

Marketing in the Post-COVID World



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While experts may draw parallels between COVID-19 and the Spanish Flu or even the recent SARS epidemic, it is a fact that the world is entering uncharted territory. The economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis will be unprecedented. With major economies such as the United States already entering recession, organizations across the board will change spending habits in both discretionary and non-discretionary areas. Going ahead, apart from cost cutting, investment patterns will change with increased focus on getting core businesses back on track. Although the marketing segment generally flies under the radar during cost-cutting, things have to be different this time around. Sharper marketing tactics to regain customer confidence will pave way for the future. The current COVID-19 crisis has led to a greater emphasis on the ongoing digitization of enterprises. As the need for adopting and delivering experiences via digital channels grows at a rapid rate, the role of marketers becomes even more indispensable.

With this whitepaper, we aim to shine light on "Changes in Customer Behavior and Attitudes" in the post-COVID world. Along with this, the paper also aims to highlight how these changes will impact businesses, thereby sparking a change in marketing functions for sustained relevance.



Altered Consumer Behaviors, Newer Operating Models

That COVID is impacting and will continue to impact user experiences is a reality now. As the pandemic changes habits and interactions, new patterns and behaviors are emerging in consumption and reception of services. Here are a few examples of the same:

- Heightened adoption of telemedicine as it becomes the primary mode of consultation. Hospital visits will be reserved for patients in need of intensive care or surgical treatments.
- Online education and learning services providers will witness a boom as normal classrooms will be replaced by virtual classes and self-learning programs.
- The entertainment industry will and is already witnessing a sharp uptick in streaming services as platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, and Amazon Prime are already witnessing a steep climb in demand. This will lead to theatrical releases taking a secondary spot after online video streaming services.
- Public transport will take a hit due to the obvious exposure risks involved. The rise in personal transport demand can be gauged by the fact that Germany has prioritized opening their car showrooms over restaurants.
- The global supply chain has already taken a hit, and as countries roll out policies for domestic production, local brands and businesses will have greater adoption. The caution on part of customers regarding products from a central or distant warehouse will also contribute to local growth.
- The airline industry faces a daunting challenge as it will have to overhaul everything -- from seating arrangements to screening at airports. Leisure or personal travel will take a backseat as customers will consider business travels based on the risk and reward factor. Remote working teams and virtual meetings are off to a flying start and these will further cut down the need for inter-continental business travels.
- The professional sports sector, too, is mired in challenges, with its money-spinner -- the live events -- already facing an existential threat. This will lead to severe implications for live viewership, resulting in further challenges.



Digital: The New Normal

At a time when the epidemic has mandated even the neighborhood stores to move to digital channels, large businesses are out of excuses and arguments for not going digital. In-person interactions and meetings have become a thing of the technicolor era as the world goes digital.

The conventional methods are also failing to present the appropriate data points for businesses all over. The traditional methods leave even the big brands in the dark over consumption of their advertising messages. As offline campaigns are replaced by digital campaigns, major brands across the globe have started rethinking their advertising budgets with the wallets tilting toward digital. Since the majority of population spends more time on digital channels and consumes even more digital media due to social distancing, it is only logical for advertising to pivot to digital channels. The wider reach and data driven targeting give brands precise feedback about the efficacy and perceived relevance of their advertising messages.

Gone are the days of celebrity endorsements or festive euphoria tones, the current scenario demands 'relevant' and 'safety' focused advertising messages. Even giants such as McDonalds had gradually shifted their focus to digital channels, but the COVID crisis has only expedited their adoption and execution.



Touchless Commerce

The retail industry experts hold the opinion that even something as routine as grocery shopping will see customers giving preference to self-checkouts and digital payment options. A survey by Engine Insights points at a 74% spike in online shopping since March. Similarly, shopping behavior will witness major disruptions as low contact/no contact commerce gains prominence via unattended delivery, doorstep delivery, or curbside service to cars. Contactless payments are no more just an expectation, but the norm.



Growth of Virtual Experiences

The post-COVID era will witness customers foregoing the habit of in-store or physical experiences and favor virtual experiences.

