



The Barkley COVID-19 POV

03/17/2020

# An open brief for being a useful brand during COVID-19.



## Dear valued client,

As your partner, we wanted to share our perspective on relevant behaviors and actions modern brands should consider during an unprecedented time in history.

In recent days, most brands have published public letters reassuring their employees and customers that they are doing everything in their power to make their stakeholders' lives easier during COVID-19. The letters are thoughtful and honest. And they all make it clear that priority #1 for organizations will be their employees — which is right. Finding ways to support a workforce in flux is the first and right thing to do.

**But what happens after the letter?** What happens when supply chains slow, sales stall, stores close, media plans are postponed, and the business itself comes to a standstill like the general public? You are making tough decisions in these areas and more. What do you do with the brand?

**This is a time for brands to act fast in the coming months ahead. This is a time for brands to put their purpose into serious action by being as useful as possible.**

We've already seen brands be useful by thinking big. LVMH in France is turning their perfume factory into a hand sanitizer factory. But we've also seen brands be useful by thinking small. Disney+ released Frozen 2 three months early for parents already fighting the stay-at-home battle.

**The best brands combine their purpose with practicality to help in this time of need.** With Planet Fitness (a Barkley client), our team worked with our client to create a program called "United We Move" where the brand is hosting a Facebook livestream "Work-In" session every day designed to reduce stress and get a workout in from home. Simple. Practical. And derived directly from their purpose of "creating a healthier world through pressure-free fitness." Working with another client, Riceland, we helped by calling every one of their retail and foodservice customers, letting each know that we have rice ready to ship to help meet the needs of their shoppers.

**Attached, you will find a short set of action steps** in the form of prompts and questions to help your brand be as useful as possible during this time. This document is designed to get your brand back on offense in a new world that is profoundly different than the one we lived in four days ago, and that continues to change by the hour.

To quote Dr. Michael Ryan of the World Health Organization, "If you need to be right before you move, you will never win. Perfection is the enemy of the good. Speed trumps perfection." We will be proactive in the coming days and weeks to help you navigate these steps. Our teams are actively looking for opportunities to help, and we will be reporting back to each of you as fast as we can.

**It is our belief, as hard as this time is, that brands should not stay on the sidelines.** It's time to get creative, get practical and help people through this difficult time. The point isn't to profit from a crisis, but to help people get through it. That's what powerful modern brands do. And, that's what people will remember about your brand long term.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to your brand leader, or either one of us directly. We know you are going through a difficult time. We value our partnership and are here to be as useful to you as possible.

Thank you,



Jeff King  
CEO



Dan Fromm  
President

P.S. We are also attaching a document on best practices related to working remotely. We distributed this to our employees this week, and hope it may be helpful to you and your remote employees.



# How to be the most useful brand right now.

---

This document is designed to get us back on offense quickly in a new world that is profoundly different than the one we lived in only a few days ago, and that's changing daily and hourly. Our belief is that no one will blame you if you act now and overreact, but there will be little forgiveness for inaction and underreacting.

**This is not a set of tactical ideas.** Think of it as a set of prompts to use alongside your own team's planning efforts – thinking to maximize the usefulness of your brands at a time when people need you most. You have a product and/or service people value. Lean into that in a new way. Find out how your product or service can be most useful.

The following guidance runs across the whole brand spectrum — from your brand culture and workforce to the messaging to deliver to your customers and communities.

## Business Ideas

Inside



Brand Culture    Model    Products + Services    Design + Experience



## Marketing Ideas

Outside



Content    Actions    Experiential    PR    Advertising



# 1. How nimble can you be in marketing?

---

**Change current marketing. Launch early on anything that helps.**

All marketers are currently assessing the tone of their upcoming commercials, content, PR efforts. If it feels insensitive, pull it. No questions. But also look ahead. Do you have anything in your brand's marketing or product calendar that is almost ready? That has a summer launch? That could help people deal in this crisis? A piece of content that makes life more enjoyable? Ramp it up and get it out. It's estimated that there will be a 60% increase in households using TVs, especially in the daytime.

