
Cross Industry Executive Q&A

Three questions to activate your action plan

2020 has become the year of the pivot. Depending on your business, your version of pivot may be more or less extreme – but pivot you must. The current crisis has already reinforced that none of us are immune from massive shifts in how we do business.

Faced with these big decisions on what changes to make, the challenge is to use a healthy dose of skepticism and eyes-wide-openness – to put all ideas on the table – to test assumptions, ideas and decisions. To heed your own advice and gut feelings, get input from your team and listen to what other companies are saying and doing. And then to take action.

History shows that those companies that continue to market and plan for the future, even in light of adverse conditions, recover from downturns faster. Especially those that build their brand strength during times of crisis.

After the 2008/09 crash, strong brands recovered **8-9 times faster.** -- Marketing Week

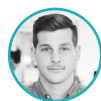
What are other companies doing?

In the face of the current situation we approached a cross-industry group of people in our network for their input on three categories that are top of mind for everyone right now:

- 1. How has your strategy and / or your messaging to clients / members shifted?**
- 2. What actions are you taking to continue to provide value to your current customer base?**
- 3. Do you believe any new ideas, approaches, or opportunities will come out of this crisis?**

We are happy to share the responses so you can learn from firms who are acting now to sustain during a time of constraint and at the same time, preparing to regain momentum when the recovery starts.

Big gratitude to these busy professionals who took the time to provide their thoughtful and infintely helpful insights.



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What's changed? Everything.

Across the board, regardless of industry, change and adjustment is the name of the game. Companies are taking a less commercial approach and are using this time to connect with their customer base on a more personal level. Leaders are being pushed harder than they ever have to find new ways to run their business. They are using this opportunity to test and measure – running short experiments on campaign delivery, messaging effectiveness or testing new value propositions. New ideas will come, new products and services will be invented.


How has your strategy and / or your messaging to clients / members shifted?



JL: In times of uncertainty; it helps to run experiments in shorter duration. To keep ourselves honest we're measuring on a weekly level – i.e. is our old outbound messaging effective OR do we need to re-evaluate messaging and test a new value prop? We focus on top-of-the-funnel. Everyone needs to build new mental models around how priorities / needs have shifted within organizations; the “status-quo” has been shaken – i.e. companies reliant on events need to find new ways to generate leads. Past relationships have never carried so much weight. We've focused on generating value for past/current clients as trust is built – i.e. we're a variable cost VS the alternative of hiring full-time sales reps (fixed cost).



DR: As a firm we have stopped targeting business development in favor of facilitating dialogues between clients to help them solve real-time problems in their business. I would personally view this as being less commercial but as client focused as ever – albeit more personally led – i.e. checking in with people to see how we can help them as well as their firm.



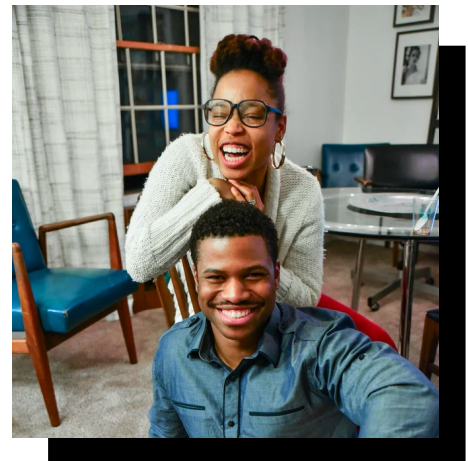
TM: It has given us a truly viable platform to communicate the features and benefits of cannabis infused beverages vs. traditional means of cannabis consumption such as smoking or vaping. We're talking a lot about the kind of precise and micro-dosed control that beverages offer, the safe predictable and consistent experience they impel, and of course, the anti-anxiety and mood-heightening effects they deliver. And it is working. Before the crisis began, infused beverages – while the fastest growing segment of the cannabis industry – hovered only at about 1% of sales. It is now 14% of sales and continuing to grow.

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CC: When you are in the business of social gatherings, the advent of social distancing requires those proverbial pivots to come into play – pivot to digital, pivot to virtual, etc. Every discussion we’re having with clients is about redefining “experience” – and what it means to deliver meaningful and memorable brand experiences in our new normal and in our post-pandemic environment. We’re deep in planning with many brands to create purposeful programs that aren’t just dependent on digital content but also include at-home, joyful moments. We can all use more of those.

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RR: In many ways it hasn’t. We are used to responding to urgent or rapidly unfolding situations, and we are making sure our clients know we are there for them and providing support and ideas depending on their particular needs.





