

# The world of digital in uncertain times

 By [Mike van Eck](#)

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With few warning signs, and in a mind-bending and staggering short space of time, the human species, in a fight for survival, has been jolted into a state of isolation and social distancing.



Photo from [Unsplash](#).

Now that we are all learning to adapt to this new reality, what has it done to the world of marketing and digital? How can brands adapt their messaging during this time of uncertainty?

In this article, we will explore some of the digital marketing trends we are learning from other countries and how we should be communicating to maintain brand presence during this period of business unusual.

## The new normal

Over the past few weeks, we have immersed ourselves in a world of webinars to try and remain in touch and stay informed.

This hunger for information (and even misinformation at times) has brought on the sharp emergence of video conferencing apps. Facebook has launched Messenger Rooms. We have seen the meteoric rise of Zoom, although questions are being asked around possible security and privacy concerns. Others emerging in the wake of Zoom include, Skype Meet Now,

Cisco Webex, Starleaf, Jitsi Meet...and yes, Google Hangouts is still around.

Consumer behaviour has also changed rapidly. We are excessively consuming more digital content, all of the time. From streaming services to social media, digital is the new normal as to how we keep in touch and stay informed.

“ ‘Netflix added 15.8 million subscribers, more than double the 7.2 million that was expected - a growth of more than 22% year over year.’ - The Verge ”

The biggest contributor to the success of these subscription streaming services is content. Unique and in large supply.

## Global trends and recommendations

Dentsu Aegis Network (a multinational media and digital marketing communications company), advises that brands should refrain from following actions:

- Short term sales activities as these, risk to drive bad-will, especially if you have an offline heavy business
- Offering cost reductions for subscriptions people can't use or watch due to the pandemic. i.e. gym memberships and sports streaming services.
- Tactical campaigns that capitalise on the situation. This will damage your brand.

In terms of risk diversion, the following media actions are recommended:

- Increasing digital presence to reflect consumer behaviour (this is currently our only link to the outside world)
- Maintain video investments to maintain brand (YouTube is a great platform for content creation over this time – dig through your archived game viewing material or recreate your favourite hotel menu dish that kept guests coming back)
- Consider radio investments as more people travel by car than any other mean of transport (People are tuning in on average for around 1 hour and 46 minutes longer per week compared to the weeks prior to lockdown, according to new figures by GfK, released by Commercial Radio Australia)
- Increase social and keep close eye on social listening (community management and being sensitive to what your followers are saying. Replicate that in your content. Listen, listen, listen)

All current marketing messaging needs to carry a high degree of empathy, showing a high level of understanding for the current consumer frame of mind. For the travel market, we need to look at how we maintain communication during this crises period.

Craig Mawdsley, joint chief strategy officer at AMV BBDO, shared some wise words in a recent article published for Think with Google -

“ Don't be self-serving; don't be cynical; don't talk like an organisation. Do the right thing and keep doing it when this ends. ”

Travel as we know it, may change forever...imagine a future reality of cross border travel with an 'immunity pass'.



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‘As we emerge from months of social distancing, we might be craving human connections - cooking with nonnas in the Italian countryside, or meeting craftsmen in rural Rajasthan, or a family road trip to Niagara Falls. “People call it the great

reset,” says Shoba Mohan, founder of Rare India. “It’s creating awareness for a better kind of travel.” - Vox, *The era of peak travel is over*

Could we see the emergence of key opinion leaders (KOL) in the future of travel marketing? These are not influencers – the likes of Kardashians or Hollywood stars (who influence only in the digital world) – but rather thought leaders in a specific area that people trust (inside and outside the world of digital).

Through this power of influence, we are able to deliver on the three R’s of influence marketing - reach, relevance and resonance. Targeted messages to selected audiences, in a tone that is engaging and memorable, leaving a brand mark for the time when we can all travel again.

‘Some top travel KOLs include Murad Osmann, who has 4.1 million Instagram followers, and The Bucket List Family with 1.7 million Instagram followers. When it comes to industry executives or thought leaders, travel KOLs include Chip Conley, who founded Joie de Vivre Hospitality, a hotel and restaurant company.’ - Izea Influencer Marketing



## Preparing for a post-Covid-19 era in the tourism industry

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Locally, the opportunity could be to align with travel and tourism-related KOL’s such as professional wildlife photographers (Nelis Wolmarans, Professional Wildlife Photographer), respected maître d’s, conservationists (Peter Chadwick, award-winning conservation journalist), game rangers (James Hendry, Wildlife TV Presenter) or local chefs (award-winning chef Nico Verster at Jamala Madikwe), for example.

Although tourism is one of the hardest-hit sectors in this time of isolation, online marketing, and maintaining a digital brand presence for future clients, is crucial for the long term survival of any travel-related brand.

As the world is turning to digital platforms to stay informed and connected, so should our marketing efforts be focussed on digital marketing to maintain brand awareness for when we can all travel again. Here are some of our recommendations...

- **Social media.** Be consistent and post regular updates. Focus your attention on the experience you offer, conservation efforts, how are you supporting your local community and what are you doing at your destination to ready yourself post coronavirus. Consider having a dedicated page or section on your website explaining the steps you are taking at your property or destination to ready yourself for travellers.
- **Look at retargeting website visitors on Google Ads.** SEO will play a vital role in the long term in maintaining a brand presence as people start to think about travelling again.
- **Video content on YouTube and Facebook.** Look at archived material showcasing wildlife diversity, or maybe even a 360-degree walk around your property.
- **Google analytics.** Ensure your website is tagged correctly. Monitor trends to get an indication of where your website visitors are from, what devices do they access from (is your website mobile friendly?) and which sections of your site are most popular.
- **Use Google Trends** to analyse the popularity of top search queries in Google Search across various regions and languages.
- **Stay informed about your brand conversation** via Google Alerts. Get notifications in your inbox as Google trawls web pages, newspaper articles, blogs, or scientific research that matches search terms you specify relevant to your brand conversation.

As owner-managed businesses, we will get hit harder than most, and only together can we navigate through the fear, and optimise our business for a new future.

Start planning now for recovery. Keep investing in marketing.

For now. Stay home. Stay safe. Stay connected.

## ABOUT MIKE VAN ECK

Mike van Eck is the founder and owner of Digital Khaki. Digital Khaki is a small, ambitious, specialist travel and destination digital marketing agency, providing content and social media marketing services. With over 30 years of experience in the business of media, Mke has been privileged to witness the media landscape evolve from a world dominated by traditional media to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where physical meets digital through world-changing innovation and technology.

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