A RETAILER'S GUIDE TO MANAGING THEIR BUSINESS DURING A CRISIS

Management and business strategy tips for retailers during the **COVID-19** crisis

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Total Retail's mission is to provide retail executives with the information they need to do their jobs more effectively. This applies in both good times as well as bad times. And for most of the retail industry, the past weeks and months have certainly fallen into the latter camp. The COVID-19 global pandemic has dealt a significant blow to the retail industry, resulting in closed brick-and-mortar stores, laid off and furloughed employees, disrupted supply chains, just to name a few of the challenges retailers are currently facing.

As such, Total Retail wants to do its part to help its audience in their time of need. Retail and brand executives are in search of answers on how to manage their businesses during this unprecedented time. They want to hear what other businesses have done that have proved successful; they want to pick up tips on how to lead a team during a crisis; they want to know how to best communicate with customers and employees in this stressful time. In short, they want information to help them do their jobs more effectively.

This report was created to provide retail and brand executives with valuable information on these subjects and more, all accessible in one easy-to-read PDF. We've compiled individual articles from leading retail industry experts, all of which have recently been published in Total Retail's e-newsletter (*Total Retail Report*) and website, and combined them to create this guide. The end result is a resource that can be leveraged not just during COVID-19, but during any future crisis that might befell your business.

The guide features insights on how to create effective COVID-19 communications (and measure the impact of them), why now is the right time to foster a direct-to-consumer mind-set within your organization, how to use marketing automation tools during a time of crisis, how to develop an inventory strategy when supply chains are disrupted (like they are now), how to profitably ship online orders, and, perhaps most importantly, necessities for business survival in a crisis.

We hope you find value in this resource. While times are tough right now for many retailers, remember that together we can overcome this and come out the other side a stronger industry. In fact, this guide can help prepare your business to hit the ground running once things get back to normal. During these seemingly dark days, keep this axiom in mind: Success is when preparation meets opportunity.

Stay safe, be well, and we will get through this together.

Joseph D. Keenan

Joe Keenan
Editor-in-Chief
Total Retail

RETAILERS: ARE YOUR COVID-19-RELATED COMMUNICATIONS EFFECTIVE? HERE'S HOW TO TELL

Credit: Getty Images by Busakorn Pongparmit

Along with everyone else, retailers are having a rough time with the COVID-19 outbreak. SparkPost, the world's largest email deliverability engine, looked at its data and pulled some trends related to how companies are communicating; what consumers care to see; and how this crisis is driving transparent, ongoing communication. One thing is certain, during these difficult times, organizations are leaning on digital channels very heavily, with email continuing to be the most versatile, quickly deployable, lowest cost channel for most.

While those in the food and drug categories don't lack store traffic, they're facing abrupt challenges, including managing adjusted hours and product shortages. Other retailers with only brick-and-mortar operations are closing stores and watching their revenue fall off a cliff. Those with e-commerce infrastructure are in somewhat better shape, subject to their own category shortages. The experience runs the gamut for retailers, but what is consistent across the board is that nearly every retailer is tackling new ways to engage with customers to share important information. It can be from the most critical of messages (e.g., "Your prescription is ready for you, but please note new pharmacy pick-up rules") to purely informational (e.g., "Hand sanitizer is back-in-stock."). As the world adjusts to the new normal, retailers in particular are in a unique position to re-create their message and communication strategy, developing a plan that allows them to balance normal promotional messaging with more critical messages.

Bottom Line
From a high level, SparkPost communication data is highlighting the early steps brands are taking, and it's clear that clear, timely, accurate information and reassurance are resonating with consumers. Consider that consumers are opening more than 30 percent of emails they receive of this nature compared to the roughly 15 percent open rate for most standard retail promotional email.

Effective email communication requires information that addresses the basics:

- Are you still open for business? When?

- How are you keeping your workers and customers safe? How — and with what service enhancements or adjustments — are you dealing with customer-facing impacts?

- How are you meeting special customer product and service needs caused by the crisis?

- How can customers contact you with questions or problems?

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What We Found

Filtering for related messaging with subject line keywords, we looked at how retailers in 19 categories are emailing specifically about the coronavirus. *(Note: These developments are advancing so rapidly that we can provide only snapshot views, which will certainly have changed by the time you read this piece.)* Here's what we're seeing that works:

- Almost without exception, message themes are similar across retail sectors — e.g., president/CEO messages; store hours/closures; general updates; event cancellations/postponements; refund policies; staying healthy/safe *(some are unique to a sector; e.g., "How to keep coronavirus off your smartphone")*; merchandise/food delivery safety/options *("COVID-19 teaching resources," "Crafting and coronavirus")*.

