

# Are you exasperated by Covid-19 excess?

## Are you re-thinking what is really important to you, and questioning some of your values?



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I don't know about you, but quite frankly I'm sick of reading, hearing and watching all the stuff about the Covid-19 crisis, lockdown, WFH, (or 'work from home') and how we all have to adjust to 'the new normal'. I'm bored with the unsolicited advice on how to lead during a crisis, what to do to adapt to the change in the world, how I should be learning new skills – online, of course – and how to take advantage of the crisis to make money.

I've had enough of the countless emails I get from desperate companies who want to sell me their stuff. And, of course, we've had our fair share of political stupidity from various leaders across the world. I miss the bush terribly, and as a home-schooling father, I have developed an incredible respect for teachers.

I'm not naïve or in denial – I know there are some real dangers in this epidemic, and at 63-years old I am very much in the risk-group. Indeed, my own grandfather lost three of his seven siblings in 1918 – not in the First World War (they all survived that okay), but because of the Spanish 'flu pandemic.

I'm not suggesting that you become reckless in your approach and do silly things. I'm completely in agreement with our President and the seemingly harsh measures taken to protect us. We have certainly lost many of our basic human rights, and I do fear that this will continue even after the crisis is over. But it's almost as if people have re-thought what is really important to them, and questioned some of their values.

For example, I have been an openly loyal fan of the company that produces my mobile phone. I've been fussy about 'this' feature and 'that' ability (most of which I may use once a year), but now that my income has tightened up, I've questioned whether my needs are vain, petty and frivolous.

There has been a lot that is positive, not least of which is the chance to reconnect with my family.



I love the amazingly creative funny jokes and videos I get on my WhatsApps – to the point where my 'phone memory can't handle anymore. Humour is one of the powerful ways in which we deal with these types of calamities. And, at my last count, I have collected more than 900 examples of companies that have done something positive and innovative, and sometimes just plain fun, to make lives easier for their customers and the communities in which they operate. Yes, that's 900 examples, and one of my favourites is a company in Japan that designed the 'WFH Jammies', a top which in the bottom half is just a comfortable sweatshirt, but the top half looks like a formal, appropriate, professional work shirt for Zoom calls! I'd love to order a pair for me.

So, there's been a lot of change, but what I'd like to focus on in this month's column is what has **NOT** changed in the world of customers and marketing. Getting back your lost customers and their purchases after Covid-19 is no doubt going to be just about every business's key strategy.

“ Our customers will have changed, and this will reflect in their new buying behaviour. Sometimes it will not appear rational. ”

For example, we have one restaurant in our neighbourhood where, after years and years of loyalty, we stopped going because we were tired of the same old food on the same old menu.



The owner is someone we really liked, but we just needed some variety. A couple of years ago he helped my son raise some funds for a charity, and we felt obligated to return the favour. We just didn't get round to it.

When all the restaurants closed, I immediately sent him a message saying that as soon as he opened again, we'd be first in line to support him. And that's how it worked out. Since lockdown restrictions were eased, we have ordered take-out meals four times. Our relationship with him – and

our need to help him through his hard times – was more important than our trivial food tastes.

### So what do you need to be able to do? I have a few thoughts:

- For decades I've been talking about "living a day in the life of your customer." Now that they are different, you cannot afford to make assumptions. So it's almost like you have just been divorced and you have to start a new relationship getting to know them.





- What is their new life like? How have their priorities changed? How loyal do they feel towards your business? What are the things that trouble them and keep them awake at night – and how can you help? These are just a handful of questions, but you're going to need a lot more detail.
- Probably critical to your own success, is to clearly define what drives 'value' in their lives. What has become more important to them about the way a business treats them? This can range from simple thoughts like creating convenience and simplicity, to an in-depth insight into how they make their buying decisions, particularly which emotions play a role. You can only achieve this by sitting with them, knee-to-knee, jaw-to-jaw, talking in detail about these drivers. Also watch out for the clues they give you.

- And at an even deeper level, but one which may be the most crucial factor for your success, how are you going to uncover their unmet desires and needs? What is their number one non-negotiable priority? Did you notice how I started off this column? I began by saying how sick and tired I am of Covid. It may not be politically correct, but I know that it's certainly what many of my friends and colleagues are feeling now. Your job is to be able to tap into how your customers are feeling right now – even at the risk of being controversial and attracting the haters – and to respond appropriately.

So let's just get on with it. Human beings like your customers and your staff are still going to remain basically the same irrational, emotional, illogical creatures that they have always been for thousands of years, and the closer your understanding of what drives these, the easier it will be for you to get them on your side again. Use this opportunity to bring out the best in you and your team, and don't allow it to bring out the worst. Bring some sunshine to the lives of people around you. **SR**

