



A GUIDE TO **B2B MARKETING** DURING (AND AFTER) COVID-19





2020 IS ALL ABOUT AGILITY.



**Ellie Smith, Director of Client Services
at The Marketing Pod**

“The coronavirus pandemic has caused B2B marketers across all industries to reassess their 2020 marketing strategies, as campaigns that were delivering in Q1 became ineffective or impossible to carry out in Q2.

However, it seems that those of us working in the B2B sector are adapting well to the huge changes we have all experienced in the last few months. Research has shown that the majority of B2B marketers are confident in their organisation's ability to work remotely, with only 11% of B2B marketers believing that their organisation will be compromised by remote working. Many B2B marketers are also embracing innovation due to the pandemic, with 43% introducing innovation to their customer comms and 49% implementing product or service innovations. In fact, 14% of B2B marketers describe their approach to marketing during the pandemic as 'seizing the opportunity'.

But that doesn't mean that there aren't challenges ahead. Many B2B marketers are working with reduced budgets, or are having to quickly reallocate their budget in response to changing customer priorities.

And with marketing budgets likely to face increased scrutiny in the months ahead, it's crucial that B2B marketers deliver tangible results; results which contribute to their organisation's broader business plan.

This means that in 2020, flexibility is key. You may need to pivot your existing strategy - this is an ideal time to reassess your audience and review your activity for the year ahead. By identifying the channels, messages and tools that will resonate with your target audience in this new landscape and focusing on them, you can ensure you're driving maximum value from your marketing. We've packed the first half of this guide with our best-practice tips on how to do this, along with what we've seen working well in the past few months.

In the second half of the guide, we focus on key considerations for 2021 - because while your 2020 strategy is on pause, you should have more time to create a robust strategy for the coming year. We can expect 2021 to bring fresh challenges (with many predicting a recession), but by taking a strategic approach you can ensure that your campaigns resonate and deliver the results you need.”

PREPARE TO PIVOT.



While much of your marketing plan may be on hold for the foreseeable future, the strategy behind your marketing plan should be much more robust. Because while your short-term activity may have relied upon events going ahead and your customers being in the office, your long-term strategy should have been built on the deep insight you have into your customers and the market environment in which they operate.

So although your market landscape may continue to change rapidly, much of your strategy should remain relevant and valuable. However, in such a challenging environment, it's a good idea to go back and review your strategy with your customer at the centre of your mind.

You can determine whether you need to pivot your strategy by reviewing it in light of these key questions...

Are you still targeting the right audience?

The coronavirus crisis has had such a global impact, it's likely that the context in which your customers are operating has changed - and if it has, you may need to adapt the way you market to them, or focus on another audience entirely for now. **You know your customers**, so go back to the customer segmentation that informed your strategy, which should contain all the insight you need to determine whether you need to change your target audience - or change your approach to your target audience.

Do you need to pivot your positioning?

Once you have determined whether your target audience is still the right strategic choice for your organisation, it's time to consider whether your positioning with them is still correct in the new market context.

You may feel you were front of mind for them before the pandemic hit, but are you still top-of-mind now? If not, you may need to pivot your positioning to ensure you're still engaging these customers now that they have different priorities. There is likely to still be a need for your products or services, but your lead times to sale may be longer, the customer journey may be different, and your overall proposition may need to change.

Which products should you be activating?

When deciding on which elements of your product portfolio you should activate, you need to take a long hard look at your business plan and the rationale behind the numbers. Does that rationale still stand?

It's also worth considering whether you need to change your overall proposition or amend it. Do your customers still have the same challenges that they did prior to the Covid 19 crisis? Do your products or services resolve their current pain points? If the answer is no, then you need to deactivate those products or services for now and ideally strive to fill the gap with a new proposition within your existing product set. If that's not possible, then you should instead seek a different target segment for your current proposition.



EXCELLING AT EXECUTION



Once you're sure on your strategy, you can be confident in planning your execution - and this year, it's all about being agile and responsive.

When your landscape is constantly changing, it can be tempting to take a reactive approach to your marketing - but this could lead you to waste money on ineffective campaigns. Ensure your activity is always aligned to your strategy by always...