- ◆ The aforementioned rise in personal transport will witness automakers and dealers investing in AI-driven virtual experiences to expedite the traditional auto buying journey. AR/VR features will replace the actual touch and feel process in a car showroom for all intents and purposes.
- ◆ The emphasis on social distancing will see quicker adoption of Digital Twin capability for replicating real-life scenarios. This will be evident in various sectors, such as healthcare (diagnosis and treatment option selections), retail (garment fittings), auto manufacturing (crash tests), and sales (for test drives).
- ◆ Virtual outfitting capabilities will enable continued engagement with customers for custom-tailored garment businesses.
- ◆ Luxury brands are already bracing to invest in exclusive virtual experience stores to provide a near-real experience.
- ◆ Professional sports associations will need to build capabilities that enable online/remote viewership and shared viewing capabilities along with gamification features





Rise of Subscription Economy

The fear of the unknown will drive customers to make less capital-intensive investment decisions and more short-term investments with rental models or subscriptions witnessing a sharper rise. Some initial estimates predict that the subscription economy will grow to the tune of \$520 billion by the end of 2020. While long-term decisions will still be kept at bay, customers will opt for rolling short-term subscriptions. They will increasingly prefer models that will enable the “pay for usage” service.

The subscription model already dominates the personal entertainment industry. Add to this AI-driven capabilities such as assessing user expressions and attention span while consuming content, and delivering personalized content becomes easier, ensuring a win-win for providers and customers.



Customer Service

The COVID crisis will make in-person service impossible for customers, thus leading to increased pressure on customer support teams. High traffic of calls, longer call durations, and dwindling customer faith will become the order of the day. Businesses not investing in proactive customer service will end up losing customers. The customer service departments would do well to invest in AI-based capabilities to take care of routine calls. AI capabilities differentiating between critical and non-critical calls will reduce the burden on human support executives.

Proactive customer care will gain prominence in the post-COVID era. Given this, smart chatbots will provide relief in terms of quick replies for regular questions/ queries. Apart from this, the businesses will also have to invest in continuously enhancing their FAQ banks.



Data is the New Currency

Tracking the evolution of customer behaviors will ensure that businesses craft the right experiences for them. While the current pandemic situation has compelled a significant chunk of customers to use purely digital channels for their purchases, some customers would shift to pre-crisis norms once everything settles down, but there are predictions that a majority of them will continue to use digital channels. Therefore, it is important that the brands position themselves in the right channel, so as to be visible to their customers. The brands will have to invest in proactively building a databank of customer behavior so as to analyze customer preferences and choices.

The days of guessing customer's channel preferences are over, as capturing data about all the moments in a customer's journey becomes important for brands. Brands must keep a real-time pulse on changing customer preferences in order to stay relevant.





Messaging is the Key

Brands must refrain from using the pandemic and the resultant fear psychosis to reiterate the necessity of their products, no matter their relevance in the current scenario. Any frivolous brand messaging will be critically rejected by the discerning customer. As a confidence building measure for customers, CEOs should start reaching out to consumers to spread awareness about safety practices adopted across the supply chain.

McDonalds had their arches separated. Audi had its rings spread out. Nike, Burger King, Volkswagen had a public service message about distancing. While these campaigns were highly momentary in nature, the fact that brands invested in them using their equity to spread public service messaging cast them in positive light for consumers.

With going digital becoming a necessity, marketing teams will need to explore new channels and target customers in a new paradigm, while ensuring that content, products, information, and offers are digitally delivered even quicker than before. New customer journeys will emerge, and new patterns and behaviors will unfold; meaning that an enterprise will need to be ready to truly deliver digitally. With its manpower, tools, and ready solutions to deliver the new digital wave, marketing is the pivot that will thread all of this together.

How Will These Events Influence Marketers' Operations in the Post-COVID Future?

The aforementioned examples, events, and changes clearly highlight that the epidemic will leave a lingering and deep impact on our lives. The same lingering impact will also create new methods of communication, interaction, consumption, feedback, contracts, buying, and ordering among others. This leads to the conclusion that the encapsulated experience will be an ever-changing entity with mechanisms such as channels remaining intertwined to different contexts too. Hence, the onus is on the marketing teams within an enterprise to quickly assemble all tools and services in order to adapt to these changes. They need to push the envelope for their customer consumptions so that the customers get what they want, setting things into motion.



Redefining and Reconfiguring Journeys



Customer Context and Data Must Be Used



Streamline & Optimize MARTECH



Bring Right Degree of Automation

Marketing functions must own up to channeling positive sentiments and brand reliability while helping sales with revenue and customer confidence. Here are some important tasks and responsibilities that marketing would need to deliver and adapt to.



Redefining and Reconfiguring Journeys

The new habits and patterns have changed the pre-defined customer journeys that were delivered over different channels. The need of the hour is to augment existing systems and methods so as to rejig these journeys instead of crafting new journeys altogether. For example, curb side delivery or contactless home deliveries are new methods introduced in the existing online buying journey. The enterprises should not delay in launching these capabilities at a time when the demand for them is already peaking. Marketing teams must utilize their platform solutions, their MARTECH ecosystems, and their agency partners to quickly configure these steps or methods into the existing user journey flows, and then launch it for end-user consumption as an on-demand release.