JR: We find ourselves in the midst of a crisis to both our health and our wealth. As a trusted advisor, my business is built on personal relationships. I already know your family story and how you define success as it relates to long term financial goals. We have already discussed your philanthropic mission. What has shifted is the way the impact of this pandemic has further amplified the urgency around articulating values through investing and philanthropy. I am working with my clients to discover how the personal effects of this virus will translate into how they position their portfolios, going forward. Plus, the first thing on everyone’s mind is how to survive - how to protect themselves from the virus and how to adjust to a new normal in the day to day operations of our homes and businesses. I’m a resource for an accountant, a banker, a family lawyer, a mortgage broker, or an estate planning attorney. There is that list of personal and financial housekeeping items that feels more pressing now, like making sure estate and trust planning documents are in order. People want to ask me how I order groceries and plan meals, how I manage the remote school schedule, ways to motivate a teenager to give back to the community, where to find face masks, or how to organize a birthday party over zoom. Clients see me as their financial advisor, but also their neighbor and fellow lock down survivor - and a resourceful one, at that.

What actions are you taking to continue to provide value to your current customer base?

 **JL:** We are giving folks an opportunity to pay over a longer duration to lessen monthly costs with payment flexibility. For increased transparency, we are also focused on setting weekly engagement goals vs managing against quarterly engagement goals. Additionally, we are going further to provide more clarity around weekly / monthly outcomes; the more certain we can be around results, the more value and further indispensable we become to Founders in uncertainty.

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 **DR:** We are adding value by connecting clients with peers in other firms / parts of the industry so that they can collaborate on how best to respond to challenges.

 **TM:** We have always seen delivery platforms as a priority sales channel for our cannabis-infused wines. We were banking on the insight that home delivery is a familiar and comfortable shopping method for the affluent, canna-curious female consumer that is our target. Since the crisis began, we have doubled down on that insight and have made ourselves available on every major delivery platform in the state of California while ensuring parity pricing with brick and mortar retail outlets.



CC: When the pandemic first became profoundly real for so many of us, we wanted to lean into the goodness that immediately sprouted from brands, sports properties, athletes, entertainers, etc. So, we started to feature these examples on our social channels, using #experiencegood. It was our way of celebrating the creativity we were seeing from our industry. What began as simple social sharing quickly morphed into a digital platform of case studies that reflect the sport and entertainment industry uniting fans and audiences through unique experiences. We partnered with The Vendry to launch www.experiencegood.co as the digital destination to convene all the great ideas and programs from our industry. And, we now have more than 20 agency partners contributing content to the platform. We're conducting workshops with our clients to share the #experiencegood featured articles and case studies — and to use the platform as creative fodder to help other brands change their approach for IRL experiences.



RR: Our core business revolves around transactions and high-risk situations, and obviously whether it's ESG, restructurings, or understanding how to communicate earnings and financial guidance in the current climate, the importance of effective communications is critical. We are helping our clients to navigate an environment where new rules are being written in real-time. Many of our clients also want to benefit from best practices of their peers as well, and we are able to help them understand what has been successful given the diversity and breadth of our global client base.



“The importance of effective communications is critical.”



JR: I recognize how much my clients are managing, personally and professionally, and how it feels to spin plates. During the first week of the PAUSE, I launched a twice weekly broadcast to bring real time updates on capital markets investing. Just 15 minutes, and you get all of the information you need about everything from fiscal policy, to economic insights, social impact and investment trends. I am a single mom, on my own, with two young children in a small Manhattan apartment. I am producing this broadcast from a desk in my bedroom, featuring some of the top thinkers in my firm and industry. I am proud I haven't skipped a beat.

Do you believe any new ideas, approaches, or opportunities will come out of this crisis?



JL: Yes, 100% – organizations are pushed to re-evaluate their current value proposition and business model. Savings and cost reduction are more top of mind ... I think (3) priorities are now balanced between:

GROWTH / SPEED / COST SAVINGS

Before the pandemic I think it was speed and growth above all else: moving away from growth at all costs to balanced and effective growth. The early/late majority adopters (post early-adopters) are being pushed to think and invest in digital transformation due to pandemic and finding ways to flex between office and distributed org – i.e. growth of Slack/Zoom, etc. Folks will be open to thinking about new, more effective ways to “accomplish the job”; possibly without adding more bodies. The flywheel has been kicked with massive layoffs; people will fear “a round 2 of pandemic might happen again”.



DR: Clients are being forced to make critical business decisions on executive hiring and vendor engagement full remotely without meeting people face to face. While there are clients that will default to how they traditionally worked with service providers and hired executives, some may well decide that running a process digitally is significantly advantageous from a timing and cost perspective. For those who do significantly amend the way they operate I think it is inevitable that they will seek more data and analytical tools to drive decision making. So, the “look them in the eye and shake their hand” trust factor to hiring an executive might at the outset of a search lean more heavily on psychometric tools and analytical leadership/management assessment.

