

The strategic minds that created #PEPcares amidst a pandemic

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This month's Marketing Masterminds are Izolde Kriel, Mindshare's digital strategic planner, and Monica McLoughlin, PEP's digital marketing manager. They discuss #PEPcares.



Izolde Kriel



Monica McLoughlin

How did this idea come about?

Izalde: On the 27th of March 2020, South Africa came to a standstill as we went into one of the world's earliest and strictest lockdowns. PEP, being Africa's largest single brand retailer, had to shut its doors at over 2,500 stores. Marketing campaigns for the next few months had already been planned and being unable to trade, we had to quickly change our product and price strategy.

We had three tasks - continue to be relevant and connect with our customers in a meaningful way, take advantage of the decrease in competitor ad spend, and ensure no loss in ad spend revenue.

This brought to life the idea of #PEPcares.

Why was there a need for a solution like #PEPcares?

Monica: Our main focus at PEP is always to make our customer look and feel good. We knew that it was about walking the talk and displaying our culture of Sikhula KunYe (growing together), even when we are unable to trade. Parents were struggling to juggle everything at once, with seasons changing and babies and kids desperately needing new clothing. We knew we still had to help in some way. The #PEPcares campaign intended to offer customers advice on how to look after themselves and their families with health and hygiene tips. We then embarked on a special mission - to wish the world well. We knew we could not do this alone and therefore called on all PEP Kids to help us spread positivity, hope, and joy in this difficult time. Together with a mini-series of "At Home With PEP" activities, PEP ensured to keep families at home, connected, and entertained.

How does it work?

Izolde: Within 48 hours all product and price ads were changed to #PEPcares messaging on all booked media. PEP kids got creative and made 'Get Well Soon' cards, which were uploaded to social media with the hashtag #PEPcares, or sent to our WhatsApp line. A collage of all these special messages was shared far and wide via free-to-air TV stations, community radio, and digital channels, spreading positivity, hope and inspiration.

Monica: Simultaneously, a mini-series of "At Home With PEP" activities was launched on social media aiding parents with kid-friendly home workouts, easy-to-follow recipes, and step-by-step arts and crafts. Kids were encouraged to share their activities with us to be featured on our social pages.

What channels did you use for the campaign?

Izolde: We predicted an increase in internet traffic during lockdown, especially on mobile phones as customers were at home. The mobile focus ensured that PEP was present, reaching our customers where traditional channels such as OOH and Print could not at the time. Facebook and Instagram were selected as the main channels, as it enabled us to run targeted as well as broad reach campaigns at the lowest cost. It also enabled us to engage with our consumers, leveraging the shareability of the platforms as customers shared their messages with the #PEPcares hashtag.

Monica: Our strategy was straightforward – we knew that we wanted to help parents keep their kids busy with fun, educational, yet affordable solutions. We gave away airtime vouchers to not only enable our customers to participate, but also to keep them connected while they were at home. We also introduced WhatsApp as an easier, cost-effective way to

get more customers involved and made the entry mechanism on social platforms as easy as possible with the #PEPcares hashtag.

And what were the results?

Izolde: We received just over 3,000 *Get Well* messages. The #PEPcares messages were viewed over 34 million times on social media, and we recorded over 1.7 million engagements. Our year-on-year cost per reach decreased by 31%, and our cost per 1,000 by 45%.

Other results:

- We gained over 11,000 new followers in one month, compared to an average of around 2,000 a month
- Comments peaked at 1,200 per hour
- Website traffic increased by 126%
- New visitors to the site increased 140%

- We achieved our highest ever Net Promoter Score of 9.2

Monica: We were kept busy, but it was such a joy, and that's the overwhelming sentiment that we received from our customers as well. It was extremely heart-warming to see.

Were there any unexpected results?

Izolde: When we opened for trading after lockdown, we recorded our best seven consecutive trading days in history; we sold over 15 million units and increased our basket size by 120%.

Did you experience any challenges with this campaign?

Monica: The biggest challenge came with creating content for the campaign. Because of the strict lockdown regulations, we were unable to shoot in-studio. It was time to innovate and we decided to keep the content as real and raw as possible. Two PEP kids were recorded at home with a smartphone, as we kicked off the at-home-with-PEP series. They baked, had fun with arts and crafts, and even showed our customers how to stay fit and healthy with a few home workouts.

Do you have a stand-out memory from this campaign?

Monica: Through it all, while we were going through such a change in our personal and working environments, the teamwork that came together for this campaign was fantastic. Once again reminding us that we do everything for our remarkable customers.

Do you have plans to expand the campaign?

Monica: A while ago, someone went into our Mossel Bay store and, in an anonymous act of kindness, paid off all the lay-bys held by the store. It was just the most incredible gesture that we've ever seen, and it made such a difference for these customers. So, we launched our Lay-by Buddy campaign, where anonymous donors can sponsor lay-bys. The uptake has been phenomenal, to date, we've received over R1m in lay-by donations.

Izolde: We're making it easier for people to become a Lay-by Buddy as they can now also donate online. From as little as R20, you can help pay towards someone's lay-by at PEP. Each month randomly selected beneficiaries will receive a voucher to settle their outstanding PEP lay-by.

What was your biggest learning?

Monica: Our biggest learning was that we have to be flexible during these uncertain times. We can continue planning for the future, but we have to be agile enough to change course and adapt to what's happening around us. At the core of our business, we remain committed to delighting our customers. We have an amazing team, and everything just came together, it was quite something.

How can people get in touch?

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