Checking in with your customers

Customer research is complex at the minute. While asking your customers about their future plans is usually advisable, people are unable to predict how coronavirus will affect their actions, budgets or businesses in three months or even three weeks from now. So it's best to keep any questions focused on the issues they're facing right now, as this will give

you the information you need to ensure you're addressing their key pain points. You should also be checking in with your customers more frequently than you usually would, because as the situation evolves the challenges they face will change too - but you will only know this by talking to them.

Reviewing your data

The data you collect on your customers could help you to gain a clearer picture on the best ways to reach them, as the crisis may be affecting their behaviour in ways that they aren't even aware of themselves. You may find that tried-and-tested techniques aren't achieving the same results as they did just a few months ago, while other campaigns are performing well on channels that you haven't had much success on previously. So make sure that you're not wasting your budget by regularly reviewing the data you're collecting and adapting your spend accordingly.

Reaching out appropriately

During such a difficult time for so many people, it's crucial that you're particularly careful in crafting your messaging and creatives. Images of large groups of employees enjoying office life are unlikely to resonate while we're still under lockdown, for example, while communications that are overly optimistic could be seen as insensitive. So look at all of your comms through a Covid-19 lens before you press send, but make sure you're not being too bland in your efforts to be empathetic. Stay on-brand, and avoid over-used phrases such as 'we're here for you' and 'unprecedented circumstances'.

Measuring your success

It's likely that at least some of your original 2020 marketing plan has been disrupted, but rather than lamenting the activity you can't carry out right now, take the opportunity to be creative and explore new tools and techniques. Perhaps you think a new proposition would work well in this environment, or you'd like to experiment with a new format such as podcasts while in-person events are on hold. Now is a great time to give it a go - we're all grappling with a new way of working at the minute, so it's worth taking some time to work out what gains traction and what doesn't. Just make sure you're always measuring the results of your activity, so you can make adjustments where necessary.

Our top tip:

We're fierce proponents of A/B testing, particularly in such an evolving environment. By testing out different messages, creatives and channels you can quickly discover what works and what doesn't.



WHAT'S WORKING (AND WHAT'S NOT)?

If you're ready to try new things, but you're not sure where to start, here's our advice on where you should be focusing your efforts in 2020.

▶ Press play on...

Digital advertising

It's tempting to reduce ad spend during times of economic uncertainty, but if you can maintain or even increase your digital advertising budget then your brand could really benefit. As many businesses dial down their advertising efforts, ad costs are falling, and those that continue to advertise stand to gain a greater share of voice. So if you can afford to boost your search and social advertising activity, we highly recommend doing so.

Podcasts

Podcasts are another medium that has been thriving since we all started working more remotely. As an audio-only format, podcasts work really well because they give your audience a chance to digest your content while doing other things - which is perfect for busy professionals that might not have time to dedicate to a webinar. They are also much simpler to execute than you might think, thanks to technology like Squadcast!

For more tips on starting your own company podcast, [click here](#).

Webinars

With many planned trade shows and conferences now going virtual, the (already popular) webinar format has become the go-to event format for B2B marketers this year. And for good reason - they provide a much-needed chance for professionals to stay connected to the latest industry changes and network with their peers. Make sure your webinar stands out from the many others your audience is likely to be attending by securing an interesting, expert speaker to take part.

Top tips for engagement

You can make your webinars just as interactive as in-person events by:

- Using software which allows you to create 'breakout' rooms for delegate discussions
- Carrying out live polls to get the audience's opinions, and feeding the results back to them
- Leaving plenty of time for a Q&A session at the end - many will come simply to put their questions to the speaker



Sales enablement

Businesses with sales and marketing teams that work in collaboration with each other are much more likely to thrive than those who waste time and resources competing against each other. So if your organisation's sales and marketing teams are still operating in silos, now is the time to take a more collaborative approach. You're all working towards the same business goals, so give your sales team a toolkit of materials like blogs, videos and product cards that they can easily personalise to individual prospects. By providing them with these tools and the data you've gathered on that prospect, you're giving them everything they need to turn your marketing-qualified leads into **sales-qualified leads**.



|| Press pause on...