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TM: It’s been widely reported that cannabis sales have soared in the wake of lockdown. That’s given us a far wider consumer base to address and ones who are clearly available to our message. So, for us, the focus is on education and correcting the misinformation that is so pervasive in the cannabis arena in order to seize this unique opportunity to bring cannabis use – particularly infused beverages – into the mainstream.



CC: We know we'll all be seeking more contactless ways to maneuver through our lives - so hand - motioned and facial recognition technology will certainly become more of an innovation and investment priority. On a basic but necessary level, we'll need more portable hand-washing and sanitizing stations because every venue must step up their game in these areas. We also now know that remote working can be productive so the shift to more flexible workplaces is here and will radically change our office workplace needs.

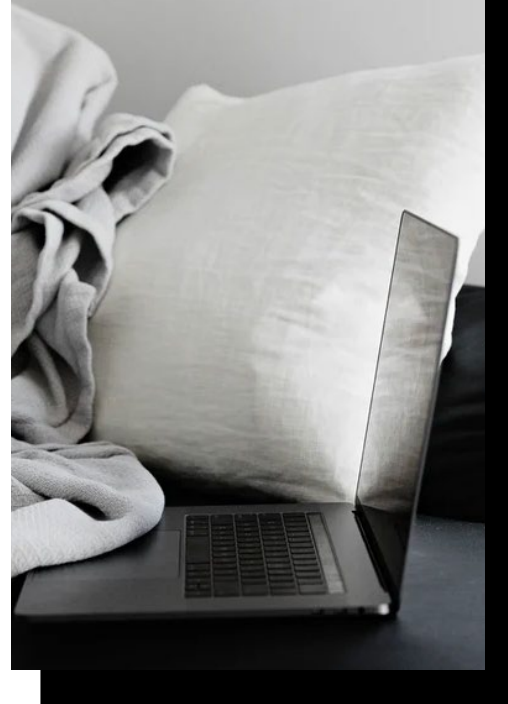


RR: I think it's too early to tell, and a lot will depend where the "new normal" settles in. Clearly the needle will have moved on how we all interact and communicate "virtually," and that will be an obvious focus. The learnings may very well impact how companies conduct things like annual meetings, or investor meetings in the future, some of which will have ramifications for corporate governance. It's all very fluid right now, which is a good challenge for communicators.



JR: Dislocations in equity markets are an opportunity to show our strength as stock pickers. Some highly desirable names, particularly in the work-from-home space, are available at more attractive prices now. We already prioritized enduring businesses with high cash flow and quality balance sheets, but we are looking for ideas related to cyclical themes that will benefit from a rebound and resilience to weather difficult times. The crisis accelerates trends that were already in place before, in retail, hospitality, health care and technology. The case is strong for sustainability as a factor in long term returns. The clues for the next best investing ideas are evidenced in the changes we see in our own daily lives. I believe individuals will value active money management, grounded in deep research capacity, and a better alignment between social justice concerns and the allocation of core capital. Refusing the straw in your drink or the plastic bag at the grocery store in the name of environmental consciousness can't really co-exist with passively investing in the stocks of the largest ocean polluters. Solving for systemic weaknesses being felt in our cities can be a way to focus efforts on the fixed income side. Housing, health care, education and transportation infrastructure present opportunities to deploy capital for future economic equity and expansion. Activist investing in municipal bonds is more exciting than it sounds!

"The shift to more flexible workplaces is here."



Apply the Insights to Your Situation

Taking time to think about how each of our three questions applies to your business is a great way to activate your on-going plan. Gather input from your teams and your own network to spark ideas that are relevant to your situation.

Look through a lens of truth to evaluate the resources you have now and how your products and services can be positioned or deployed to address current market and customer needs. Think about how other companies are pivoting their entire business models and what you have to offer within the context of this crisis. The points you establish become your checklist for action items, areas of opportunity and things that need to be addressed.

Once you have your checklist:

Prioritize – sort your checklist into nice to haves vs. must haves that can best meet your customer’s needs. *(For inspiration on this, see our recent post on [Guiding Practices for the New Normal](#))*

Be strategic about the actions you choose.

Be realistic about what you can accomplish in light of your current resources.

Set criteria for how they will be selected and measured – criteria such as time, quality, cost, etc.

Be prepared to adjust if needed during implementation – remember, agility is the name of the game.

Lights, Camera, Action!

What are you waiting for? Fire up the web-conference, invite your team and get started on the path to future-proofing your business. We guarantee it won't be a waste of time. Whatever actions you take from this exercise will not only help you relaunch and recover when the next normal materializes, but you will be that much better prepared for the one after that.

If you need help thinking through your own situation and prioritizing what to do first, we have a team ready to save the day. [Just ask.](#)

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