Streamline & Optimize MARTECH

Most of the mature organizations have suitable MARTECH stack referred to as their respective marketing or engagement platforms. However, most of these implementations have acquired MARTECH components over a period of time that often leads to patch work rather than integrated platform. It is important to assess and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the MARTECH platforms to ensure its efficiency and optimization levels. As new products are created and new promotions launched to counter the COVID fallout, components in the ecosystem like deployment on demand, simultaneous multi-channel publishing of content, reusing assets across campaigns, getting rid of duplicate tools, etc., must be constantly streamlined. HCL Technologies provides digital consulting services specifically for marketing platforms that addresses comprehensive inspection and assessment of implementations, including recommendations for optimization and modernization.



Customer Context and Data Must Be Used

Bringing customer context with respect to the messaging or experiences was always a need but now it becomes an even pressing need. Customer retention and building customer trust should be areas of focus. While the consumers will be naturally wary of trying out new products, established brands must use this opportunity to strengthen their position by reiterating their brands benefits and establish fresh connections with customers. Instead of focusing on messaging merely to create a buzz, brands should focus on campaigns that will consistently engage with customers in the right way. All customers will not react to external events or pandemic situations in the same manner, therefore, the marketers need to accelerate their customer data platform journeys and ensure that CDPs (Customer Data Platforms) make way to their MARTECH suite. It is no longer an aspiration but a need today. DMPs (Data management platforms) in interim can still be a workable alternative, but cannot be an answer to CDP.



Bring Right Degree of Automation

There is an unprecedented need for automating marketing tasks. Marketers must build automation capabilities to launch promotions for campaign launches and repeated delivery capabilities for brand site launches, regional roll outs, onboarding of business, bulk asset ingestion, and agency handshake -- the list is endless. These tasks still happen as part of human or system-based workflows in many organizations and require manual intervention to promote marketing outcome to desired channels. A BOT-based solution needs investment. Most of the aforementioned activities, such as digital production and localization, can be automated for repeat tasks, thus making the marketing organization very efficient. HCL Technologies Advantage Experience platform offers various automation programs that can improve day-to-day marketing operations by 20%-40%.

New Ways of Working for Marketing Organizations in Post-COVID World

Marketing teams are really close-knit units who work very closely and represent one of the most mature examples of collaboration in an enterprise. Their processes and cultures are very collaborative and bring a lot of other teams, vendors, agencies, and technologies together. In the world of physical distancing, the generally co-located marketing teams may face challenges owing to lack of in-person interactions when working on a product / asset launch together. It is important to bring new cultural adjustments and new ways of working to ensure that these functions are delivered without disruptions and all customer-facing marketing activities run smoothly like before. The following section describes a few practices to deliver remote collaboration and marketing on demand.



Product Aligned Organization



Agile & MVP is More Important Than Ever Before



Remote Marketing Through Remote/Virtual Agile

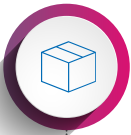


New Operating Models To Ensure Predictable Outcomes and Continuity



Utilizing Platforms To Address Distributed Operating Models





Product Aligned Organization

In the times when activities or interactions mostly happen virtually or remotely, it will become extremely important to stay closer to business value streams and business objectives and structure, so that business value can be delivered without any delays. Moving to a product team structure is not a novel idea anymore. With the shift taking place across industries in the last 2-3 years, it will now hit the mainstream to ensure effectiveness and guarantee business outcome. Marketing is no exception; marketing teams and members must align to product team and feature team constructs, and start delivering the capabilities aligned to business outcomes.



Agile & MVP is More Important Than Ever Before

To this day, marketing teams often work in waterfall model with respect to MARTECH platform deliveries, even in operations. The work sequence follows certain norms that have existed for years. Bringing agility in terms of business outcome delivery through an MVP culture and on-demand releases are now of utmost importance so as to ensure continuous visibility and display business value outcome as soon as possible. BIZ-DEV-OPS principles and methods must be aligned and adopted.