## TV Advertising

The impact of COVID-19

---

- (+) There will be higher HUT levels (Households Using TVs) especially across news and daytime. This will increase TV's audience reach, and increase the audience "supply".
- (+) Advertisers will pull back, decreasing demand in advertising and potentially making media a buyer's market.
- (+) If the economy is stable, there could be a serious increase in household spending immediately following the short-term school closure and quarantine period. Advertisers who remain on air will have a distinct advantage in their ability to prime consumers.
- (-) There will be a decrease in quality programming in the shortterm (no live events) and the long term (shooting/production currently suspended for many scripted and reality series) and increased pressure on networks to appease larger advertisers with "make goods".
- (-) If the crisis only lasts a month, it's possible that network liability and commitments outweigh any of the short-term buyer benefits.



## 2. How helpful can you be in the home?

---

Tackle practical challenges humans have while hunkering down.

For non-essential office workers, working from home is a reality. For essential workers, they are scrambling to get childcare as most kids will be home from school. While most brands can't help this problem, you can make home life easier. If you're CPG, show people creative ways to use your product. If you're retail or restaurant, focus on making your app more useful or find ways to minimize interaction in the transaction (delivery, drive-thru).

## 3. How empathetic can you be?

---

Find specific challenges your consumers are having on a daily basis.

People are experiencing a set of challenges they've never had to deal with before. Can you pick one challenge to help based on who you are and the product or service you create? Can you pick one of your most vulnerable audiences to specifically help? Single parents? The elderly? Teachers? The following are specific challenges we are seeing:

Now take what you do and apply it to one of the many new challenges people are facing:

---

1. Working from home with kids
2. Information reliability: using editorial authority to create a primary source of info on X topic
3. Overworked medical workers (esp those you know)
4. Childcare for medical workers
5. Anxiety + mental health: People need new ways to relax without leaving their homes
6. The need for safe interactions outside the house, getting food, gas, etc
7. Caring for loved ones when you can't physically see them
8. Lack of human contact
9. Entertainment/monoculture: sports and live entertainment are gone for awhile. What fills the gap for things we watch together?
10. Rights of passage postponed (birthdays, weddings, funerals)
11. Regular health care: access to non-COVID-19 care and advice (esp when the system is overloaded)
12. Lost work and wages: non-salaried workers losing at least a month of income
13. Transportation: Lots of public transit shut, folks probably not getting in rideshare
14. Small businesses frozen without income
15. General uncertainty about how long this will last
16. Educating kids / virtual learning at home
17. Connecting and staying engaged with work and colleagues from a distance
18. A need for a break from the news
19. A need for quiet
20. A need for easy meals
21. Ways to communicate with elderly family
22. Need to explain to kids what's going on



## 4. How community-centric can you be now and if it gets worse?

---

Activate your people and assets on the ground at a local level.

As we stated upfront, this can be a time for thinking small and local. How can your brand become available to the communities you live in/work in/do business in? Look at the overlap of your brand, your business and your community. What action can you take?

If we don't flatten the curve, what can your brand offer up to help an overrun health care system? Do you have physical space? Can you create a program just for health care workers? We hope that the worst-case scenario won't happen, but if it does, you can be a useful actor in it.

Start here: look at the overlaps and take action



Ask:

- Do you know how the brand can/will/is impacting the community?
- How are the business and community currently interacting that may be an opportunity?
- What do you know about the role the brand plays within the business needs?



## 5. How virtual can you be as a brand?

---

**Go from selling to streaming.**

Let's take your brands online. Even more so. For every live event, sale, promotion you were planning, can you replace it with an online one? This won't be easy. Think small. Go back through the marketing calendars of the past and think about online efforts that could help. Translating what used to be done physically into the digital space is a brief we've all been working on for 15 years. Now is the time to really use it.

## 6. How communicative can you be?

---

**You can do no wrong by over-communicating.**

The stories will come in. Creative ways people in your system are uniting and helping their local communities. This situation is dynamic and fluid in every state, city, locality. If you don't already have a robust field reporting tool, now's the time to get one.

