

#NedbankIMC2020: Marketing works... but what about during the pandemic

By [Juanita Pienaar](#)

28 Jul 2020

The 2020 Nedbank IMC 2020 virtual conference took place on Friday, 24 July, where Verusha Maharaj, advertising and marketing lead at Deloitte Consulting presented on how marketers can retain their existing customer base and embrace the new.



#NedbankIMC2020: Marketing works... but what about during the pandemic [Part 1]

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Below she lists seven steps she thinks marketers should be taking to move forward during the pandemic.

Step 1: Put concrete actions at the heart of your strategy

"Brands need to understand how their customer path to purchase has been completely altered by the Covid-19 pandemic. In order to best position themselves for crisis response and recovery, a smooth and self-efficient online customer experience has never been more important. Brands which innovate for the future for their category in the good times will benefit in the bad times. Brands that don't, well, they won't."

As an example, she said British grocery retailer Sainsbury's shared that the brand has invested in upgrading their e-commerce experience in the last couple of years, which pre-Covid-19 contributed to about 8% in its grocery business. Now it's 15%, nearly doubling in just a few short weeks. The store's smart shop app, which allows contactless payments in-store has also jumped to nearly a third of all transactions. Years ahead of uptake projections.

Step 2: Marketing teams need to embrace an agile culture, innovation and creativity

"Brands are finding new ways to work crunching numbers quickly and making fast decisions in large and previously bureaucratic organisations," she said.



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She used the example of Birds Eye, a UK brand of frozen foods, who completely changed its manufacturing and marketing strategy within days to scale up supply at the start of the lockdown.

Then there is Mastercard, which pivoted its experience platform, which is the centre of its brand, to completely digital experiences as it became clear that physical experiences would end for the foreseeable future.

She also told us that Unilever fast-tracked the launch of a new cleaning product in China based on emerging consumer trends around hygiene, and IBM took a new approach to creative agency briefings, speeding up the creative process to create a TV campaign in less than 10 days.

Step 3: Do not become a 'me too'

"Remember that circumstances like the one that we are in shapes values. When more than 44 million people have had their circumstances affected because of job loss, businesses will likely see a corresponding shift in their values. In values in turn shape customer behaviour," she said.

"Understanding these shifts is going to be critical for organisations as they determine what their messaging should include, and how best to engage with their specific audience."



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Step 4: Be true to your brand

Maharaj said that consumers are hyper-aware of what has changed in their lives and how much has changed and businesses should be aware of this. Tailor-made messaging that speaks to a changed and changing audience. But remember that you also need to remind customers about what hasn't changed. A brand's purpose, for example, doesn't have to change as long as it's clearly thought-through and relevant in a world that's responding to in a world that's emerging

from Covid-19.

"It will be our responsibility as marketers to explain to the audience how the brand fits into the new reality. Please discontinue any campaigns that could appear tone-deaf and damage the brand proposition."

Step 5: More than ever we are required to meet customers where they are

Here, Maharaj says the omnichannel paradigm is now applied at all levels from communication all the way through to retention. Our lives digitised overnight; work, school, doctor visits and even yoga came to us through Wi-Fi. Downloads and video streaming apps, increased more than a 100% in the past few weeks.

"In Deloitte's most recent global marketing trends study, 65% of respondents have tried at least one new digital activity for the first time since the pandemic started. It's like we can't transform our digital experience fast enough and we are even shifting to hybrid business models. Whether we order online, pick up curbside, no human touch altogether. And at the end of the day, feeling like zombies (or should I say, 'Zoomies'), burnt out from so much digital interaction that lacks human connection."

“ We just need to find out how we communicate authentically, and we'll be the ones that consumers seek out. Because even though we can't replace a human touch or a hug, we can pay attention to what it means to be more human through our digital experiences. ”

Step 6: Work on being different She said that the biggest challenges often bring even greater opportunities for forcing business to innovate. It's requiring all brand to immediately shift the way that they do things. Yes, you need to deliver on your brand promise but make sure that you create strategies for growth for yourself going forward.



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Maharaj said that in 2020 we'll see more people experimenting with interactive content types. These formats that leverage cutting edge technology like combining augmented reality with video content will offer a more immersive and engaging experience. And this is what consumers want; to feel more connected to the brand.

"Do not forget that you are not constricted to social channels. There is more out there that you can use to innovate."

Step 7: Listen, listen, listen

"Tapping a direct line to consumers' opinions and values are more vital in a world upended by the pandemic. It's a very thin line that separates empathy from opportunism but empathy matters."

Maharaj says, for marketers to connect with their customers, they need to realise that people are receiving overwhelming and even conflicting information, as they navigate this pandemic. In these circumstances, their decisions are likely more emotional than ever. So even though you might be tempted to simply deliver facts faster and with more clarity, what's more, effective for you to do right now is to deliver information and messages with greater empathy.

She says this global crisis has dramatically shaken everyone's lives. Our priorities shifted overnight. Our focus suddenly reverted to the base of the pyramid. Health and safety have taken the front stage, marginalizing everything gratuitous. Sidelining all of the interactions that we don't recognise as valuable. Especially with the organisations and brands that we don't immediately identify as honest, authentic and worth our trust.

“ To establish and maintain relationships with customers, brands cannot simply rely on the appeal of brand communication or the promise of the best price offer on the market. The rules of engagement have changed and the customer is more right than ever before. ”

"The need to digitise has become an urgent imperative, looking beyond competition and embracing collaboration. Now is the time to transform into an agile organisation. Now is the time for marketing to tune in with a new way to acknowledge humanity. So, I can leave you with just one question to ask yourself about your marketing campaigns, instead of asking, 'Is it good?', 'Is it bad?', ask yourself, 'Is it human?'"

Bizcommunity attended the Nedbank IMC 2020 live stream. Follow @IMCCConf @IMCCConference #NedbankIMC2020 #MarketingWorks for some standout insights.

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.

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