

BEING MORE HUMAN IN A CRISIS

SCOUT

WE ASKED
CONSUMERS WHAT
THEY WANT FROM
BRANDS DURING
THIS PANDEMIC

In the best of times, most people prefer brands that feel more human. And in times like these, facing a global pandemic and economic downturn, being more human is exactly what people need. It goes without saying that these are unprecedented days for every person and every industry on the planet. No one is immune to the impact. It's scary out there. We're all dealing daily with more questions than answers. While there is no crystal ball out there to clearly lay out what is on the other side of this crisis, one thing we know for sure is that in times like these, human spirit and ingenuity always seem to find a way to rise above the tides.

How can a brand stay top of mind with consumers during this time without being tone deaf and/or opportunistic? How can a brand connect with consumers in a way that will honor and preserve loyalty? And, how can a brand be more human in today's COVID-19 world and beyond?

MORE THAN HALF
OF CONSUMERS
WANT BRANDS
TO LEND A
HELPING HAND
TO THOSE THOSE
MOST IMPACTED
BY COVID-19*

Scout and **The Harris Poll** recently asked consumers what they expect from brands during this unprecedented time. **How can a brand stay top of mind with consumers during this time without being tone deaf and/or opportunistic?**

Assisting those most impacted by the current situation

59%

Providing a hopeful message

46%

Company transparency on new procedures/business decisions

39%

Frequent customer touchpoints (e.g., email, social, company website)

31%

Continuing advertising as normal

27%

Survey Method:

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Scout from March 24-25, 2020 among 1,043 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact Cheryl Maher.

THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCES AMONG AGE GROUPS DEALT WITH TRANSPARENCY

1. Overall consumers selected assisting those impacted by the situation as the #1 way consumers feel brands can stay top of mind. However, when you dig into the demographics, we see some interesting differences. While it's probably not surprising that older generations that are most vulnerable to COVID-19 want to see brands helping those impacted, their younger counterparts are as well. But, younger generations are more likely than some older generations to indicate company transparency as a key way for brands to stay top of mind.
 - a. Those ages 18 - 34 are significantly more likely than Gen X to choose transparency on new procedures and/or business decisions: 18-34 (44%) vs 45-54 (31%).
 - b. Those ages 55+ (2 segments of 55-64 and 65+) are significantly more likely than the youngest two segments (under 45) to choose assisting those that are most impacted by the current situation: 18-44 (51%) vs 55+ (67%).
2. Findings didn't vary significantly by region of the country or by male/female.
3. While "continuing advertising as normal" was the least likely selected, still 27% suggested this is an appropriate response.

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FIVE HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS FOR AUTHENTIC HUMAN CONNECTIONS DURING COVID-19

In today's uncertain and unprecedented times, we believe there are five core human characteristics to help guide your brand and content strategies to more deeply connect with customers, and add true value to the lives of many dealing with uncertainty in their lives:

PERSONALITY

Be yourself
while being human

WARMTH

Empathy should
drive all that you do

FIT

You must be flexible
in your pursuit to fit
into everyday lives

TRUST

Transparency is key,
even when
spreading hope

SOCIAL IMPACT

Take every
opportunity to help
those impacted
and help the
greater good

1: PERSONALITY

Be yourself while being human.

It's important to understand that your brand values, the things that make you most human, have never been more important or critical to moving forward. Do not abandon your values. Do not move away from who you are. Work to be the best version of your brand while addressing the complex challenges of this uncertain time.

To help stay authentic, pay attention to how your brand communicates across all channels: online, on television, over the air, in print, etc. Are you doom and gloom? Are you overly optimistic? Are you identifying possible ways to add levity and hope? Are you strictly transactional? Do your communications sound like management wrote them? Are you one-dimensional? Humans are complex.

- Identify your top brand characteristics and values that are relevant during this current situation. Ensure you are consistent with your tone and chosen brand characteristics throughout channels.
- Identify and communicate an “outlier” personality trait to your brand (i.e. snarky, intimate, playful, etc.). Something you uniquely own. Look for ways to lean into that outlier trait where appropriate to set yourself apart and connect on a human level.

2: WARMTH

Empathy should drive all that you do.

