

Times change. The fundamentals don't

 By [Stuart Walsh](#)

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By now you're probably up to your eyeballs in "Top Ten Tips" articles on marketing in a crisis and any agency worth its salt will also be sharing not just practice, but theory too. At the very least, and hopefully, with sincere intentions, they'll be digging through their archives for opinion pieces showing that reducing advertising during a recession or crisis can be a massive mistake.



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It's advice that's decades-old now, but no less relevant today than when it was first put forward. That's because marketing, as much as it may sometimes feel as if it's changing every hour, is based on certain fundamentals that have been around since long before Lord Leverhulme is supposed to have uttered his famous phrase about advertising spend.

Simple, clear and concise

I'm a bit obsessed with fundamentals; not just the fundamentals of strategy, but also of marketing and communication and even the fundamentals of things as seemingly trivial as briefs. And there's a very good reason for that. If you know and follow the fundamentals, it's very difficult to go wrong - fundamentals are not only in place because they've been tried and tested by experts before us - but also because fundamentals, unlike much of what passes for marketing these days, tend to be simple, clear and concise. If they weren't, they would be unlikely to be widely adopted.

Professor Mark Ritson describes the fundamentals of marketing thus:

“ *Identify your target market. Discover what they want. Find a way of giving it to them.* ”

Right now, and especially after President Ramaphosa's announcement last night, it's safe to say that most of our customers and clients, no matter in which category we operate, want very similar things. Things we may have taken for granted in the past. Things like comfort, reassurance, peace of mind and generally, relief from anxiety and stress.

It's the brands who can provide even just a semblance of the qualities above that will be rewarded in the long term. While brands who make a spectacle, being glib and gimmicky, will no doubt win with the awards judges, it's the brands who make a difference that will win where it counts.

And any brand can do that, no matter which category and no matter how small, because it's not just grand gestures that will be noticed and rewarded; even the smallest and cheapest things can surprise and delight your customer. I know this because even the most cynical customer you'll ever meet was won over by something that probably cost less than 20c.

"Think small"

That cynical customer, whom we'll just call X, was not a burger fan in general, but one night he decided to get one delivered from Rocomamas. The burger was pretty good. But it's not the reason that our cynical customer, X, has become a regular customer. It's because attached to the package containing the burger was a much smaller package. And in that package were two dog biscuits. Game over.

So even if you can't convert your plant to the production of ventilators or use excess alcohol to produce hand sanitiser, you can still make a difference in a customer's life right now. For once, my advice would be "think small," think about how you can make people feel more at ease, less lonely and so on. Even if it's not territory your brand normally operates in, there is always something you can do to show people you care. One at a time if necessary.

And while you might think it odd, coming from a brand "fascist" like me to advise you to behave out of character, all I can say is I can't think of a single brand that has ever suffered from showing compassion.

So, while we will be available for you throughout this period and will continue to supply whatever material you may need, be that case studies or inspirational ideas, my advice to all brands on how to succeed in these anxiety-ridden times is based on a fundamental that's been in place for centuries and transcends the discipline of marketing:

Go with your conscience.

ABOUT STUART WALSH

Stuart's previous career as an award-winning creative means he is one of very few strategists who has won both creative awards (including Cannes, One Show, ADC and Loeries) as well as effectiveness awards such as Effie and APEX. Prior to Boundless, he was CSO of Grey for 6 years, in addition to stints at Metropolitan Republic, DDB and Yellowwood. As well as some rubbish places.

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