



COVID-19: GOODWILL CONVERSION

Brands Accelerate Giving Back with Purpose

INTRODUCTION

In the early days of COVID-19, the role of retail elevated nearly immediately with store employees becoming members of the essential frontline seemingly overnight.

Americans are turning to the state of their local grocery store as an unofficial evaluation of the pandemic at large. On top of stocked shelves and safe shopping environments, retailers have been tasked with creating normalcy, camaraderie and security through their communication and action.

Continuing into the first weeks of pantry loading and panic shopping, retailers seemed to be getting more brand mentions than the on-shelf brands within. However, while retailers were forced to act quickest, CPG brands and beyond were not far behind. Many household brand names have recently moved to the forefront of COVID-19 conversation and response.

According to Kantar Monitor, the percentage of those who want brands to take a larger role in society has risen 14 percentage points in just the last 2 years, from 51% in 2017 to 65% last year.

It is certainly worth mentioning that it didn't take a global pandemic for many in the industry to enact goodwill and philanthropy, and most will continue to do so post-crisis. Rather, this level of response looks and feels natural for those manufacturers who have been ramping up corporate social responsibility throughout the years, and for consumers who have come to expect it.

That said, many companies are, of course, trying to stay afloat themselves amidst store closures, cancelled programming, sales declines and more. Yet, even during a time of economic uncertainty, a growing number of companies are refusing to compromise on their values and customer loyalties.



THE BELOW BRANDS ARE LEVERAGING THEIR TECHNOLOGY, REACH AND CORE VALUES TO CONNECT WITH AMERICANS IN UNIQUE WAYS.

Digital/Tech: Open Table

Open Table is a digital restaurant discovery and reservation tool that has expanded its software to retail partners and shoppers. Just as users book dining times, they can now reserve time slots for safe shopping.

This concept allows retailers to crowd control and provides peace of mind to concerned and at-risk shoppers, all while stemming decline of its own dine-in reliant service.

- Google promises free ad space to small and medium-size businesses
- Zoom gives K-12 schools in COVID-19-affected countries video conferencing tools free of charge



B&M/D2C Retailers: Hy-Vee

Hy-Vee, a Midwest grocer, is offering free access to its KidsFit program, which provides at-home exercise and interactive games for children. Hy-Vee is posting daily videos to a network website, which also features several other equity-driving TV series and videos from the grocer.

While Hy-Vee is already playing an obvious critical role in safely providing essential items, leadership continues to advance the retailer's mission to "play an integral role in consumers' health." While in the recent past this looked like in-store dieticians and health screenings, the latest leg includes keeping kids active, and their parents sane, through the duration of school closures.

- At Allbirds, for every pair of shoes bought, a pair is donated to a healthcare worker
- Lowe's urges DIY Thank You signs for healthcare workers



CPG Brands

In response to the many colleges that have been forced to cancel, postpone or virtually alter their graduation ceremonies, Anheuser-Busch InBev's value beer Natural Light is hosting a "Worldwide Commencement." The event will be hosted via Facebook Live, and will include a star-studded speaker line up and various sweepstakes. Any student from the class of 2020 is eligible and free to register.

Natty Light has a secure place in the low-budget college party scene. With most institutions announcing closures and virtual learning through end of year, their core drinker demographic will miss many (drinkable) milestones. Natty Light is bringing relevance to their brand by giving 2020 grads one more opportunity to "Cheers!"

- Bayer donated millions of chloroquine tablets for research in the COVID-19 fight
- Riviana donated more than 27,000 pounds of Minute Rice to the country's largest food bank



WHAT THIS ALL MEANS

Goodwill in the COVID-19 climate doesn't have to look like the production of hand sanitizer or masks, although it can and has, nor does it have to be a straight monetary donation. Every day presents spaces to fill in the new uncertainty, and the new normal.

From pantry staple recipe ideas, to education and entertainment content for restless children, to support for our at-home fitness routines, the continuous emerging pain points in your consumer's life, in your life, present ample opportunity for an appropriate and impactful COVID-19 response.

The above case studies have been recognized as exceptional examples of retailers and brands rising to service, and ultimately supporting their own business health along the

way. However, as always, a fine line runs between opportunism and goodwill.

Even with the best intentions, it can be easy to miss the mark. Consumers are listening closer than ever, and successful brands are listening back. While there are many standard ground rules for maintaining authenticity when employing goodwill and philanthropy initiatives, several COVID-19 specific considerations have risen to the top.

COVID-19 CHECKLIST FOR GOODWILL

1. Learn about consumer sentiment and response from global partners who are likely to be ahead in virus escalation and impact.
2. Action multiple scenarios in phases — near term, short term, short-long term. Expect that messaging will evolve and shift quickly.
3. Stay abreast of continually emerging digital behavior insights, such as shifts and spikes in mobile usage time of day and duration.
4. Explore tools and strategies for search monitoring, social listening and social engagement.
5. Review and examine all your brand's creative with a critical eye to ensure it's striking the right tone.
6. Consider quick market studies with your audience to gauge customer attitudes and inform your messaging strategy with data.
7. Look for untapped white spaces — the overlap between your customers' need states and the services your brand can provide.

CONCLUSION

The way in which manufacturers and marketers respond during the coronavirus crisis can make a difference in determining how a brand is perceived in the long term. Some brands, especially those that don't seem to have a natural fit within global pandemic relief, may be tempted to refrain from addressing

the situation altogether. However, with the continuous shifts in consumers' lifestyles, wallets and buying behavior, all brands have an opportunity to improve the greater good, or at the least, the normalcy of consumers' lives.



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