- For the most part, messages with subject lines specifically keyed to the illness itself are not also actively promoting the retailer's products. Their intent is to inform and reassure. Other messaging tends not to explicitly reference the illness, but often touches content around the disease's impacts and implications. For example, *"Let's get through this together,"* sent by Dollar Shave Club.

Retailers Creating Opportunity

Despite how serious this situation is, it has created legitimate product and service needs to which retailers must respond. For example, for online orders, Target has a clever store pickup feature, driven by its app. Email messages promote this process and real-time email messages accompany every step. The customer tells Target when they are on the way for pickup. The app can track the customer's location, and know when they've arrived at the store. Using a dedicated parking area, packages are brought directly to the car without further prompting. This process works because many customer-touch channels are aligned, allowing customer engagement data to freely flow from one platform to the next in order to deliver the

service being promoted in the email. The experience is seamless, convenient, and designed to thrive regardless of the threat of a pandemic.

Beyond merchandise and food delivery, we're seeing other examples of opportunities arising due to the sudden necessity for many to work and school from home. These changing needs are generating communication focused on related brand offerings and remain anchored in the principles of consumer convenience, safety and speed. Below are two noteworthy examples:
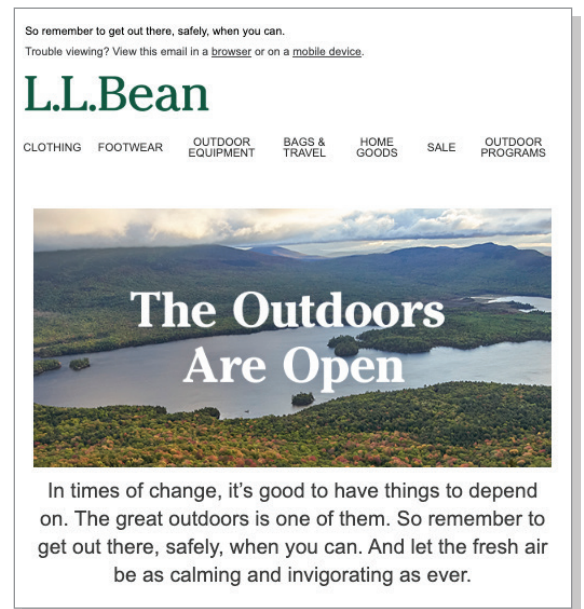
Credit: L.L.Bean by SparkPost

- **From:** L.L.Bean, March 19

- **Subject Line:** The Outdoors Are Open

- **Projected Audience:** 2.3 million (96 percent of the company's projected overall email audience footprint)

- **Read Rate:** 21 percent

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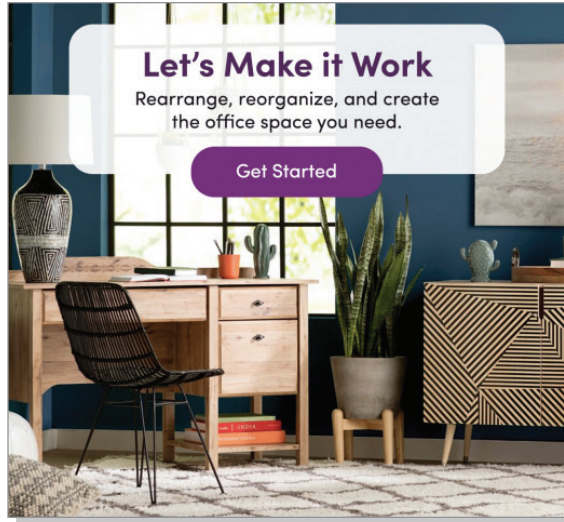
Credit: Wayfair by SparkPost

- **From:** Wayfair, March 20

- **Subject Line:** No home office? No problem.

- **Projected Audience:** 18.6 million (48 percent of the company's projected overall email audience footprint)

- **Read Rate:** 17 percent

Meaningful Tips

While brands must balance promotion and COVID-19-sensitive communications, understanding how customer needs have changed creates new opportunities to provide value. As you evaluate your brand's communications approach, consider these tips:

- Talk to your customers about what they need to know and/or what they may need to do.

- Email engagement is most strongly driven through smart targeting and informative subject lines that reflect relevant content.

