

How to Connect During a Crisis

Small business owners are facing new challenges during this crisis. Communicating with customers requires more focus and depth than ever before. In Mat Zuker's latest article for Forbes Magazine, he cites Jay Mandel who runs The Collective NYC, a marketing consulting team focusing on a customer's experience, who underlines the importance of businesses to understand their mission statement and values in order to re-enforce marketing strategies.

Information is Crucial. Each customer purveying your business's website needs to understand your hours of operation, any limitations to service and what is being done to ensure cleanliness. Providing this information establishes to your customer your seriousness of precautions which will be appreciated during this time.



If your financial situation allows, focus on your employees, donate to charities or offer discounted or free products. By marketing this information, your brand's scope will bolster with the customer as well.

Utilizing the Customer's Time. Most customers are adhering to social distancing guidelines put forth by their state and the federal government. Now, more than ever, it is important to exhibit to your customers how your brand can be utilized beyond your brick and mortar. Zuker cites how universities are beginning to offer free online classes and telecommunication companies are offering two months of free service to low-income families; King Arthur flour is promoting its library of comfort food recipes (yes, please!). Thinking beyond your storefront to put your service or product into your customer's virtual hands is important.

Remember to entertain. By each passing day, customers are looking for new stimulation to help the time go by at home. Movie companies are making the best of the situation by sending theatrical releases to online streaming services. We don't think it is necessary to always make your customers laugh, but it might be within your branding to aim for content geared towards warmth, humanity and empathy.

The metric for engaging your customers is changing; moving beyond views and shares to quality feedback or social impact on your community. Do not bite off more than you can chew. Cited in Zuker's article, *Social Media Today* warns of virtue signaling; meaning declaring a set of values, but not following through on the actual deeds.

Also, this is a fantastic opportunity to consider your marketing strategies for when this crisis ends. What will your business look like once you are able to open the doors? How are you able to stay relevant with your competitors? These are all questions needing answers, but today we must do our best to accomplish what is in front of us.

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