

yesler 

B2B MARKETING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

B2B MARKETING IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

As the world grapples with and adapts to the rapidly developing changes needed to help contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), we've heard from many of you over the past few weeks about how these changes have disrupted your marketing programs and plans.

You may have been asked to pivot your efforts, or you are scrambling to cancel perennial events or re-envision them to be virtual-only. We all are wondering how to strike that balance between continuing to support the economy through being able to work, while attending to our families, communities, and the needs of our customers.

We want you to know that your business and the programs we work on together remain a top priority for us at Yesler.

To help us collectively find footing in the next few months, we'd like to share what we're seeing across the B2B marketing industry, with some practical guidance on how to tune what you're doing now for the current crisis and to strengthen your approach to the new opportunities that will come after.

WHAT WE'RE SEEING

ABRUPT CHANGES TO OUR MARKETING PROGRAMS

Amid unprecedented uncertainty, B2B marketers aren't sure which tactics to use or where to make investments.

Here's what's driving it:

- Seeing that customers' priorities have shifted and many aren't in a position to be marketed to right now, either because their industry has been severely impacted or because of the impact to their personal lives.
- The imperative for sensitivity—the need to provide helpful service without sounding tone-deaf, exploitive, or opportunistic.
- The immediate need to transform events and tactics to reach virtual-only audiences.
- Noticing that the crisis is affecting different channels at different paces, which makes it difficult to know how to have a cohesive brand response and presence.
- A sudden focus inward to the business to re-examine the market, budgets, and even job priorities.
- Not knowing how long the crisis will last makes it difficult to plan long-term initiatives.
- Yet, there is a continuing need to invest marketing budget, but without a playbook.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

USE EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT CUSTOMERS AND CONSISTENCY

Marketing's job is to adapt to changing conditions, and we can rely on ourselves to get through this.

One comfort is that we're more informed than we were in the 2008 financial crisis, and the things we do now to weather the current crisis won't be the same because we've learned so much more since then.

We know more about ROI and impact, and we can use the technologies we've put in place and the results they show us to make bets on activities that will serve our businesses as conditions change.

That means, we can really focus on what we need to do to support customers.

It's also good to remember that when you partner with an agency at this time, you have access to a broad set of skills and experiences. The right agency can be an agile, dynamic force in a rapidly changing situation.

Your Yesler team is here to help you decide on those best bets and then to help execute and measure them. We'll supply guidance and insights into how you can optimize or switch directions along the way.

Following are some insights from Yesler service area leads on specific aspects of B2B marketing, along with their guidance about what to do now and how your Yesler team can get it going for you.

CONTENTS

Advocacy	6
Creative and content development	7
Marketing automation	8
Account-based marketing (ABM)	9
Paid media	10
Social media	11
Martech	12
Marketing operations	13
Analytics	14
Sales enablement	15
Strategy	16
The future	17

ADVOCACY

Erin Meisner
Director of Advocacy



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Customer participation in advocacy program activities has dropped. This includes taking reference calls and creating written and video case studies. Customers are overwhelmed by changes and many are reluctant to share stories when they aren't sure how their business or industry will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Exercise sensitivity and don't push hard. We don't know how deeply individuals and industries are affected by the crisis.
- Simply ask customers what they need. Shift from asking customers to support sales to asking how you can help them complete an implementation or adapt a technology to another use.
- Focus on building customer communities. Connect customers from similar industries or circumstances so they can discuss strategies for how to adapt to common challenges.
- Work on trying new narratives, messaging, and formats. With travel and in-person production at a halt, we need to rethink how we tell stories.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- Rely on our reference program management teams to bring together customer communities and connect customers to things they need to keep them going in the short-term.
- We've had a lot practice trying out new narrative structure and formats for clients. Let's work together to explore user-generated videos, podcasts, or new ways of making it easier for customers to give testimonials or references.



CREATIVE AND CONTENT DEVELOPMENT

Greg Cabrera

Director, Creative & Content



David Campbell

Creative Director



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Marketers are scrambling to review and revise existing content to accommodate changes in event plans and redirect email campaigns—especially those that include direct mail—to land for audiences that may now be working from home. Because different channels are being impacted at different rates, and the situation is changing so rapidly, it's difficult to create a coherent brand response. But a coordinated message matters.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Review all your content, text, and imagery (existing and under-development) for sensitivity to the crisis. For example, be mindful that your subject lines are on-brand and do not incite fear.
- Be transparent, honest, and authentic. Avoid “fun-based” messaging in general.
- Stick to your brand basics. Don't launch sub-brands or new campaigns. Customers need consistency.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- We're already running QA checks for crisis-sensitive language on all client content. [Here's the checklist](#) we're using. Feel free to download it and run these checks on your marketing content.
- Our teams can scale to help revise campaign and event content on a tight turn.
- We can help evaluate cancellations and come up with alternative event, campaign, or content options to replace them.
- We can identify where changes to your content mean corresponding changes to the marketing automation technology that supports it.



MARKETING AUTOMATION

Melinda Snow Olson
Director, Global Event
Marketing Operations



Lauren Smith
Director, Marketing
Automation



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

As businesses rush to communicate their responses to COVID-19, marketers risk losing sight of all email communications sent to customers. More business units may be sending communications to customers directly, and you might be inundating customers and contacts with crisis news and overlooked evergreen nurture campaigns alike.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Re-evaluate your global email communication limits and prioritize messages across your organization.
- Review your evergreen digital content, like nurture programs and blogs. Ensure that they are still appropriate and not tone-deaf for the current situation.
- Consider using your automation to run a donation campaign and invite customers to participate.
- Update your sales scripts so that what salespeople say matches what your automation introduced.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- We'll review and reset your global email communications limits to make sure you're not inundating contacts or bogging down your platform.
- We can help pivot your marketing automation infrastructure (including rebuilding emails and landing pages) from live to virtual events.
- We can review existing campaigns and their operational practices to recommend changes to better serve your communication goals during the crisis.