When it comes to your own internal "brand culture," make sure to re-evaluate and update employee communications plans. These will become blueprints to keep workforces aligned and informed.

**In addition:**

- Examine how leadership is communicating with employees as well as how they are encouraging employees to communicate with each other. Consider if additional channels of communication are needed and useful.
- Determine what a backup method of communication will be should the base system fail. Consider leveraging communities within social media (transparent and available) especially as physical distancing increases.
- Set standard times for daily updates and create a hierarchy of communication.
- Create a forum for immediate feedback to give brand leaders real-time opportunities to listen and ascertain the severity of employee situations.

Are they or members of their family sick? Do they have access to care?

Are their children home from school making it impossible for them to return to work (if on-site work is necessary) or challenging to work from home?

Is there a system for them to indicate their availability to return to work should the opportunity present itself?

Are there creative opportunities to collect and/or answer employee questions in a 24/7 capacity — i.e., an online chat bot?



## 7. How serious can you be?

Strike a balance between seriousness and optimism.

Right now, even the most irreverent brands are taking a sober stance. The news outlets are adding to the confusion, so the brand can play a smart role by making things easier, not more complicated. People need to see that you understand and empathize with the situation they're in, not just in what you say and do but in how you say and do it.

Your tone has to be tuned for clarity and action. It's great to be human and encouraging in trying times, but the bar for sincerity and authenticity is going to be higher than it has ever been. It's ok to be optimistic, but it's not the time to be cute.

Beyond that, there's no formula. You have to use your best judgment as you go by doing your best to be true to the whole brand and your experience building it.



◀ Even the most irreverent brands have to play it straighter than usual.



## 8. How narrow can you be on who you help?

---

Find your most vulnerable audiences and reach out to help.

This disease is going to hurt the most vulnerable people in society. Now is a perfect time to think about smaller, more in-need audiences of your brand. Single parents? The elderly? Teachers? How can you design programs around them to help get them through?

## 9. How timely and contextual can you be?

---

Create an action plan based on the virus and consumer journey.

We've used some data from Nielsen to develop a simple framework for the next coming months. Your teams will customize it for your brand, but this is the general journey in which to be a helpful brand.

Right now, you're in the "Prepare and Hunker Down" phase. Consumers are trying to work through logistics, all while being confused with the magnitude of this virus. What can your brand do now to alleviate confusion or add a little joy? Next, you'll be in Peak – the extended period of time. How does your brand help physically, mentally? After that, "Recovery" phase will come, where people start to venture out again. How do you provide clarity for this unsure time? And if we ever get back to "Normal," what do you do then? This won't be a time for celebration, but a time to collectively create a sigh of relief with your consumers.



## How timely and contextual can you be? *(continued)*

### Speed to Usefulness

The primary driver of success in a crisis is speed of action. Brands need to figure out how to marshal their assets fast to be useful to the max amount of people who need all kinds of help. This is not a time for building equity; it’s a time for spending it usefully. Put what people rely on you for before what the brand stands for.

### Start Here

Adopt a simple framework plan for the next 3 months. Use it to structure ideation and be ready to adapt on the fly. Take this template and populate it for your brand/business/category.



	<b>Phase 1: Prepare</b>	<b>Phase 2: Peak</b>	<b>Phase 3: Recovery</b>
	What should your brand be doing as people are preparing and adjusting to the reality of staying home?	How does your brand’s role in their life change while they are restricted at home? How should your communications shift to reflect that?	What is the new relationship between your product/service and the consumer? What does that mean for your staff? For communication planning?
<b>NEED</b>	e.g., Need to know how to operate in a new reality	e.g., Need small moments to break cabin fever	e.g., Need to still enjoy life in recovery
<b>STRATEGY</b>			
<b>STRATEGY</b>			

Source: Nielsen





---

# Thank you.

Stay healthy, and please don't hesitate to reach out at any time. We will be updating this document and POV as needed.