- To the extent possible, tailor messaging to customers most likely to respond, based on their status, location, behavior or preference.

- Craft subject lines to efficiently alert recipients to what's in your message.

- Be mindful of tone and the email's overall message, asking yourself, "Is this necessary?"; "How are we helping the customer?"; and "What are we asking from them at this time?"

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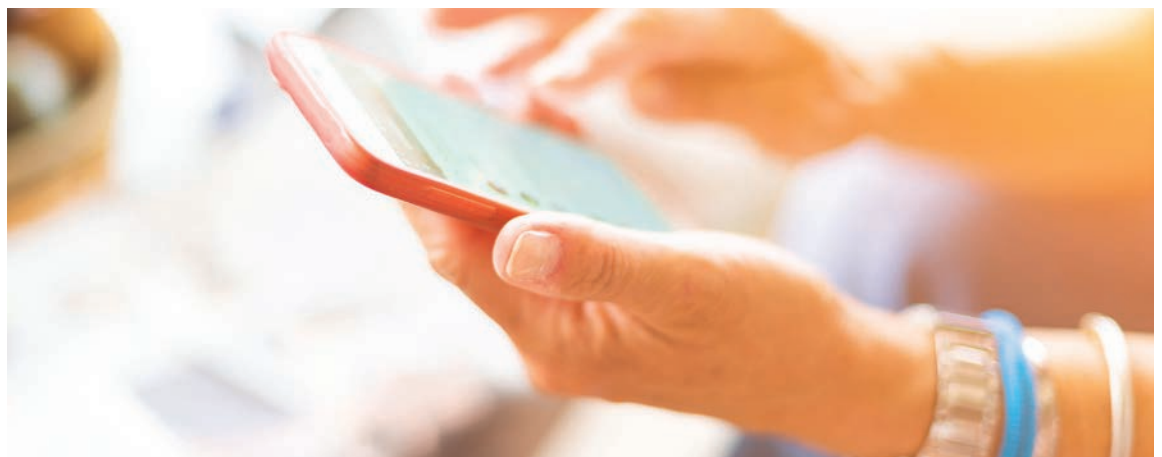
HOW TO MAKE FREE SHIPPING PROFITABLE (EVEN WITH COVID-19)

Credit: Getty Images by Spencer Platt

There are hidden costs in order fulfillment that can be minimized or eliminated by streamlining your supply chain. Options such as buy online, pick up in-store (BOPIS) and ship-from-store are increasingly popular among merchants as lower-cost fulfillment, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Any cost reduction within the supply chain can ease the burden of offering free shipping to cash-strapped end customers. In part seven of this 10-part series, I cover e-commerce-friendly supply chain improvements that would help you offer free shipping profitably, even during these difficult economic times. (Here are parts one, two, three, four, five and six in this multipart series.)

1. Ship-From-Store

Offering free one- or two-day shipping is tough if you don't have multiple fulfillment locations. If your orders cannot reach your customers quickly by ground shipping, then you would end up paying double or more to use the faster air service. However, merchants with brick-and-mortar stores can enable physical stores to do fulfillment.

Through this method, store associates pick, pack and ship online orders. This is exactly what lululemon athletica is doing during the COVID-19 pandemic (its stores have been closed since March 16). lululemon plans to restaff a few stores to fulfill online orders. Ship-from-store can also improve the profits and productivity of physical stores during normal times because store employees can process online orders during slow periods of the day, and move inventory in stores faster.

Leading brick-and-mortar retailers such as Best Buy and Target have adopted ship-from-store very successfully. A well-established nationwide footprint reduces costs and delivery time by shipping from the nearest store. Merchants typically use an order management system (OMS) that can determine which location should ship the order. An OMS analyzes inventory levels, delivery cost, and delivery time to make decisions.

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Typical Order Routing through OMS

Customer Orders Online → OMS Compares Options → Store 1 / Store 2 / Warehouse 1

Factors:
- Days of inventory
- Forecasted demand
- Shipping Costs
- Labor costs
- Delivery ETA
- Inventory lead time
- (many more)

Credit: Cahoot

Pros:
- Improve physical store productivity by fulfilling online orders during slow hours.

- Merchants can reduce costs and increase delivery times by shipping from stores closest to the customer.

- Shared inventory reduces safety stock in case of split inventory.

Cons:
- It requires a robust technology that can sync inventory in real time for stores to power one- and two-day delivery.

