



MARCH 2020

# **COVID-19 Recovery Planning:**

**HOW TO PROTECT YOUR BRAND  
IN A TIME OF CRISIS AND PREPARE  
YOURSELF FOR THE NEW NORMAL**

**A crisis is defined as a time when difficult and important decisions must be made.**

That time is now. As we all face decisions we would prefer to avoid, some of us will make the tough decisions quickly and fearlessly, while others will make their decisions even tougher by allowing themselves to fall victim to fear. A crisis can also be a fork in the road and a moment of opportunity. We choose to move quickly and intentionally, because that's the brave thing to do.

**We encourage you to be brave for your brand, too.**



# Where do we begin?

No one knows how long this will all last—how long we'll be living in a socially distanced world and working digitally from the "comfort" of our quarantines. But we do know that we have to hope, trust, plan and work for an end, so let's start there.

**Let's start at the end.**



# Welcome to the new normal.

**There's nothing opportunistic  
about preparing your  
business for the future.**

When this is all said and done, our world will probably look a little different. There will be new consumer habits, new brand outlooks and new industry norms. All of these things and more will make up what we come to know as the new normal.

Many may view the change as a threat. But normal is evolutionary—online ads and computers in our homes are normal now, but they weren't always. And if handled correctly—with poise and confidence—this new normal could just as easily present an opportunity for your brand to emerge with new competitive advantages you never saw coming.



# New Consumer Habits

**When brands accurately predict new behavioral norms and meet customers with solutions...they'll be poised to enjoy a newfound competitive advantage.**

We're all creatures of habit. In fact, nearly half the decisions we make are habitual. So as consumers who are now isolated from the everyday lives we used to know, our habits are being significantly disrupted. Stuck at home, we're embracing alternatives to many of the little things that previously made up our normal routines—delivery services over a quick trip to the store, K-Cups

instead of the Starbucks drive-thru, and yoga classes taken via video rather than in-studio.

As marketers we have to recognize that the longer this crisis lasts, the stickier these new consumption habits will become. And with a disruption as widespread as the one we're facing now, we have to expect a level of change in both B2B and B2C industries.

When brands accurately predict new behavioral norms and meet customers with solutions in their newly preferred modes of engagement, they'll be poised to enjoy a newfound competitive advantage. Those who bet on a total return to normalcy may end up wondering why their loyal customers have disappeared.





# New Brand Outlooks

**The greatest focus for brand marketers should be how we can make flexibility, innovation and change part of our brand's DNA—every day of the week.**

With the unprecedented nature of COVID-19, brands will now undoubtedly be considering how their businesses can evolve to be more flexible and sustainable when faced with situations like this in the future.

For example, as consumers shift to a more digital-first consumption approach, it seems almost obvious that brands will have to follow suit. As if it weren't already happening, social media and influencer

marketing will become an even greater focus than it already was for brands. According to Obviously, an influencer marketing agency, the last two weeks have seen a 76% increase in accumulated likes on #ad posts and campaign impressions in Q1 are up 22% over Q4. That said, it's critical for brands to recognize how these areas of marketing are also being affected right now.

While more extensive guidelines and

expectations for tactics like these will be set, brand leaders will likely become more involved in this area to ensure brand standards remain upheld and consistent.

Ultimately, the greatest focus for brand marketers should be how we can make flexibility, innovation and change part of our brand's DNA—every day of the week. When we value adaptability, we can take on any challenge with confidence.



# Every business is being affected— including your competitor's.

By working together, we must get ahead of industry shifts before they become the norms. It's up to us to connect the dots between what your consumers need now and how your brand is going to deliver those needs.



# So what do we do right now?

We all struggle to understand how we're supposed to respond during a crisis—and for a brand, the struggle can be even more difficult. As the face of a business, a brand walks a fine line during times like these when it comes to building and maintaining trust with consumers. So how do we navigate this without coming off as opportunistic or tone deaf? Here are five things you can do right now to better prepare your brand for the post-COVID-19 world:

- 1. Hold true to your brand.**
- 2. Say less and do more.**
- 3. Think long term.**
- 4. Be focused and flexible.**
- 5. Remember you're not alone.**





1.