Remote Marketing Through Remote/Virtual Agile

With teams working away from offices in a completely remote setting, it is critical that teams have a structure, process, tools, and governance ensuring continuous deliveries. It becomes even more important for marketing organizations, especially in a condition where a collaborated piece of outcome needs to be produced quickly and needs to go live for marketing initiatives, such as campaign launch or website updates. Some important pointers:

- ◆ Establish specific remote working practices: Shorter Sprints | Documentation Focus | Fluid Agile Teams | Enhanced Testing | Virtual Monitoring | Intelligent Work Allocation
- ◆ Use Marketing Story Points-based estimation methodologies to ensure on-time delivery.

- ◆ Clearly define gates and acceptance criteria and release dates.
- ◆ Track marketing efforts and initiatives using project management tools such as Jira or MRM.
- ◆ Define and measure KPIs formally for every process.
- ◆ Frequent interaction and at least 2 stand up meetings.
- ◆ Automate production work through test and deployment to production (including publishing) workflow automation.
- ◆ Start cross-skilling and up-skilling.
- ◆ Leverage platform workflows to ensure governance, security, and compliance.
- ◆ Replace traditional monitoring with performance-centric governance.
- ◆ Leverage cloud-based solutions.
- ◆ Agency procedures should cover: Brand copyright protection, security of digital assets, real-time approvals, and AI-driven workflows for managing digital assets.
- ◆ Investment in collaborative tools such as brand portals, slack, teams for intra-departmental conversations and engagements is important.

In the times when activities or interactions mostly happen virtually or remotely, it will become extremely important to stay closer to business value streams and business objectives and structure, so that business values can be delivered without any delays. Moving to a product team structure is not a novel idea anymore. With the shift taking place across industries in the last 2-3 years, it will now hit the mainstream to ensure effectiveness and guarantee business outcome. Marketing is no exception; marketing teams and members must align to product team and feature team constructs, and start delivering the capabilities aligned to business outcomes.



New Operating Models To Ensure Predictable Outcomes and Continuity

It is important that defining and adopting more predictable, cost-optimized, and SLA-driven business is prioritized over the usual people and managed-service models. These models should be built on outcome-based business construct. As-a-Service models are gaining popularity for providing business outcome-based services, guaranteeing services aligned to business value and SLAs. Some of the models currently relevant are "Marketing As-a-Service" and "Commerce As-a-Service." Businesses must decide to focus on core marketing functions, such as budgets, prioritization, and strategy as well as allow end-to-end services like "Marketing As-a-Service" to function and thrive in their enterprise model. Marketing As-a-Service models will absorb the risks that come with

disruptive events, ensure business continuity, and create an easily scalable model. These services can be provided in a service catalogue manner using a consumption-based pricing model. The model can be crafted as different tiered model to suit different sizing needs of an enterprise. These As-a-Service models are normally delivered via a Digital Command Center mechanism so as to allow shared services model for execution.

The Digital Command Center is another opportunity for marketers. These centers work on key principles of being SLA driven, predictive operating procedures, and offer great latitude for observability. The scope of a Digital Command Center would primarily include:

- ◆ Business request management, prioritization, and routing
- ◆ Platform monitoring, support, and enhancement
- ◆ Applications monitoring, support, and enhancement
- ◆ Digital production operations
- ◆ Content and site operations
- ◆ Campaign operations
- ◆ Analytics operations
- ◆ Product and SKU launch
- ◆ Pricing configurations
- ◆ Category management
- ◆ Onboarding and setup
- ◆ Rollouts



Utilizing Platforms To Address Distributed Operating Models

Many marketing platforms enable remote working through features such as Remote DAM, automated workflows, AI-driven content authorization, and publishing. Homogenous approach to integrated platform model constituting content management, campaign, lead management, customer retention, and loyalty management capabilities will help marketers build streamlined customer journeys.

In conclusion, marketing functions have to constantly lean on community, brand building, and building the right kind of relationships with customers. Marketers may have to adopt different strategies for markets that are still witnessing the peak of COVID experience and those that are recovering or have recovered. Businesses and customers are slowly limping back to pre-COVID normalcy. Therefore, it is important to not stay in the COVID messaging loop perennially, but focus on post-COVID normalcy.

In summary, marketers need to ensure

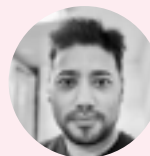
- ◆ Focus on building and retaining customer trust
- ◆ Preparations for new normal
- ◆ Encouragement of loyalty
- ◆ Temporary adjustments made to address COVID-specific requirements are reverted

The guidance listed out in this paper has evolved on the basis of our work experience with industry behemoths and best practices and learnings. By adapting the enablers and recommendations outlined in this paper to the degree of business levels that they experience, marketing functions and marketers will be able to easily adapt to the changing buying behavior and patterns, and a new normal will effortlessly evolve in the future.

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