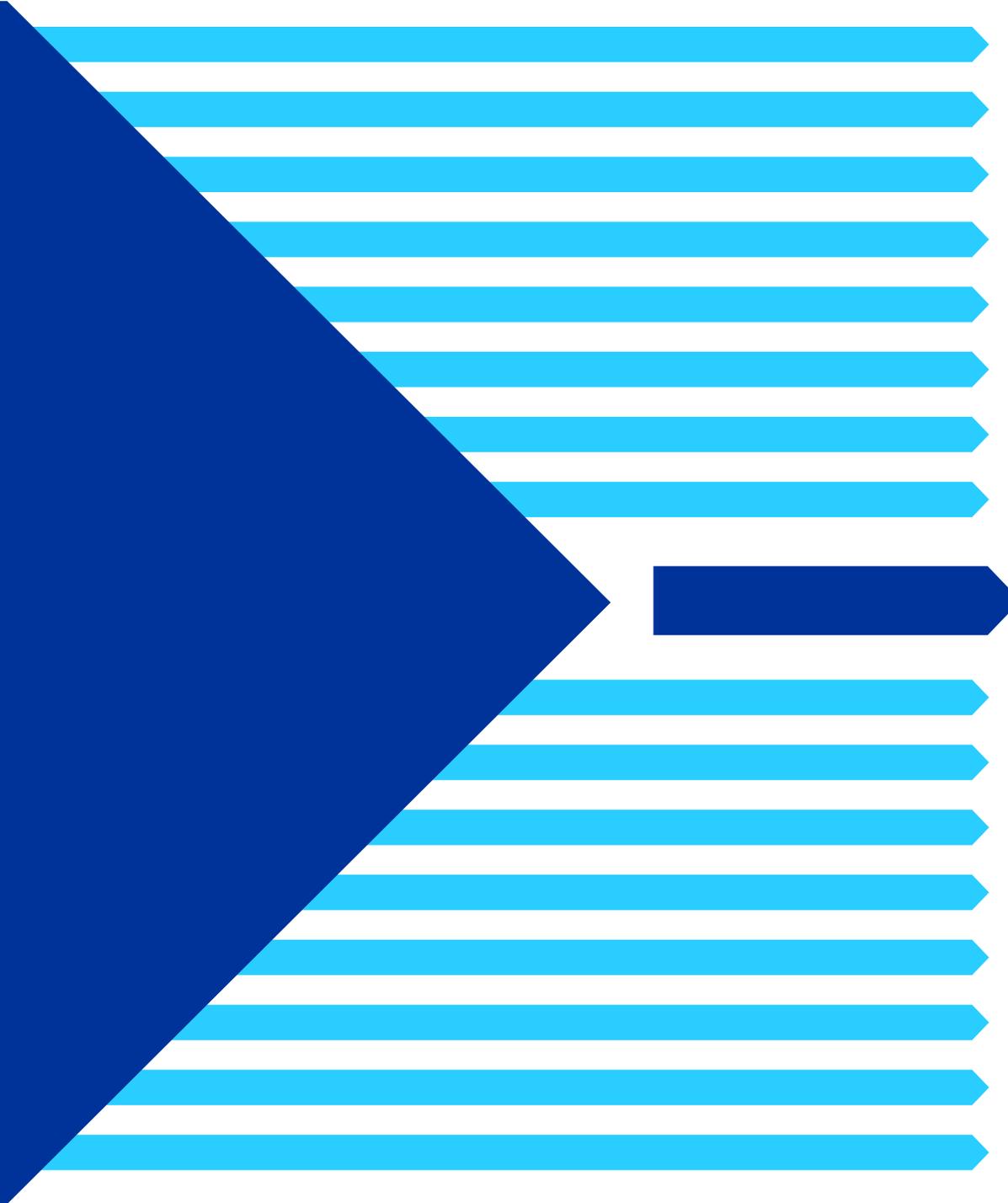


Walking a tightrope

How to connect with consumers in times of uncertainty



Michele Morelli
SVP Head of Marketing
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Getting the tone right

My first job when I graduated college was with a major cable news network. Breaking news was constant.

What I found fascinating was that brands that wanted to align themselves with all kinds of news topics... including crises, epidemics and tragedies.

One particular industry vertical was especially interested in airplane crashes.

My gut reaction? Creepy. Bizarre. But when I actually saw the commercial spots, they were empathetic, soft and focused on helping the consumer.



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Solutions to consumers that are not only useful and possibly lifesaving, but also give them peace of mind

Serving serious, urgent needs

This was my first real exposure to brands serving human needs in the time of uncertainty. But this is an area where marketers need to walk a very fine line.