- The physical spaces in stores need to be redesigned and retooled to enable the packaging and shipping of online orders.

- Additional training is needed for store employees.

2. Buy Online, Pick Up In-Store (BOPIS)

Another way merchants with physical stores can differentiate themselves is through in-store pickup. Store pickups allow customers the flexibility to get their items within the same day at a low cost to them and the merchant. It's not free shipping per se, but a low-cost alternative that can also boost store traffic.

Store pickup works best for items that are needed quickly, like healthcare products during an illness or grocery items. BOPIS bypasses the shipping process, cutting delivery time from days to mere hours. Retailers with a high volume of store pickups, like Walmart, have recently introduced self-service package lockers to minimize additional staffing needs and wait times.

BOPIS is particularly suited to weathering the COVID-19 outbreak, as it can limit the time consumers spend in public areas, and merchants can continue operating even as home delivery services come under strain. Consumers are already shifting towards these services: BOPIS shopping grew 28 percent year-over-year in February, according to data from Adobe Analytics. This trend lays out a potential survival strategy for retailers to follow as coronavirus concerns grow. For example, Books-A-Million has just expanded its BOPIS service with a curbside option. Consumers can purchase books online and a store associate will bring them to their car when they arrive.

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Credit: Walmart

Pros:

- Customers can get their products within hours.

- Eliminate shipping costs through store pickups.

- Store pickups drive more traffic to a retail location, which would entice additional sales.

Cons:

- Customers can get frustrated and dissatisfied if the pickup isn't convenient or takes a long time.

- Requires a robust inventory management system to check store inventory in real time.

- BOPIS requires store associates' time to prepare orders accurately and efficiently.

- Like shipping from the store, it may require physical spaces to be redesigned or retooled to accommodate a special pickup area for BOPIS orders.

3. Just in Time (JIT) Inventory

Just-in-time (JIT) inventory stocking is a common inventory management technique and a lean methodology to increase efficiency. An excellent example of JIT in action is Zara, the fast-fashion brand. Zara only produces half of its line each season. Throughout the rest of the season, it designs and manufactures variations of popular models that sell well. To do this, Zara has invested in an extremely fast and reliable production process.

Applying Zara's methods, sellers can quickly gather and process historical sales data to make better demand predictions. A good sourcing strategy with JIT concepts would minimize markdowns and dead inventory.

According to the March 23 survey of 1,300 international firms from RapidRatings, 59 percent of U.S. companies said they would be unable to continue shipments for more than two weeks after a production stoppage due to the coronavirus pandemic. The primary culprit is a cross-industry reliance on JIT manufacturing.

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Pros:
- Lower inventory holding costs leading from smaller storage space requirement and less dead stock.

- Free up cash flow (money not used to stockpile inventory can be reinvested elsewhere).

- Capture trends quickly by testing the market and sourcing as needed.

- Less dead stock means less disposal/ inventory return fees and markdowns.

Cons:
- Requires a very accurate estimation of demand to minimize stock-outs.

- Buying inventory frequently makes you more sensitive to price fluctuations; margins will slump if supply prices suddenly go up.

- Requires reliable suppliers and inbound deliveries to not fall behind schedule.

4. Drop-Shipping

Drop-shipping takes away the majority of your cost of storing and fulfilling items. Under this model, merchants forward the orders to suppliers, and the items get shipped directly to customers.

One of the big benefits of this model is the low investment and capital needed to start selling items. Merchants don't stock the items in their warehouse, effectively making it a zero-inventory business. Drop-shipping can also help merchants with market testing for new products. You can quickly bolster your catalog while storing inventory only for your best-selling items.

However, the ease of getting started also results in many merchants selling the same thing. Intense competition drives the retail price down, and margins are typically slim on drop-ship items. Therefore, it's tricky to offer free shipping for drop-ship items. To counter this, merchants can offer free shipping with a minimum order value. Another downside to drop-shipping is you don't have control over the fulfillment process, like marketing inserts, packaging, or limited shipping options.

With the Coronavirus pandemic, drop-shippers should prepare for fulfillment delays and make sure to get that message across to their customers. While merchants wait for factories to open back up in China, it's important to save as much money as possible during this time. Another way to change your drop-ship product strategy is to find new product opportunities due to the spreading virus. Products such as hand sanitizer, vitamins, supplements, masks, and other health-related items are a given, but also online grocery sales are booming.

