



RESPONDING TO

COVID-19

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BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING-PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS



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IMPLICATION OF COVID-19 ON BUILDING-PRODUCT MANUFACTURERS



[The Coronavirus Guidance for America](#) identified plumbers and other tradespeople as “essential critical infrastructure workers,” especially as the nation responds to the threat of COVID-19. Therefore, many building-product manufacturers have announced that they will continue providing products and services to support suppliers and tradesmen. That said, manufacturers now face an even bigger responsibility to openly and accurately communicate with their stakeholders.

Many companies are choosing to “go dark” during this crisis, while others are rising to the occasion and making a memorable impact. But at the end of the day, audiences want to see how companies are stepping up and contributing to the cause, and we believe that’s the key to communicating during this crisis. It is essential to consider the harmful impact COVID-19 may have on overall business performance and, therefore, important to find ways to successfully navigate through the crisis.

Brands are truly under fire, as CEOs and corporate communications managers are scrambling to send the right message to their customers and employees. This pandemic has become a way to determine whether a company cares about its customers, employees and the community at large; or whether its primary focus is maintaining profitability.



OPEN THE GATE TO YOUR BUSINESS OPERATIONS

The best thing manufacturers can do right now is be as transparent as possible by sharing their strategies and next steps during the crisis. This is not the time to over-sell, instead it's the time to make customers feel at ease with operational transparency. Describe the steps you're taking to mitigate risk and give them insight into the steps you're taking to help the community. "You will sometimes get it right, and you will often get it wrong, but it is still better to be as transparent as you can," says Paul Argenti, Professor of Corporate Communication at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, in an article for Harvard Business Review, [Communicating Through the Coronavirus Crisis](#).

Ideally manufacturers will want to communicate company actions without creating a sense of panic. The goal should be to reassure audiences that essentials are under control, without taking away from the seriousness of the matter. According to a whitepaper by Scott Kronick from Ogilvy, [How to communicate in turbulent times](#), nothing builds trust better throughout an issue or crisis than a steady flow of responsible information that keeps everyone involved. The best way to offer responsible information is to stay on top of the most recent and relevant updates that pertain to your stakeholders. For example, [Plumbing & Mechanical magazine](#) recently reported on COVID-19 and the impact on the national plumbing industry, taking a deeper look at the responses from manufacturers, distributors, specifying engineers and contractors.

ACCURATE INFORMATION

It's essential that the information you share is accurate and comes from a trusted source in the industry. That being said, in order to relay information to key audiences, companies need to establish effective communications channels, such as industry publications, company websites, social media platforms and email.

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BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Redirect your trade show budget.

Many design and construction industry trade shows have already been postponed or even cancelled. Here is a list of [All the Design Events That Have Been Canceled or Postponed Due to Coronavirus So Far](#), courtesy of Architectural Digest Pro. “Many CFO’s will mistakenly see this as a way to cut travel and trade-show expenses when they should redirect them,” says [Mark Mitchell](#), author of Building Materials Channel Marketing in a recent newsletter. (Mitchell is also known as the Wizard of building materials sales.) Instead of cutting back on trade show budgets, your company can redirect those budgets to updating websites and increasing online presence.

Online platforms have become the most important communication channels during this crisis. If you have already invested a ton of money in your trade-show booth, why not offer a virtual tour of the booth and “go-live” to answer customer questions.



BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Reevaluate your approach to social media marketing.

Your pre-pandemic social media content plan or campaign may no longer be applicable. It's important to re-evaluate your copy and announcements. Ask yourself: Will our audience care about this message right now? Are we offending anyone with this message?

Now is not the time to over-sell.

Steer away from hard-sell content that promotes products directly. Shift focus to how your brand can provide value for consumers during this challenging time. Do NOT make claims you can't prove.

“Health” is the ideal focus now.

The topic doesn't necessarily have to be the virus. A general message of how your product can contribute to a “healthy home” or to overall “wellness” is an ideal play. Reassure your audience by proactively letting them know how you can protect their health.



BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING DURING THE PANDEMIC

In that vein, here are a few posting tips:

- As noted above, **avoid sales pitches** unless your products are vital to the situation we are all facing.
- **Don't try to be funny** or use a play on words about the situation. You can be funny, but you should avoid direct jokes about the virus. While some may appreciate the humor, others may not. It could damage your reputation.
- Customers feel assured by businesses that **play the role of a responsible community member**. Assure your customers that your business is stepping up to take precautions at this challenging time. Share the safety and security measures you're implementing to address the crisis in your place of business in a way that helps remove consumer doubt and fear.
- Provide **valuable information**, such as how-to's or DIY solutions to your products (if applicable).
- Even if a topic does not pertain to your normal conversation, but is fun and can **get everyone to participate**, go for it. For example, share fun boredom-busters or challenge everyone to a photo of the day contest.



BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Online customer service is a must.

Make it easy for customers to reach you. If you don't have a chatbot on your website or an active social media chatbot, think about adding it soon.

Stay in touch with your customers by responding to their comments on social media, and engage with them as much as possible. Train your salespeople in virtual selling, via video sales calls. By pivoting social channels away from self-promotion to share helpful updates and promote customer service contacts, you can signal to consumers that you care about their challenges and are here to proactively help.

This crisis isn't a marketing opportunity, but that doesn't mean we can't still connect with customers in meaningful ways.

How to improve online customer service: Make it clear to your customers (1) you are available and exactly; (2) how they can reach you.

For example, "Here's who you can contact if you would like to ask a technical question." You can even share images of your technical team working from home, ready to take any calls. This personal touch will put your customers at ease. List all the different ways customers can reach your team, such as an online contact us page, phone numbers, chat bots or even a video room where they can request a meeting.



BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Video conferencing and live-streamed events.

Online training webinars for your contractor and installer audience, are a valuable marketing tool right now.

How can you take advantage of online video and streaming to reach home-bound audiences?

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- Many companies offer online training and event-streaming as a way to reach a greater audience and increase attendance. Even in good times, this is a helpful suggestion because many industry professionals have tight schedules and cannot attend events unless they are outside normal business hours.
- You can also make your webinars and events a subscription/membership plan. That way, your viewers can access the information at any time.



BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Establish your company as a thought leader in the industry with media relations.

Contribute to trade publications by offering a quote on how your company will navigate through the crisis and let your customers know what steps you're taking to ensure their safety and the safety of your employees. This is an effective, long-term play and will build trust in your audience.

Develop lead-generation content.

Many industry professionals seek helpful and valuable information at this time. Whitepapers, ebooks, webinars, etc. are excellent lead magnets. For example, offer an ebook to contractors with resources and tools to help them conduct business effectively during this challenging time.

Comment on conversations that are most relevant to you.

The [LinkedIn](#) Official Blog advises that you find and comment on information and conversations on topics that are most relevant to your industry. This is a great way to share your insights. Searching hashtags is a fast way to do this.

BEST PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Keep your employees connected virtually via relevant updates on business operations and decision-making.

An internal newsletter is a great way to communicate with large numbers of employees.

- According to Facebook, 93 percent of Americans surveyed believe brands should stand up and help manage the spread of the virus. This includes (1) how businesses manage employee sick time; (2) whether the business responsibly encourages its employees to maintain social distance; and (3) how it keeps the public informed about the impact of the pandemic on its products and services.

Make a memorable and meaningful impact.

Here's a look at [How Companies Are Responding to the crisis](#). Several are stepping up to do what they can to support their stakeholders; in particular, their workers, customers, and communities.

Here are ways you can help:

- Donate supplies that can help your community or those still working on the frontlines. Raffle off gift cards to local restaurants.
- Start a positivity chain (sometimes words of encouragement are enough to help people stay strong).

MID- TO LONG-TERM MARKETING STRATEGIES



Plan flexible, fast-response marketing investments.

Avoid removing all ads in a panic at a time of crisis. Instead, allow your business to re-prioritize its marketing channels during the outbreak. Evaluate all your campaigns in the current context, and make adjustments to deliver new messages with empathy.

Leverage PR efforts aimed at promoting your brand's reliability.

Develop and share messaging for how your brand is helping society rebuild in real ways. Create new product stories and selling points that promote home living and healthfulness. Continue the customer outreach efforts you began earlier in your planning, to build on positive support and continue your momentum with consumers.

Use this time to think towards product innovation...

...by closely monitoring consumer trends and the emergence of new demand spaces and occasions in a post-outbreak society.

RESOURCES

- **Whitehouse Government Briefings, [Coronavirus Guidelines for America](#)**
- **Harvard Business Review, [Communicating Through the Coronavirus Crisis](#)**
- **Ogilvy, [How to communicate in turbulent times](#)**
- **Plumbing and Mechanical magazine, [COVID-19: Impact on the plumbing industry](#)**
- **Architectural Digest Pro, [All the Design Events That Have Been Canceled or Postponed Due to Coronavirus So Far](#)**
- **[Mark Mitchell](#)**
- **LinkedIn Official Blog, [Tips to Share Your Insights and Experiences on LinkedIn](#)**
- **Just Capital, [Capitalism Meets Coronavirus: How Companies Are Responding](#)**
- **Facebook, Response to COVID-19 for Advertisers.**