

# Digital or die - have we overcorrected the fundamentals of marketing?



By [Leigh-Anne Acquisto](#)

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It only took half a year, but in that time the world as we know it changed forever. Even though certain aspects of life are likely to revert to type, there are both big differences and small variations which have affected much of how we'll do life going forward.



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As they say, it'll be a new normal for everyone, a term which I have come to detest because really, life is constantly evolving. Nothing is ever static. It's just that usually, things don't change this drastically, all at the same time, all over the world, in every industry of business.

Arguably, marketing has probably changed more so than most other industries as it relies on historical data to predict future strategies for brands, and Covid has pretty much turned data on its head. For months, shopping and purchasing behaviour has changed radically as people have had to adapt their buying habits by necessity or desire. Additionally, most brands haven't known what to do (or say) as they've navigated what the pandemic has meant for their survival, with some having been unable to trade at all. As a result, a number of our familiar favourites will never be seen again.

Recently, Nielsen released a number of frameworks outlining the short-, medium-, and long-term implications of Covid-19 on consumer behaviours and needs. Essentially, it revealed that there are three phases of adjusted living responses, namely rebound, reboot, and reinvent. We are currently in the reboot phase, where we are reassessing and reprioritising a significant number of aspects in our lives. This is the phase where different habits are being formed, and let's be honest, we've had more than the typical 21 days to shatter old routines and allow completely new behaviours to emerge.

Many people have had to downscale, switch to cheaper alternatives, or try new products and services to make their lives work. Even those consumers whose income has been insulated during the pandemic have gone through this reboot. They too have been increasingly housebound, unable to spend money as they normally would, and going online more frequently, all of which has led to a similar reprioritisation of what is important and how they will choose to conduct their lives as the

future unfolds.

## Is the choice really to go digital or die?

These shifts in consumer behaviour are very real, there's no question about it. But does it warrant a complete rethink of how we go about marketing our brands to people? The phrase "go digital or die" has come up more than once in strategic planning sessions across the globe, leading to an overload of published content and digital communication. Consequently, digital marketing teams are working around the clock to create content strategies that engage, excite and convert, while conversely, traditional media houses are all but closing down.

Arguably, this is the right course of action. We're all seeing how digital brands are thriving during this time. However, the problem with traditional agencies shutting down their services, aside from the loss of jobs and ensuing a knock-on effect as suppliers and related service providers lose business, is that it could quite possibly be an overcorrection. My sense is that recent 'digital success' is a direct result of necessity and forced lockdown behaviour by consumers, that are at home and online.

Moreover, because the customer experience for most digital-first brands has been successful, it likely means that this behaviour will continue long after the necessity subsides. Those digital-first brands have had the previous and current advantage of refining the customer experience over time and thus were primed for the onslaught of new online customers, far more so than their brick-and-mortar counterparts.

But this doesn't mean that the way they go about attracting new consumers is fundamentally different. While most traditional brands are going digital, some of the biggest digital brands in the world are utilising traditional platforms to create emotional connections and engage their audiences. Go figure.



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According to the Ad Age Leading National Advertisers report, in 2019 the biggest TV advertisers were Amazon, Google, and Facebook. In the report, it was revealed that Amazon had actually increased their TV spend by 32%, with Google doing the same at an increase of 23% and Facebook increasing theirs by a staggering 236%. Yet in spite of this evidence, if you are not hotly debating how to pivot onto digital or up your brand's share of search, then you're probably going to be overlooked as irrelevant and out of touch.

In truth, what is absolutely crucial is a return to the fundamental principles of marketing. Where we continue to effectively reach customers and deliver quality products or services in the most convenient way possible and at the best possible price. The only difference is that we have at our disposal so many more ways of performing this function. The answer isn't

to deviate from this main function of marketing in pursuit of doing digital for the sake of digital.

The same thinking applies to how we understand the consumer. Clearly consumers have changed, but we still need to understand our audiences and have an in-depth handle on their key needs and drivers. Again, this function of marketing hasn't changed. It's just that we now have better tools to gather data, and better technology to analyse and apply the insights from that data to deliver a heightened customer experience.

*“ Whether we talk about B2C or B2me or whatever the ever-evolving jargon of the minute dictates, marketers should continue to create relevant and meaningful communication, engagements and experiences. This pursuit has not changed, regardless of what you call it. ”*

Now, more than ever, brands need to stay true to who they are, with some slight refinements in order to do so authentically in this new era. To do so, brands need marketing leaders who have the wherewithal to stay the course as the world becomes infinitely more complex. Marketers who are able to orchestrate and combine a wide variety of players and platforms seamlessly to deliver to consumers' expectations and to create brand loyalty. Because while channels will always evolve and technology will continue to bring amazing new ways of delivering experiences to people, it will take only the brave, true and strong marketing teams who understand the fundamentals first and can combine the right tools, technology and approach to innovate and deliver true value to markets.

## ABOUT LEIGH-ANNE ACQUISTO

Leigh-Anne is a brand behaviour specialist who has spent the last 15 years developing brands within some of the biggest organisations across the continent. During this time she has been awarded a number of awards for communication effectiveness, most memorably for the world renowned Trillion Dollar Campaign which was accolade the most awarded campaign in the history of Cannes. She is currently the director of Liquorish Ink a strategic communications consultancy.

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