



Toward a more human brand.

Turbulent times bring an opportunity to create more genuine and valuable bonds with customers.

In times of economic or social turbulence it can be tempting to pause and wait to see what comes next, or perhaps to carry on with some semblance of business as usual. That is not the leadership that is needed today. This is a time when we—as brands, as humans—should **look beyond ourselves and put the needs of consumers, employees, suppliers and communities first.**

Marketers now have virtually unparalleled capabilities to sense those needs and help lead their companies through uncertainty thanks

to the proliferation of data about customers, markets and the world at large. Our data can help us deliver what people value from us—relevance, context and empathy—at every turn with every person. Moreover, it can help our businesses sense and predict sudden shifts in demand, supply interruptions, pricing pressures, product or service preferences and more.

By looking to those insights, being agile and moving quickly, marketers can help inform human-centric communications, experiences,

policies, initiatives and products that reveal the value and deliver on the purpose of our brands in real time. We can shape not only our response to crisis, but our ability to thrive in a changed world.

Doing so can have a lasting, positive impact on our organizations and on the bonds we create with customers while also providing a guiding light on the path to recovery.

Most importantly, it is the right thing to do.

The new urgency of agility.

In turbulent times, the emotional state and needs of customers can change rapidly. Throughout the early months of 2020, it seemed as if every day brought new information, new marketplace and community conditions, a new mood. In such an ever-changing environment, brands that follow a script written yesterday potentially risk losing relevance—or even alienating the very people that they aim to serve.

Responding to such changes requires more than just subtle shifts in campaign creative or media spend. It means constantly reinventing communications with a focus on human outcomes. It means sensing the emotional states, preferences and activities of audiences in real time; and adapting the message, medium and moment of your campaigns to meet people where they are with what they need.

But these new demands for agility are not limited to how your brand communicates.

Becoming a more human brand means infusing flexibility, responsiveness and relevance *into the actions of your whole organization*—from what you charge for products, to where you route shipments, to how you provide customer support and deploy talent.

It also means putting customer needs above short-term return where possible, recognizing that the further horizon is ultimately where value lies. Offering free shipping, eliminating late fees or providing more flexible payment options may not make profitable customers today and may not be sustainable forever. But in times of need, such approaches can help create loyal advocates for life.

In recent years, agility has been the rallying cry behind digital transformation. Responding to challenging times means expanding that call to the full range of activities across the enterprise. Brands that are more agile can respond to marketplace pressures as well as to shifting external forces in society as a whole—allowing them to be contextually connected and relevant regardless of circumstance.

One of the key ways to unlock the potential in this new mindset lies in your data.



IS IT TIME TO **“DEVOPS YOUR BRAND”**?

Ultimately turbulent times are an opportunity for bold and transformative measures. To achieve this at pace and in ways that can adapt to evolving external realities, it's illuminating to look to the world of IT and specifically to the application development and deployment model of DevOps.

At its core, this approach is about connecting development and operations into a constant cycle of iterative improvements. It's about *running* as you *learn to run*—and constantly employing what you learn in the process, allowing you to run faster and more efficiently over time.

The DevOps model can help infuse new agility and responsiveness into communications initiatives, such as:

- **Connecting customer, market and supply chain data** in real time to develop a coherent and current understanding of the world in which you operate
- **Adapting brand standards and messaging** in step with changing customer and market preferences, needs and realities
- **Adjusting advertising frequency, cadence and context** to fit the changing habits and emerging needs of audiences
- **Deploying new communications technologies and channels** to serve customers no matter where they are, no matter what they need in the moment
- **Sensing trends and sentiments in social media** and adjusting your communications in real time

Data can help reveal the path ahead.

The modern marketer has access to more, higher quality and fresher data than ever before. We have first-person data willingly provided by our customers in anticipation of better and more personalized communications. We have anonymous behavioral data such as campaign analytics, website traffic patterns, purchase and service histories. We can also access a wide range of environmental, trend and contextual data, from local weather conditions to national news to social sensing.