Dropshipping

Send orders
To supplier

Carrier
delivers item

**Customer buys
at your site**

**Supplier packs &
ships orders**

**Customer
Receives Orders**

Credit: Cahoot

Pros:

- The supplier handles all fulfillment operations, including shipping and returns.

- Less capital is required to start the business as the seller doesn't need to hold inventory.

- Operating costs are also lower since there's no need for warehouse or fulfillment facilities.

- It's easier to start an online business with drop-shipping.

Cons:

- Low margins, and sellers often compete on price because they're selling the same products.

- Very few suppliers can support today's one- and two-day delivery expectations.

- Drop-shipping offers little to no control in fulfillment, such as packing quality, shipping options, inserts, etc.

- Drop-shipping is frowned upon by leading marketplaces such as Amazon.com, and may lead to suspension or penalty.

5. Other Supply Chain Improvements

Mastering the supply chain is both an art and science. Whichever model(s) you settle on, the key is continuous improvement. Whether you're a veteran or just starting, it's always good to step back and reassess your supply chain for improvements. Purposeful improvements in the supply chain can help you improve your cost structure and allow you to offer free shipping profitably.

Here are a few high-level recommendations:

- **Optimize sourcing:** As you scale your sales and increase your bargaining power, you should look beyond your current suppliers. From time to time, consider alternative suppliers that align with your selling strategy, which can fall in the spectrum from a cost leader to a high differentiator.

- **Optimize fulfillment location:** As your volumes grow, inbound and outbound freight becomes a significant cost. Being closer to your customers can save you money and delight them with faster shipping. On the other hand, being closer to your vendors will help you reduce lead time and inbound costs. Both factors should be considered in deciding the optimal fulfillment center location. In addition, some locations also enjoy cheaper labor costs and government incentives.

- **Optimize on-hand inventory:** More inventory allows you to grow sales faster with promotions without fear of going out of stock. However, item popularity/best-seller ranks fluctuate over time, and customer tastes change quickly. If you stockpile too much inventory, you might get stuck with piles of slow-moving product. As discussed above, JIT concepts and drop-shipping can be explored to minimize inventory accumulation. Also, having a robust demand planning process and tools are key to efficient inventory management.

- **Optimize inventory distribution:** Distributed warehousing is excellent for satisfying the customer expectation of free and fast shipping. However, the costs of splitting inventory are often overlooked. According to the square root law of safety stock, splitting inventory increases the safety stock requirements, which in turn will increase your total storage and operation costs.

- **Optimize sales channels:** It's a good practice for brands to sell through multiple channels simultaneously. You sell more by improving item availability and discoverability. Channels like Shopify, BigCommerce, Magento, eBay, Wish, and Walmart have less competition than Amazon, which has more than 8 million third-party sellers vying for customer attention worldwide. By comparison, Walmart only has about 33,000 third-party sellers (as of January 2020). Large Amazon sellers have a chance to be a bigger fish in a smaller pond on Walmart's marketplace.

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HOW TO DEVELOP A CORONAVIRUS INVENTORY STRATEGY

Credit: Getty Images by xavierarnau

Global supply chains haven't had this much disruption since World War II, and the United States wasn't as dependent on oversea goods and manufacturing then. On March 19, J.C. Penney announced that it was closing 850 stores, affecting 90,000 store associates. Sadly, J.C. Penney joins an illustrious group of retailers closing for several weeks to try and flatten the curve of the coronavirus.

John Hopkins University says that 200,000 people globally have the coronavirus. One news source said last week that positive tests in the U.S. increased from 7,700 to 9,000 in 24 hours. But many cases of the virus haven't been diagnosed due to a lack of test kits and therefore are "presumptive." *Forbes* has an article illustrating World Health Organization statistics by country, detailing how this virus is growing exponentially.

This crisis rapidly changes hour by hour, with closed school systems, closed restaurants and bars, and hospitals stretched to the max. As of this article, the entire state of California has been ordered to "stay at home," requiring nonessential businesses to close.

Considering the complexities of global supply chains, we want to concentrate for a minute on inventory availability. Without having "the right" inventory, you have no sales. Your strategy for this crisis needs to be different than normal merchandise planning.

1. **How will the disruption to your supply chain affect sales and your company's ability to stay open?** Formulate your business strategy ... quickly. The first step is to re-project your order demand for the crisis period. From this, you can project inventory needs and labor hours required for fulfillment. The length of time that health authorities are saying this could be at its highest threat is anywhere from one month to four months. One projection is 18 months with a cycle of reinfection. China has been experiencing this since November 2019. It may be best to use a six-week to eight-week projection period. There are other important aspects in addition to inventory, such as local and state health authorities' directives about "social distancing," "self-quarantine" and employees availability.