Direct mail

In typical circumstances, we're very enthusiastic about the power of personalised direct mail - but if your audience is likely to be away from their desks for an extended period, your DMs could become lost in the big pile of post they return to. So hold on any direct mail activity for now.

In-person events

Until the coronavirus crisis is under control, we wouldn't recommend getting involved in any in-person events as there's a risk that these events will be postponed, cancelled or poorly attended even if they do go ahead. Stay connected with your customers by holding digital events instead!

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2021



Unfortunately, it's almost certain that the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic will lead to a global recession at some point in the next year, which means many of us are facing challenging times ahead.

The word 'recession' strikes fear into most marketers' hearts, because when economic conditions get tough, marketing budgets can be the first to be cut. But the good news is that brands and marketers have weathered recessions many times before. By learning from their successes and mistakes, you can ensure that your brand is prepared to survive the recession and thrive once it's over.

The power of brand

Brand equity gives us some protection in a recession, but the true value of a strong brand really shines through when we come out of a recession. Data from the 2008 recession shows that those brands with significant brand equity suffered just as much as their peers, but once the recession came to an end they grew much more quickly.

If you don't have much equity in your brand yet, you should focus on increasing your advertising spend now in order to strengthen your brand before the recession hits. If your competitors are reducing their **advertising** presence (which many organisations are), then you stand to maintain a greater share of voice simply by maintaining your ad spend. Research has

shown that brands whose share of voice (SOV) are greater than their market share are more likely to gain market share, while those who have a smaller SOV than their share of market are more likely to lose market share.

So, although it may be tempting to reduce your spending on **digital advertising**, if your brand needs a boost you could benefit from maintaining or increasing your spend on **search and social media ads**. If (as is likely) your competitors reduce their ad spend, and advertisers continue to reduce ad costs as a result, you could substantially increase your organisation's share of voice simply by holding your existing ad budget. With the majority of the UK workforce currently working from home, audiences for online channels are also larger than usual, so your

search engine and social media ads are likely to reach a wider audience.

