

Brand trust and the coronavirus pandemic



By Karena Crerar

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The rapidly evolving Covid-19 pandemic has not only presented an alarming health crisis but is also causing significant social and economic implications across the globe. In uncertain environments like this, trust in institutions - businesses, organisations, and governments - becomes even more critical. Strong leadership and decisive action are needed to earn that trust and shape our post-crisis future.



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We have observed groups of people ignoring critical health guidance, in part because they doubted the veracity of available information or because they relied on disinformation. At the same time, a number of businesses have stepped up to the plate with responsible actions and information from credible sources, including scientists and public health authorities, knowing that their employees expect frequent updates and agile changes to workplace policies.

Edelman provided insight into the need for business and employers to step up during this difficult and uncertain time with two special research reports that were released recently, allowing us to glean further pertinent insights on the critical role that employers and brands are expected to play during the coronavirus pandemic.



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Findings from our survey, conducted across 12-markets globally, revealed the power and necessity of brands as well as their urgent need to act. Brands should find solutions instead of just selling and the solutions need to be tangible and fast, not impressionistic and conceptual.

Show up and do your part

In times of crisis, people want credible information, and this is where brands have a vital role to play. Now is not the time to disappear, but to show up and use all your resources and creativity to make a difference. This is about understanding the unique role your brand plays in people's lives, how this has changed, and how your brand can help or be useful during a

crisis.

Respondents recognised the need for specific brand action to help address the societal challenges posed by Covid-19, from protecting the well-being of employees to shifting products and pricing to creating a sense of community. 62% of respondents said their country will not make it through this crisis without brands playing a critical role in addressing the challenges of the pandemic. 55% said that brands and companies are responding more quickly and effectively than the government.



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At the same time, 71% agree that if they perceive that a brand is putting profit over people, they will lose trust in that brand forever. Brands need to look for opportunities to lead by example and do the right thing, where it makes sense for their business. If there is useful and reliable information that might help people navigate the uncertainty, or keep people calm, brands need to share it. If you have important information that affects your company, or your employees (e.g. around the transmission of the virus), you may want to consider sharing that publicly.

Don't act alone

There is strength in collaboration. To truly help people during this pandemic requires joining forces with others – most critically government. There was unanimity across markets (90% globally) that people wanted brands to do everything they could to protect the well-being and financial security of their employees and suppliers, even if it means substantial financial losses until the pandemic ends.

Key roles included being a regular reliable news source that keeps people informed, educating through offering people instructional information about how to protect themselves and bringing people together through powerful platforms such as social media by connecting and helping them stay emotionally close.

There is a clear desire that brands partner with government and also be a safety net stepping in to fill gaps in the government's response to the virus.

Solve, don't sell

Brands should focus all efforts on finding appropriate and meaningful solutions to the problems people are facing today. The communication efforts should be geared towards keeping the public fully informed with regards to how the brand is supporting and protecting its employees and customers and what operational changes have been made to ensure there is access to its products and services.



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The Edelman survey showed 72% of respondents agreed it is comforting and reassuring to hear what the brands they use are doing to respond to the pandemic. For respondents, this indicated that the brand was responsible, caring and sensitive enough to be in touch with the needs of the market.

In this time of crisis, people are turning more and more to the brands that they are absolutely sure that they can trust, brands that are innovative and genuinely compassionate in the way they respond to issues like the virus outbreak. People are interested in brands and companies that place people before their profits and there is no better time to do this than right now. Brands need to be present and play an active role in the solution.

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