2. **Will you have inventory available to fill orders?** Pareto's Law or 80/20 rule (i.e., 20 percent of the products give you 80 percent of the sales) applies to many retail and e-commerce merchandise assortments. If Pareto's Law doesn't hold for your business, what key items are you going to keep in stock that maximize sales? Chasing all items through the supply chain may not be feasible. Take care of these key items and you may be able to weather this pandemic from a sales perspective. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Are the factories you work with affected by the virus? Are they at full capacity, on reduced hours for production, or closed?

- Are countries you import from in lock down?

- When you look at key items' in-transit and in stock, how long will item inventories last? Are their alternative suppliers? Can you place larger purchase orders for key items to maximize sales?

- Do you have internal expediters keeping close watch on these key items? Can you be more proactive in advance of a shipment to be sure it's to ship on time?

- Be prepared to pay higher freight costs. How will gross margin be affected?

- What does this strategy do to your cash flow needs? Can you increase lines of credit?

3. **What will be the impacts on freight forwarders and carriers?** Global transportation systems have been strained with the pandemic and will face further capacity constraints in the coming weeks. Priority will obviously be given to those shipments that focus on medical supplies and other life-saving needs. Companies will need to be patient and keep in constant contact with overseas shippers, trucking companies and small parcel carriers. These companies will continually be impacted as the virus continues to spread. The carriers will be fielding a significant number of calls and questions on shipping delays, so be sure to clearly communicate with customers on how shipments may be affected. As more and more commercial flights are grounded or cancelled, carriers like FedEx have the ability to handle this freight. UPS is working with the U.S. government to assist with logistics planning and operations to support coronavirus testing sites. Both FedEx and UPS will continue to focus on response efforts to assist the country as needed, retailers and consumers alike

It's extremely hard to accept this is happening to our businesses, nation and economy. We hope and pray that your business weathers this and comes back quickly. May your family and your employees stay healthy!

> **"IF PARETO'S LAW DOESN'T HOLD FOR YOUR BUSINESS, WHAT KEY ITEMS ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP IN STOCK THAT MAXIMIZE SALES? CHASING ALL ITEMS THROUGH THE SUPPLY CHAIN MAY NOT BE FEASIBLE. TAKE CARE OF THESE KEY ITEMS AND YOU MAY BE ABLE TO WEATHER THIS PANDEMIC FROM A SALES PERSPECTIVE."**

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WHY NOW IS THE TIME FOR RETAILERS TO ADOPT A D-TO-C MIND-SET

Credit: Getty Images by Richard Pohle

In the midst of mounting uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, the presidential election, and other stressors, customer service needs to be dialed up now more than ever. In the retail industry, with more employees working from home and less shoppers visiting physical stores, the time is now for brands to strengthen their direct-to-consumer (D-to-C) mind-set. But how can retailers ensure they're serving their customers AND providing their customer service agents with the right tools to navigate the ever-changing landscape?

In the weeks to come, retailers should expect an increase in customer questions as more people order online. Brands need to be fully prepared to minimize customer service disruptions and maximize agents' ability to seamlessly address customer concerns, especially when they themselves may need to be working remotely. Certainly, the companies that have already positioned themselves for omnichannel and digital-first interactions are at definite advantage, but this doesn't mean that other companies can't catch up. By rethinking the way brands use customer service and technology, retailers can gain better control over their customer-focused practices. Here are some tips for going about doing that:

Focus on minimizing customer service disruptions.
In today's volatile market, it's even more imperative that customer service operations run smoothly. Disruptions and outages can erode customer confidence and damage brand reputation. Big-box stores like Costco, Target, and Best Buy have all experienced website issues during critical shopping times, with some retailers losing 4 percent of a day's sales each hour that a website is down, not to mention high levels of customer frustration. Having the right technology in place can mean the difference between a very satisfied and a very unsatisfied customer. Investing in the right tools can also provide critical support to the customer service agents who will be fielding more queries while they acclimate to working from home.

Don't just talk about being omnichannel, BE omnichannel.
True omnichannel support means being available in any channel a customer wants to use. If a customer contacts a brand via chat, an agent should be able to pick up that conversation online without requiring the customer to repeat any information. Many retailers are turning to omnichannel platforms that include artificial intelligence

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and machine learning to help them automate their business processes, while making it easier for their agents to take action on customer information promptly and correctly. While omnichannel support may require brands to invest in technology to handle shifts between channels, the right tools can significantly improve the customer experience and build customer loyalty.

