### READ OUR BLOG >

A blog with tips on how to create fierce content marketing, at work or at play.

#### USE OUR KNOWLEDGE CENTER >

Learn how to improve your craft and better position your organization's thought leadership for stronger audience engagement.

### LET'S START A NEW PROJECT TOGETHER!

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