How do you offer service, advice or even products to consumers who have very serious and often urgent needs at a time of uncertainty?

Right now, the world is facing a pandemic. Companies and brands can offer solutions to consumers that are not only useful and possibly lifesaving, but also give them peace of mind (I'm looking at you hand sanitizer).

But how should brands talk to consumers in these moments of uncertainty? How do they avoid exploiting anxiety and fear mongering while still communicating genuine solutions and practicality?



Being relevant and relatable

Now more than ever, this tightrope needs to be walked!

Brands need to understand what their consumers want, need and (ultimately) expect from them.

And in today's ever-more digital environment, this includes making real-time changes to their messaging.

Because consumers expect advertising and messages that are timely, relevant and relate to what's happening in the moment.

Here are five points for brands to consider during times of uncertainty:

1. Speak human
2. Understand sentiment
3. Test the market
4. Spot the trends
5. Recast your advertising

We explore these further on the next pages.



01

Speak human

Be sure to talk to your consumers in a human voice - that is, with empathy and authenticity.

Your messaging should reflect an understanding, not only of your audience, but also the latest events. Keep communicating as a responsible and reassuring brand.

For example, if you primarily deal in food & beverage, advise the public that you have appropriate hygiene measures in place.

If you're in CPG, let the public know what measures you are taking to resolve supplychain disruption.

You may not need to change a whole campaign, but it is worth considering additional touch points at the corporate brand level. This could take the form of a supportive email to customers, or a timely post on social media.

Consumers relate better to companies have their interests at heart. They want to know that the safety of customers and staff is being well looked after.



02

Understand sentiment

In fast-moving situations, keeping abreast of consumer sentiment is critical.

It's the key to understanding how people will react to brand messaging.

Right now, sentiment around the coronavirus is evolving rapidly, and it's different from market to market.

Brands need to know where people's heads are from hour to hour, so they can judge how a particular message will be received.

So how do we (and our clients) do this? Toluna Communities brings consumers together in a real-time, digital environment.

This is a place where brands and consumers can connect and engage dynamically.

Creating the community is fast (in most cases less than 24 hours).

Feedback is immediate and assessed over time. In times of uncertainty, this kind of insight is precious.



03

Test the market

I'll admit it. I used to love a good A/B test. Or even post-message social listening.

And while these have their place, now more than ever, you need to test messages before you go to market and the Twitterverse skewers your brand.

And the best way to know how a message will land with your audience is to ask them.

One of the best pivots I have seen is by the company Raddish, a home 'cooking club' for adults and kids.

They changed their messaging targeting parents who now have kids at home due to school cancelations.

Not only giving away 10,000 kits but also creating activity guides for parents who find themselves responsible homeschooling.

At Toluna, we offer an automated, quickmessage testing platform to get feedback in real time. It's cost efficient, covers multiple countries, delivers high-quality results, and is completely scalable.

So in short, there's no reason brands should put messages in market without testing them first.



04

Spot the trends

Crises change shopping behavior. For some, that means buying more.

For others, switching to online shopping, or having to ditch their preferred brands. Dedicated organic shoppers may start to rethink their shopping basket.

As a marketer, you need to quickly spot changes in trends and reevaluate your strategy.

Digital tracking is an effective way to spot changes in digital search and buying behavior from the big-box retailers.

With access to in app buying behavior and mobile search, our clients use it to understand when and how consumers shop, and more.

And we also have a bespoke product that allows you track various in-app behaviors and tie these back to survey respondents.

Recently, we used digital tracking to better understand consumer search behaviors around the coronavirus in Asia Pacific.



05

Recast your advertising

Emotions are running high. Brands can't afford to hit the wrong note.

It's time to pull ads that sound tone deaf and reconsider what your audience needs. If you have supply, consider reintroducing products to your campaigns that are in demand to capture market share.

If you are already moving product, consider redistributing media money elsewhere (if you are not going out with corporate level or CSR focused marketing).

But if you are that ecofriendly cleaner that can kill germs, yet your products are still on the shelves, now is the time to look at your media and where you can be impactful.

But it's important that you don't put your media plan on autopilot. After you have examined any changes, take the opportunity to readjust your digital media.

And of course, communications and offers should be reviewed and relevant too. You don't want to send a March Madness offer as the tournament is cancelled. If you're a credit card company, you may want to hold any offers on travel points right now.

These are uncertain times. But it's imperative that brands speak to their consumers in a thoughtful, human way.



Learn more about
real-time consumer insights at:
tolunacorporate.com

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