



By Richard D. Czerniawski

MARKETING IN THE NEW NORMAL

Welcome to the “new normal,” whatever it means. One thing we might agree upon is that this term, which is appearing in all manner of media, heralds significant change. We can’t ignore it because the new normal has altered our lives. Unlike the changes we typically experience, which evolve slowly, this is, might we say, “revolutionary?” It’s a significant shift away from what we do, how we do it, and even how we live.

What brings on revolutionary change? Revolution! In our case, the pandemic ushered in a revolution—a sea change. It triggered the closing of schools, leading to a surge in online learning. It shuttered businesses up and down Mainstreet. It led to working from home, not in the corporate office. The pandemic also led to a postponement of elective surgery and the rise of telemedicine. It separated us from loved ones, locked the elderly into nursing homes, and demanded “social distancing.” It led to the cancellation of events such as sporting contests and even graduation ceremonies. These are only a few of the changes and consequences. Welcome to the “new normal.” Or is it a “welcome?”

Historians, sociologists, etc., will put these changes into perspective, given ample time and the power of hindsight. However, we live in the present time where what we choose to do and not do now—today—will affect us and our business life well into the future.

Indeed, some changes were underway that may have been under our radar. We didn’t notice them. However, the pandemic brought those changes front and center. Perhaps, online learning will supplement and, in some cases, replace classroom education in the future. Maybe, too, many of us will spend more time working from home than in our corporate offices. Rather than spending time walking through the aisles of our local supermarket, we may continue to use InstaCart services and have them deliver groceries to our doorsteps. Mainstreet businesses that were on the brink may close their doors permanently. Online sales may continue to soar at a significantly faster clip.

The new normal will have a profound impact on our business lives, including our marketing! Who will benefit the most? Who will be left behind? It depends?

I think we need to start with our interpretation of the “new normal.” What does it mean to you? Is the glass half-empty? Or, half-full? If we accept it as half-empty, then we are allowing ourselves to settle for lower standards. The half-empty people lament the change. They feel like victims and float adrift, allowing the sea change to batter them. They will place the blame of failure on the pandemic,

the resultant recessionary economy—everywhere but on themselves and their inability to anticipate and prepare for change accordingly.

Then there are those people who see the glass as half-full. They envision opportunity springing from the challenges. These people are optimistic and have confidence in their abilities to make good things happen. They're eager to make the essential changes to capitalize on their perceived opportunities. The most sanguine are already maneuvering into position to take full advantage of the new normal.

What might we, marketers, expect from the new normal:

- Price competition will grow more intense, particularly in those categories that are experiencing declining sales.
- Growth categories will experience a flood of new competitors, perhaps, even from other sectors and categories. This influx of competitors from other markets will require a change in how we go about our business as they do not play by the same rules.
- Innovation, particularly in technology (including AI), will create rogue waves that transform entire industries.
- Customers will become more demanding. We'll have to deliver what they want, when they want, and how they want it.
- The winners will be those businesses that better satisfy customer needs, not those that merely patronize them or allow "creeping decrementalism" to undermine the performance of their offerings.
- We will need to demonstrate that we genuinely want the customer's business and go to great lengths to develop intangibles that make our brands more attractive to them. Intangibles are those features that are not part of the physical product but comprise the whole offering to customers.
- Innovation will need to accelerate to win the battle for customers and market share.
- Some will need to change their business models to balance costs to the enterprise, benefits to customers, and provide relevant, meaningful differentiation. For example, this includes the size, composition, and deployment of sales personnel. Another is the channels we employ to interface with customers. It even includes how we choose to communicate with customers.
- Marketing funding will be scrutinized even more intensely.
- Marketing funding will be slashed if we cannot provide evidence that it generates a significant impact and a highly favorable ROI.
- Marketing will need to focus on ways to stimulate "pull," not push marketing.
- New product launches will be accelerated to bolster short-term revenue.
- Strategic, tactical, and operational errors will bleed companies and could lead to a downward spiral for the organization.
- New channels and tools will spring-up to connect with customers, while others will dry-up and die.
- In some industries and categories, the more things change, the more they will (need to) remain the same to make prospective customers comfortable.
- Ah, yes, customers will need reassurance that they can trust our brands. Reassurance will need to go well beyond words to actions that clearly demonstrate we are trustworthy and deserving of their business.

Those mentioned above are merely a few of the many macro-changes that will help define the new normal. Marketers need to envision what the new normal means for their brands and businesses. If

you tend to view it from the perspective that your glass is half-empty, use it to take a conservative stance where necessary to avoid risking and squandering precious resources. However, think of the case where the new normal presents an opportunity for you and your brand to soar. The half-full glass is the attitude that will enable us to prepare to take our game to a higher level. It will spur us to achieve success.

If we don't prepare for the new normal, we may find ourselves behind the proverbial power curve, where the more we do, the worse we will suffer (by draining resources). We must jump out in front of competitors to address the new normal with practices such as evidence-based marketing; and, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS**, as they can cause your brand to suffer losses—real and opportunity—that make the new normal feel like you and your brand are victims versus victors.

Prepare to take your marketing to the next level. Check-out my new book, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing**. In it, I share many learnings from my 48-year, and still counting, career in marketing management with some of the most successful companies and brands throughout the world. It will help you avoid those critical marketing errors of omission and commission and, importantly, provide sound direction to help your marketing soar. Learn more here: <http://bdn-intl.com/avoiding-critical-marketing-errors>

Stay SAFE and be well.

Peace and best wishes,

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