All of this data can help us respond to transformative times. It's what enables us to understand and therefore foster empathy with customers—which, in turn, strengthens trust and creates lasting, even emotional bonds. And those same types of data can provide the context and intelligence needed to help us become more sensitive, responsive and relevant in how we operate—the policies we set, the prices we ask, the offerings we market, the way we deploy talent, and more. Those capabilities are most important when conditions are most unpredictable.

The challenges come in understanding and acting on data quickly enough to be nimble, and completely enough to be impactful.

To address those challenges, begin by breaking down the silos that separate customer data, unifying unstructured and structured information in a single customer data platform. This will set a strong foundation on which to deploy artificial intelligence and machine learning to help predict real needs versus wants, and to improve decisioning and orchestration of your campaigns and communications—from email to social media to website content.

Adapting to times of radical change depends on your ability to understand and stay current with the emotional, physical and contextual realities of customers. **Data is your window into those realities.**

By connecting customer data you can also play a crucial role in sensing and informing business decisions about what customers and prospects will need going forward—be that entertainment or medicine, loans or lumber; and prioritizing communications and actions based on the level and type of needs of different constituencies. And you can help identify *where* customers need you—whether that means rerouting shipments, redeploying employees, moving from a retail to a delivery model or, simply, optimizing your website to reflect relevant emerging keyword trends.

Finally, data can give you the confidence to stay on brand and to stay present—even as you adapt to changing circumstances. Your customers are your customers because they have a measure of trust in you. They may even depend on you. Brands become strong because they stay true to their purpose, and embodying that has never been more important. Through your ability to connect a 360-degree view of your customer with what's happening in the world at the moment, you can remain confident that your messages and actions ring true, relevant and welcome.

Activating your voice in unpredictable times.

Doing more with data and becoming more agile are likely to require both near-term and long-term focus. Quick wins are possible, but the brands that have the opportunity to grow customer loyalty and lead markets tomorrow are those that adopt a mindset of continual strategic focus and ongoing improvement in these areas.

At the same time, brands have immediate tactical choices to consider. Those fall under five key pillars of your marketing and communications activities:

TIMING & FREQUENCY

- How does the timing, intensity and frequency of your customer cadence change?
- How much is enough and how much is too much?

TARGETING & SEGMENTATION

- In what ways are your customer segments changing in response to new conditions?

- Which target customers do you need to prioritize?
- Have the needs and journeys of customers changed?

CHANNEL

- Do you need to shift from omnichannel to omnidigital?
- What channels are most appropriate to send brand communications from?
- Where do people go now if they need help or have questions?

MESSAGING

- What is the information that people most need to hear from you?
- Does your messaging need to change in tone or language?
- What topics do you have brand permission to cover?

DESIGN & POSITIONING

- What imagery and format work best to entice customer engagement?
- What will resonate best with your customers?

By being true to your brand and purpose while revisiting these core tactical considerations, you can demonstrate to both loyal customers and new prospects that you are walking into the future alongside them, sensing changing realities as they happen and reacting in agile ways that allow you to continue adding value to their lives.



Rising to the moment.

Historically, the most beloved brands are those that look beyond themselves and put the needs of customers, employees, suppliers and the public first. And the most successful companies are those that have leaned into headwinds of change, innovating new solutions for emerging problems and breaking down legacy models that no longer fit the realities of the day.

We are in a global moment of opportunity. To mean more. To do more. To connect and solve more.

The pace of change due to technological advancement has merged with a new urgency, as the world works to rewire old ways of connecting and thriving as humans. Tomorrow's most trusted brands will be those that embrace the positive transformations of our age—the ability to collect and connect data, apply artificial intelligence and automation, and embrace new ways of working and innovating—to address the challenges we face today.

With our data and more agile practices, we can shape not only our response to crisis, but our recovery in a changed world. We can move in step with evolving markets, emerging needs, changing cultures.

In doing so, we can create more genuine, valuable bonds with customers—while making life genuinely better for the people our brands, products and services touch.



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