

Is this the best time ever to build brand love?

By [Jaco Lintvelt](#), issued by [Dentsu](#)

5 May 2020

You will not find one marketing handbook that has a plug and play solution for what the communication and marketing industry is currently experiencing. Globally, it is a challenging time requiring strong marketers to lead their company's communication and customer experience strategies in the right direction.



As an industry, I think we can commend ourselves for the agility and innovation many of South Africa's brands have shown.

At Dentsu Data Labs SSA, our contribution to helping brands and marketers navigate the new landscape came in the form of [launching the Dentsu Data Labs #Covid-19 Intelligence Centre](#) earlier this month.



MARKETING & MEDIA

Dentsu Data Labs sub-Saharan Africa launches #Covid-19 Intelligence Centre

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The Dentsu Data Labs #Covid-19 Intelligence Centre helps brands in two ways:

1. Helping brands understand how people are really feeling and keeping track of the 'social' contagion of ideas, feelings and overall morale and how that impacts brands
2. Designing short term focused solutions for brands around the new ways of interaction due to Covid-19

DDL launched this offering to some of the region's top marketers and the key take away from all the engagements was how interested each marketer is to understand their audience better than before.

If I put my consumer hat on, one thing that has stood out for me, since the first reported case of Covid-19 in South Africa, is the clear distinction between brands that care about people and the brands that care only about short-term profits.

I do not believe it is the right time to call out brands and add to the current pressures that they are currently facing, however, I have experienced a few brand updates on multiple social media platforms in the last week or so, that for me, have really made me reconsider if I will ever use their products and/or services in the near future.

Profits or people? Where should the focus be?

If we look at the impact that coronavirus disease has had on our industry, it has equalised the situation to the degree that it affects every single person, company, marketer and communication specialist globally. I find this interesting because if the playing field is now considered even, it makes it possible for consumers to see how different brands are dealing with the same situation.

In terms of the way that brands handle the communication surrounding Covid-19 makes the margin for error from a brand perspective extremely small as consumers can evaluate the response against the brands largest competitors.

What not to do:

Very strong brands and brand equity get built over time, this occurs during the good and the bad times the world experiences, however, I believe that multiple brands are going to lose their brand power if they don't act quickly and switch from pushing products and services, whilst ignoring the current pandemic, and begin focusing their attention on consumers and their needs during this uncertain time.

I entirely understand that it is a crucial time for every brand to continue recording revenue, however, I believe there are alternative ways and very responsible ways this must be done.

During times of uncertainty it also becomes even more important to use data and insights to find and reach those customers in the market in the most efficient manner.

Research has shown that audiences are more likely to engage with and adopt messages that make them feel personally involved by triggering an emotional response and there has never been a more important time for brands to get that right.

A good example:

I had a return airfare booked with a specific international airline (an airline that I personally remain brand loyal to for a number of reasons), however, before I needed to contact them to cancel my flight, the airline proactively released a communication to its customers ahead of the lockdown to put their mind at ease. The communication stipulated that I wouldn't need to worry about going through the tedious process of cancelling my ticket, instead the airline would give me redeemable vouchers that are valid for 12 months in order for me to postpone my travels according to a suitable date for me.

As a consumer, not only did the communication put my mind at ease and give me the sense of being cared about, it also increased my brand love and loyalty to this airline forever as the CEO and the internal marketing team were aligned on their focus for people and customer service.

Consumer and customer satisfaction form part of multiple brands' mission and vision statements, however, the current challenge brand/organisation should be focusing on and demonstrating to their consumers are the promises that they have made over the years and to follow it up with clear action. This airline had all my personal data they needed to keep me updated and make the process easier, and they did exactly that.

Profit or people – perhaps brands can have both?

We are currently assisting multiple brands in figuring the above situation out because, as mentioned earlier, there is no handbook for this situation.

In the above airline example, not only did this brand deliver a superior experience to me in comparison to their competitors, they protected their future revenues. The airline ensured I still believed in them and that I did not incur any financial damage as their valued consumer. The brand thought long term, they focused on profits but tailored their short-term messaging to consumers and drove their strategy based on customer retention (with even more potential profits that they will make from me in the future).

The outlook

I understand that currently for most brands the outlook on how to treat the future is challenging.

My advice to brands is simple:

1. Make sure what the business stands for is aligned to current communication
2. Make it impossible for your consumers to feel that you care more about profit than them as your customer
3. It is more important than ever to maintain communication that is relevant to the current situation and to do this consistently. Do not keep to the same content and creative that you would normally use
4. It is not the time to stop talking to consumers as they will start making their own assumptions on your stance. Why would a brand want to be quiet in a time when people are looking to them for guidance?
5. If the consumers cannot buy from you now or in the near future, tell them why and what you are going to be doing to help them in the interim
6. Be proactive and reach out to your loyal consumers and make it easier for them to cancel/postpone/reconsider their options when it comes to the services you sell

Now is the time to secure the future of your brand

Imagine this scenario: After the Covid-19 pandemic is over, your brand is worth less and you have fewer consumers – not because of the impact of the virus but because your brand's efforts were more focused on profits than people during a time when consumers expected more.

If your brand is aligned to actioning your brands promise, actively promoting content that matters, and caring about your consumers during this time, I believe that not only will your brand presence remain stable, I am confident that it will be even stronger post-Covid-19 and that your customers will believe you when you tell them that you care.

These are the consumers that will stand by you for life.

About the author:



Jaco Lintvelt is a South African digital media and marketing industry heavyweight with a proven track record in increasing profits for Fortune 500 companies/brands across major verticals, e.g. insurance, finance, automotive and alcohol.

A firm believer that change through digital adoption in our everyday life is going to accelerate - it has already impacted most consumers and companies. Africa is the most exciting place to be as the next billion consumers come online.

Currently, as the managing director Dentsu Data Labs SSA, I believe that digital solutions can help businesses deliver more profits.

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