# Hold true to your brand.

Connecting with your audience is tough enough without a global pandemic. During times like these, the challenge is even greater—many brand marketers find that the messages they’re putting out into the world are no longer relevant or appropriate. Naturally, this leads them to pivot to new directions that—on the surface level—connect their brands to the situation at hand. Unfortunately, in more cases than you might expect, these new messages come off as self-serving. While they might connect to their audiences’ conventional needs, they fail to recognize current emotional states.

What your brand puts out into the world during this time could influence what people come to expect when this is all over. Assess the emotional needs of your audience right now and address the ones that align with your brand’s personality, tone and promise. By doing so you’ll not only be putting your brand in a positive light, but you’ll also be building brand loyalty that goes for beyond the crisis.





2.

# Say less and do more.

As the saying goes, actions speak louder than words—and that’s especially true for brands in the midst of a crisis. So be proactive. Do things that are actually helpful and empathetic of the current situation—things that are authentic to your brand and align with its purpose. Make it easy for your audience to appreciate the work you’re doing, while helping people see why they need your brand more than ever.

We can’t allow ourselves to become paralyzed by fear. We must acknowledge that things aren’t normal—and that it’s better for us to take a slight misstep in an effort to do something right than to deal with the backlash of doing nothing at all.

You don’t have to say anything—but big or small, you can do something.





3.

# Think long term.

It's easy for us to get caught up in the moment right now. With everything happening so fast, we're all at risk of making decisions based on immediate benefits rather than long-term results. What's ironic about the whole situation is that as many marketing plans are being put on hold, we're being presented an opportunity to spend time doing what we rarely have time to do otherwise—plan ahead.

With your specific budget in mind, consider whether your own current marketing plans should be updated. Evaluate whether messaging and media dollars will be more effective now or later in the year—and when messages will be best received. Strategies may need to be delayed in order to encourage the best response from your audience. Whatever the case may be, keep in mind that the decisions you make now will most certainly affect the decisions you'll be presented with—and the results that you'll see—down the road.





4.

**Be focused  
and flexible.**

To call a global pandemic a distraction would be a massive understatement. But as many businesses face the very real possibility of having to shut their doors for good, it's absolutely critical that we as brand marketers stay focused on the work ahead. We must also respect the fact that for many of us, this is not our normal everyday work. For that reason, we have no choice but to remain flexible in our approach.

Ensure that every communication and action is made with a deliberate purpose. Focus on what really matters to your brand and its consumers right now—and reset your priorities as you see fit. Consider revising the objectives, strategies and messaging of your marketing plan. And dedicate resources only to media that allow for the greatest flexibility in the midst of unknowns. Be practical. Think digital.





5.

**Remember  
you're not  
alone.**

As you consider changes to your marketing plans, look to your team for different perspectives. Seek out best practices and remind yourself that the situation at hand is fluid and could change at any time. Be nimble and responsive to the current climate. And don't forget that we're all facing this crisis—we're all being affected.

In short, be a good human and a good neighbor in the global community. Lean on your peers and agency partners. Don't be afraid to ask for help as you navigate your brand through these uncertain and unprecedented times. As we try to make sense of this socially distanced world, working as a team is more important than ever before.





# One Final Note

Now is the time to ask yourself the hard questions. What impact does our brand want to have on our community? Why should consumers continue to care about what we have to say? Do we have a vision for how our brand should evolve over the next five, ten or fifteen years? Is the message of our brand authentic

to the character of our people and the actions of our business? Do we deeply understand the human truths that drive our customers? If your immediate reaction to these questions isn't satisfying you, then maybe your brand is in need of this moment of introspection.

No matter how long this physical

distance between us may last, we're all in this together. Keep an eye out for bright moments in this dark time and find ways to create your own opportunities for growth. We're all being given a chance to step back and strengthen our foundations. Prepare to re-emerge stronger than ever.



Above all, please remember that the most important thing you can do for your brand is keep yourself and your team healthy.

**Stay safe and watch out for one another.**

YOUR FRIENDS,

**GS&F**