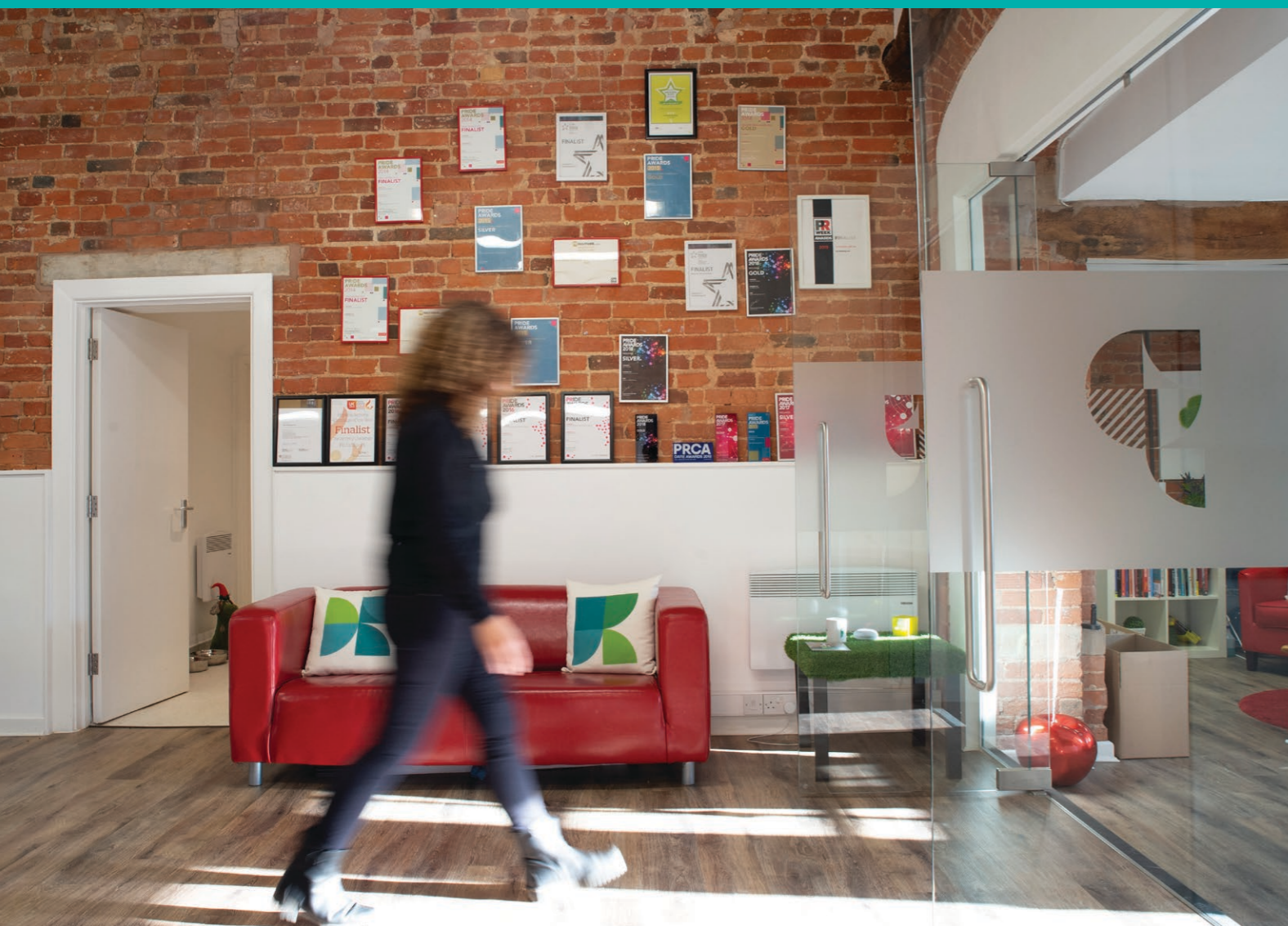
And while **outreach** activity can often be neglected, PR is another key way to add value to your brand. Coverage in trade media titles is likely to give your organisation far more authority and credibility in your audience's eyes than a piece of content on your website, building some of that much-needed trust between you and your prospects.

EXPERT SUPPORT FROM AN AGILE AGENCY

We hope you've picked up some useful insights from this guide.

We know it's not easy to know what the 'right' approach to take is while our environment continues to change so rapidly, but we're confident that by focusing on tactics and regularly checking in with your customers in 2020, you'll be able to build a robust strategy for 2021.

If you're keen to implement some of the tools and techniques we've covered (or any others) but you could use some external support with doing so, The Marketing Pod is here to help. We've built our team to ensure that we can provide experts to cover every marketing need - so whether you need strategic advice or support with delivering your campaigns, you can turn to us.



We're here for you when you need...

...to adapt quickly

We know that in the current environment, you need to be agile, and we're ready to deliver projects on a tight turnaround.

...B2B marketing experts

We are B2B marketing specialists - we have years of experience working in B2B, and we've made B2B Marketing's list of the top marcomms agencies for two years running. We've also won multiple awards for our B2B campaigns, from key trade organisations like the CIM, CIPR and PRCA.

...strategic consultancy

When you're focused on carrying out reactive, agile marketing tactics, it can be difficult to think strategically. Our experts can provide a much-needed external perspective and help you to take a long-term view to create a strategy that delivers for your organisation.

...support across the marketing spectrum

We offer a full suite of marketing services, so we can support you with all of your requirements, from copywriting and design to PR and digital.

...to demonstrate tangible results

With our bespoke Insights Dashboard, you can see how your online and offline campaigns are performing in real time. And the results should keep your board happy - we have a proven track record of delivering excellent results for B2B businesses, including:

DUCO

INSPIRED ENERGY

GEFCO

nationalgrid

Lucy

DE
THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S AWARD

solutions2
Exhibitions & Events

PENTESEC
CYBER SECURITY

nPower



B2B Marketing

Top 75 UK B2B marcomms
agency 2020

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