

collemcvoy

COVID-19 Marketing Analysis for the Outdoor and Travel Sectors

March 31, 2020

Framework for Managing Uncertainty

As we've navigated the recent unknown with our clients, we've created a [framework](#) consisting of three phases to help manage the uncertainty:

Stabilize, Empathize, Optimize.

The last two weeks have been spent working on stabilizing the welfare of our people, companies and business. We are now beginning to enter the empathize phase, where we gain an understanding of human needs in this new reality and how brands can answer these needs.

Current Cultural Context

The pandemic became real for many of us this week. Troubling news from NYC, shelter-in-place orders across many states, and week two of working from home confirmed this is the beginning of our new normal.

New research by MDC Partners and The Harris Poll reveals how coming to grips with this pandemic is impacting Americans' mindsets.

75%

Fear for their personal
health

90%

Fear for the health of their
loved ones

91%

Fear for their economic
livelihood



We feel the world has changed, and it has. We know this is temporary, but it doesn't feel that way, and we realize things will be different. Just as going to the airport is forever different from how it was before 9/11, things will change and this is the point at which they changed. The loss of normalcy; the fear of economic toll; the loss of connection. This is hitting us and we're grieving. Collectively. We are not used to this kind of collective grief in the air.

David Kessler, the world's premier expert on grief quoted in "That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief," *Harvard Business Review*



Current Human Needs

Empathy starts with meeting people where they are. Today that's a place of macro and micro grief. The greatest value brands and marketing can provide is helping people meet their basic needs and make peace with a new normal. Brands should take a bottom-up view of [Maslow's hierarchy of needs](#), the classic understanding of human needs.

To address people's basic physical and psychological needs in this crisis, brands should focus on being useful, responsible and purposeful.

Useful

Utility is the truest form of empathy in a crisis. Define a role for your brand based on actual needs. We're craving safety, stability, reassurance, connection, a sense of normalcy, and moments of levity. For which of these needs can your brand offer the most utility and value?

Responsible

There is a lot of misinformation and confusion during this time, which makes it even more important to be sensitive and responsible in our communications and actions. We must help clarify, educate and remind people how to responsibly engage with our brand in the broader context of COVID-19 guidelines.

Purposeful

To craft an authentic role for your brand, lean into your purpose. Which human or societal needs most align with your brand's guiding purpose and values? In these unprecedented times, what is the higher order benefit your brand will bring to the world?

Implications for the Outdoor and Travel Sectors

Key takeaways from research and articles published this week reflect current consumer conditions and where marketers can focus.



Recommendation 1

Give people a psychological boost by focusing on fueling anticipation for a return to nature and travels.

Insight

People are longing for a return to the outdoors and tourism. In an analysis of over [8,000 pieces of social content](#) shared by Italian, UK and US citizens in quarantine, the second most common type of content people shared was pictures of sunsets, landscapes, and throwbacks to times when they were able to travel or enjoy nature. These posts comprised 17% of all content, demonstrating a strong longing for a return to normalcy, the outdoors and traveling.

Interestingly, [studies](#) also show that we derive the most happiness from anticipating a trip – rather than from the actual experience of it.

Example

Brands that do this well haven't just shared social content; they've provided VR or AR experiences for people to enjoy from home.

Several Chinese destinations are already offering [virtual tours](#).

And South Carolina State Parks launched a five-minute [VR version](#) of the strenuous hike up Table Rock Mountain in January of this year so people with mobility or health restrictions can also enjoy the 3.6-mile trek.

Recommendation 2

While fueling anticipation gives brands a meaningful role during this crisis, they need to do so responsibly.

Insight

On the darker side of our longing for travel, rural destinations are issuing warnings to stay away...for now. Three of the busiest national parks have [closed](#) to enable social distancing, and numerous vacation towns on the [East Coast](#) and even here in [Minnesota](#) have issued pointed warnings to second homeowners not to retreat to their homes in the countryside. Rural destinations are keen to preserve their resources and protect their fragile health care systems at this time.

Example

Clients can take note from brands that are encouraging safety during this time as well as adherence to government quarantine orders.

Guinness put out a [message for St. Patrick's Day](#) this year, encouraging people to stay safe and reassuring them that "we'll march again."

Recommendation 3

Destinations and attractions should start planning for how they will enable safe engagement post-pandemic.

Insight

We talk about 'getting back to normal' once this is all over. The reality is that our expectations and behaviors will change. When this pandemic recedes, it will leave a new normal in its wake. The MDC and Harris Poll research reveals that once restrictions are lifted, it could take four to six months on average for Americans to feel comfortable enough to fly, stay in a hotel or go to a sporting event again.

To attract travelers and put their minds at ease, brands should begin planning now for how they will adapt their guidelines, technology and infrastructure to enable safe engagement once restrictions are lifted.

Example

While it's still too soon to see concrete examples of this in the Western world, we're seeing how some Chinese companies prepared for the COVID-19 recovery.

Huazhu, a major Chinese hotel group, set up a [crisis task force](#) and leveraged an internal information platform (an app called Huatong), to issue companywide guidelines and information. This simple action ensured employees and franchisees were able to coordinate a response to the crisis and prepare for recovery in real time.



We believe meeting people where they are at will lead to more meaningful brand communications and actions, and we hope these data-led thoughts on beginning with empathy are useful to you and your team.

Please let us know what other questions you may have. Through social listening, search patterns, online forums, trend monitoring, and qualitative and quantitative research, we are seeing emerging trends and inspiring examples across categories that we can translate to your specific challenges.

Because the cultural context and human needs are shifting rapidly, we will continue to update this point of view.



Thank you for your partnership.
Stay safe and well.