Tee up personalized interactions for customer service agents.
Providing a consistent experience for customers at every touchpoint makes it significantly easier for agents to deliver the personalized service today's shoppers demand. New research found that 72 percent of consumers say they now only engage with marketing messages personalized and tailored to their interests. That's why arming customer service agents with tools that allow them to access all relevant information in one centralized record is so critical. The easier it is to access this data, the better the agent's chances of creating a personalized connection.

Build and leverage your social media presence.
There's no time like the present for companies to beef up their social media presence and use it as an additional tool for communicating with customers. By using social media platforms to let customers know where and how companies can be reached will create another opportunity for customers to connect directly with retailers. This is especially important because according to Sprout Social 2019, 56 percent of consumers will unfollow a brand if they deliver poor customer service on social media.

Yes, the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 and the election can throw even the soundest D-to-C retailers off their "A" game. However, the ones that embrace a customer-first mentality and follow through with the right support for their agents will be much better positioned to deliver exceptional service while simultaneously keeping their agents happy.

"SEVENTY-TWO PERCENT OF CONSUMERS SAY THEY NOW ONLY ENGAGE WITH MARKETING MESSAGES PERSONALIZED AND TAILORED TO THEIR INTERESTS. THAT'S WHY ARMING CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENTS WITH TOOLS THAT ALLOW THEM TO ACCESS ALL RELEVANT INFORMATION IN ONE CENTRALIZED RECORD IS SO CRITICAL. THE EASIER IT IS TO ACCESS THIS DATA, THE BETTER THE AGENT'S CHANCES OF CREATING A PERSONALIZED CONNECTION."

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CORONAVIRUS AND MARKETING AUTOMATION:
## LET'S BE CAREFUL OUT THERE

Credit: Getty Images by SARINYAPINNGAM

I'm no stranger to writing about disaster pre-paredness and crisis management. I live in an area where we get hit with a hurricane every few years. And while we're in uncharted waters here with the COVID-19 Coronavirus, there are some things that marketers forget about doing in times of crisis.

I will leave up to the medical professionals to discuss what needs to be done to protect yourself from the virus, other than to say it's a very fluid and dangerous situation, so please take is seriously.

That said, marketers and business owners, here's a list of items you need to review:

1. Let's talk about your tone: I received the below emails last Thursday (March 12), and they are completely tone deaf. The subject line for the email I got from Spirit Airlines says it all, "Never A Better Time To Fly." And while I certainly understand that Spirit still needs to fill seats on its planes, maybe it could have come up with a better subject line considering the times?
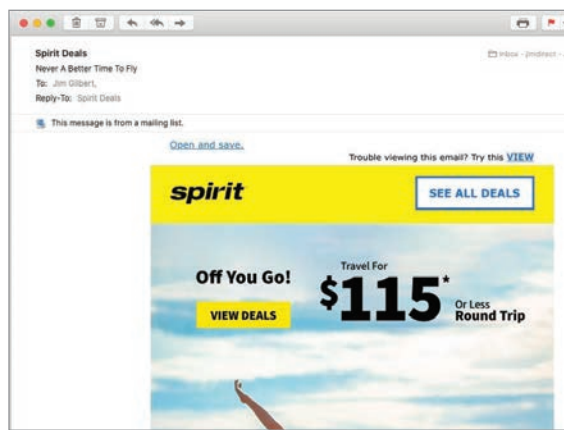
2. In my favorite gaffe email of the day (and I'm not taking political sides here; in fact, I get emails from both parties), our president literally invited me to dinner.
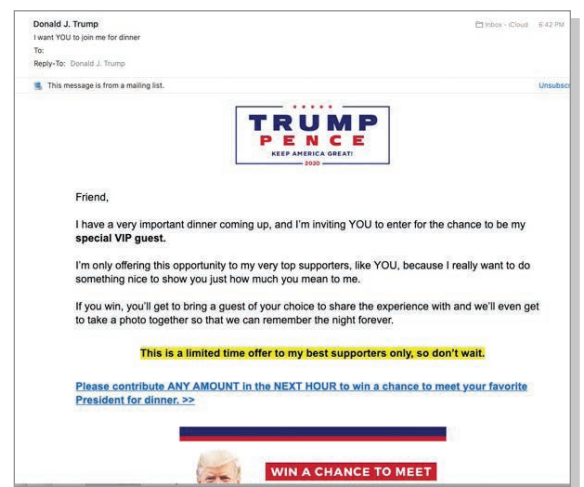
3. Which brings me to point No. 3. Please take a look at your marketing automation campaigns. It may be time to cancel some, tweak some of the copy in others, add some new ones, etc. We tend to set-em-and-forget-em, but unless you want to put a negative ding on your brand image, have a look at what you're sending out — especially in these unprecedented times.