These are challenging times, and it's important to show your allegiance with the rest of the world. You don't have to have all the answers, but you and your entire team are facing many of the same challenges others are. It's OK to talk about some of those challenges, and how your company and associates are dealing with them.

Warmth shows that your organization is made up of nice people (hopefully). A brand needs to have an emotional purpose as well as a functional purpose.

- How are you addressing the current state? Audit your communication, make sure you are respectful, kind, and genuinely try to do the most good that you can as an organization.
- Revisit your customer care outreach responses. Try to read them through your customers' eyes and add some empathetic language specific to current emotions and fears.
- Don't sacrifice your personality. You can still be playful, cool, etc. while being helpful and empathetic.

If you don't approach communications with empathy for the current COVID-19 world, you may appear tone deaf to the current state of things, or worse, it may come across that you don't care.

3: FIT

Be flexible in your pursuit to fit into everyday lives.

The goal for a product or services is to make life better, solve a problem, or fill a gap. And today more than ever, brands need to consider the current state of things to identify how your brand is doing that. When in doubt as to how you fit into customers' lives, ask them.

- Get consumer insight into new product development. Survey your database. Ask your social channels.
- Be grateful when consumers make suggestions, and take them seriously.
- How do you distribute? Could you make it easier on people?
- Consider partnerships to help you reach people.
- Can you repurpose your product or service to be more relevant while more people are at home ?

Fit is all about being hyper-local and super personalized. Do you know your demographic well enough to serve them in the best way?

4: TRUST

Truth matters.

This is no time for keeping things close to the vest. Communicate clearly how you see your role moving forward during this crisis, both internally and externally. People need information and straight talk. Let people know how you're handling the current situation. Even if it isn't all positive, people prefer to hear the truth in times of uncertainty.

During this crisis the keys to creating and maintaining trust are to stay connected and focus on truth. It's important to show solidarity and remain engaged with your audience.

- Stay present and engaged. We're all forecasting and re-forecasting the impact this crisis will have on our bottom line on an almost daily basis. Some companies are hanging on by a thread while others remain strong. Consistent and frequent communication is a must.
- Overcommunicate. If your operations have changed due to COVID-19, put your quality/process statements everywhere – website, social, etc. Stand by what you promise.
- Be supportive and social. Look for ways to be supportive on social and on online reviews. If customers are happy with you, thank them. If they are unhappy with you, be transparent and respond. If they are nervous or need info, try to be a support to them.

We're all in this together, for however long this crisis lasts, and it's important if financially possible to avoid going dormant when times are bad, only to attempt to re-ignite when times return to normal.

5: SOCIAL IMPACT

Do good and empower others to do good.

From our recent Harris Poll, the number one thing consumers want from a company/brand during the COVID-19 crisis is to help those impacted by this crisis.

Now more than ever individuals care how socially conscious a company is. Brands are now not only donating to charitable causes, but also becoming creative with ways they can help the greater good by repurposing products/ services, discounting things in high demand, and inspiring individuals to do their part.

To have a meaningful social impact, a brand needs to empower consumers to be a part of a community that does good in the world.

- Establish a clear social message as part of your communications. How are you, your product, or service helping in this time of need?
- Let consumers see the impact of their purchase. Be visible with how and where you do good in the world.
- Publicly thank your employees, brand ambassadors, and customers who support your social message.
- Treat your employees well. Consumers notice.

People realize that they vote with their dollar and that responsible consumerism impacts the world for the better. Consumers want to support brands that in turn support the things that matter to them.

FINAL THOUGHT

The old rules and ways of business don't apply to the current environment.

As a matter of fact, the new ways are still being conceived and implemented as we speak. Find ways to identify new approaches. Find creative ways to engage with your audience as only you can. Find ways to positively impact the lives of those without whom no business could survive. We're all in this together. We all have to support each other. And whenever we do that, good things happen.

At Scout, we combine deep-rooted insights and thoughtful storytelling to help brands discover their inner human, allowing them to build stronger, more defined, and more engaging relationships with their audience. From traditional advertising to innovative digital and technology solutions, we can help move brands from being liked — to being loved.

SCOUT

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