I hope these concepts help. I wrote this quickly given the fluid situation surrounding COVID-19; there are many more things you can do as a marketer in times of crisis. Please be safe!

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LIZ ELTING'S 9 NECESSITIES FOR BUSINESS SURVIVAL IN A CRISIS

With commerce drying up and the entire service economy grinding to a halt in the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it's important that business leaders, from the captains of industry to mom-and-pop bakeries, take pains to navigate this crisis carefully and deliberately. This isn't the time to panic. To help survive this fluid situation, Liz Elting, a business leader, entrepreneur, and philanthropist who famously shepherded her company TransPerfect from a dorm-room startup into a billion-dollar enterprise through both 9/11 and the 2008 financial meltdown, offered the following nine necessities for business survival in a crisis:

1. **Reassure your team.** You can't predict the future, but you must do what you can to provide calm, steady leadership by renewing your commitment to the people who work for you. Set the tone, and everyone else will follow.

2. **Have backup plans for your backup plans.** Much of the world is lurching suddenly over to primarily work-from-home arrangements, which comes with its own set of problems. Tools like conference call systems are already being overwhelmed by volume beyond capacity, so you need to know what you're going to do when your plans fall through. The whole world is rushing to find technological solutions, and that's going to take time. Plan accordingly.

3. **Maintain person-to-person contact.** After 9/11, flights in the United States were grounded for weeks, which meant that business travel was impossible. Thankfully, in 2020 we have tools we didn't have 19 years ago to keep in touch. That means that it's time to back off from email and text and engage more over voice or video. Don't become a disconnected presence.

4. **Proactive communication.** If you weren't a big communicator before, you have to step up and be one now. You need to be proactive and make sure your team and your customers know what's happening step by step. Stay connected, stay together, and make sure your team knows they're not alone.

5. **ABC (always be closing).** You need to hustle like you've never hustled before. There will be a strong tendency for potential clients to grow timid in these uncertain times, but the same goes for your competition. Be forthright, be out there, and offer solutions to the problems of this strange new world we're suddenly in. Don't retrench. Don't retreat.

6. **Invest in work-from-home solutions.** I know the temptation right now is to preserve cash. But you need to keep your business running, and that's not going to happen with half-measures or workarounds. Productivity is already going to be struggling right now; don't let bad tools make it worse. Find a solution that fits your business, and make it work. Give your team time to get up to speed, too. There's going to be a learning curve, so make sure to emphasize scheduling and goal setting (just as you would in the office) to keep everyone on track.

7. **Remember that you aren't alone.** You don't have to solve this crisis at once, and luckily, it's not your responsibility to do it by yourself. You've hired a team you trust and believe in. Now is the time to lean on their collective experience, intelligence and wisdom to help make the right decisions.

8. **Re-evaluate your finances.** These are going to be lean times the likes of which the United States hasn't faced in quite a while. Cut where you can. Do whatever you can to preserve cash flow without cutting people. And the Fed is busy injecting capital into the financial system and slashing interest rates, which means cash is going to be cheap.

9. **Act with integrity.** You need to understand the weight of the historical moment we are in. This isn't a time to shirk responsibilities or balk on commitments. Reaffirm your commitment to your team. If your company is healthy, you have a responsibility to support your team through this crisis. These are times that make and break leaders, and it's going to require vision and a commitment to the common good to make it through. We have an opportunity here to not only survive the crisis, but to create whatever comes after.

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Author Info: John Landsman, Manager of Research Analytics, SparkPost

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Date Published: 4/1/2020
Author Info: Manish Chowdhary, CEO, Cahoot

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Author Info: Brian Barry, President, F. Curtis Barry & Company

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Date Published: 3/16/2020
Author Info: Jim Gilbert, CEO, Gilbert Direct Marketing, Inc.

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Date Published: 3/17/2020
Author Info: Liz Elting, Founder and CEO, Elizabeth Elting Foundation