ACCOUNT-BASED MARKETING

Rich Miller
Vice President, Innovation



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Because account-based marketing is so personalized, ABM campaigns have an increased risk to offend or miss the mark altogether. For example, in the past few years, we've heard a lot about a resurgence of physical direct mail as an effective ABM tactic. But now, with more people working from home, many of those packages will arrive to empty offices.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Review your direct mail strategy. Consider another option unless you can ensure a welcomed delivery.
- Devise different strategies for industries hit especially hard by the crisis, including travel and hospitality. Prioritize your existing customers.
- Up the effort to personalize all content. Spend time looking at each company and asking where and how you can help. It's more important to pitch in than to push a sale.
- Reduce the programmatic emails in your mix and send more direct personal emails.
- Review and revise your calls to action to make sure they are realistic and relevant.
- Stay in lockstep with sales. You spent a lot of time and effort building alignment, so don't let it fall apart now. People's tolerance of small mismatches in communication is at a low.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- Work with our integrated teams to swiftly review and revise your strategy and the content and tech that run it.

PAID MEDIA

Michelle Pratt
Group Manager, Paid Media



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

People are changing their media usage and habits, which influences B2B media strategies, goals, messages, timing, costs, and even strategies for content experience. While paid media isn't as negatively impacted as other marketing activities, such as in-person events, we have seen some week-over-week declines in ad engagement (CTRs and CVRs) in the US and European markets.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Assess your active campaigns and review search terms, display placements, device targets, and bidding strategies.
- Review ad copy and imagery for sensitivity.
- Consider other channels and top-funnel tactics for reaching your audience.
- Pay attention to what your competitors are doing. Where they pull back could open an opportunity for you.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- Our paid media strategists can fully assess your active campaigns and make recommendations for channels, timing, tactics, display placements, bidding strategies, and the content that resonates for your audience, wherever they may be working now.
- We can keep you informed and give guidance on how the ongoing crisis will affect your media strategy for the second half of the year, your industry, and your competition.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Seth Yates
Group Manager, Social Media



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

People are using social media channels more than ever as they check the news and engage with family, friends, and community. Because social media is filling in for an absence of physical contact right now, people want a stronger sense of community from it. It's wise for businesses to tread carefully with marketing messages so as not to appear to be capitalizing on the crisis.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Use discretion when posting to the public about how your business is handling or dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. People are suddenly receiving a lot of messages from businesses and organizations they've rarely engaged with. Make sure your messaging is immediately relevant to your audience.
- Avoid using lighthearted or playful posts about COVID-19.
- Use your social channels to engage your employees and customers with valuable, straightforward content.
- Ramp up your social strategy to support your virtual events.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- Our team has a lot of experience supporting virtual events. We can help come up with ideas to fulfill the original goals of an in-person event that has transitioned into a virtual one.
- We can review your existing social strategy and recommend how to tune your messages and channel mix for both public and employee audiences during the crisis.



MARTECH

Rich Miller
Vice President, Innovation



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Martech underpins all our marketing practices, so companies will have to quickly reconfigure their setups to be effective for whatever program changes they make. It's not the first that comes to mind as the crisis unfolds. But marketers' ability to be nimble, nuanced, and results-driven will depend on it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Take a complete inventory of your martech. Know what is being used and by whom. Make sure there is an owner for every piece.
- Pay attention to identity resolution technologies. With more people working from home, it will be difficult to identify site visitors. One of our clients saw a 56 percent increase in “anonymous” website traffic in March over January, as workforces began to work remotely.
- Identify tasks that can be automated. You need more ways to cover for when people aren't working or not working at full capacity. Reallocate people to higher-value activities, such as messaging and tactic testing.
- Use testing tools like Optimizely and Persado to help quickly identify what resonates with your audiences.
- Invest in a social listening platform to stay current on what people are saying about your company and industry.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- Our team can complete a martech inventory assessment and then recommend optimizations, new tech additions, and automations that can serve your business.
- We can hook up testing tools to help you self-optimize.
- We'll work with you to tune your martech to support changes to your overall marketing strategy in response to the crisis.



MARKETING OPERATIONS

Zach Waud

Director, Marketing Operations



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

There's a tremendous effort to shift from in-person to digital events as clients rapidly adapt to new business, economic, and working conditions. Understandably, clients have a lot of quick-turn requests as they transform events and other systems and content to meet the needs of their customers.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Ask for help to get existing and ordered content revised to allow you to pivot as needed.
- After immediate-turn pivots have been made, begin working on back-up plans for the next two quarters. Once the economy starts up again, things won't return to the way they were.
- Begin to prepare for a more "virtual" normal by thinking about how to offer the value of traditional in-person activities through digital means.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- Our marketing operations teams are designed to meet quick-turn requests at scale. You can rely on us to work through these.
- We can partner with you to understand how to connect the tech, processes, and people so you can make the shift to not only running virtual-only events but running them at large scale.



ANALYTICS

Jake Anderson
Group Manager, Analytics



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Rapid shifts to accommodate at-home workforces, shuttered service industries, and virtual-only engagements means that KPIs are shifting too. Each of these changes needs corresponding adjustments in how the tools that measure those activities are set up. And, it's critical that tracking elements be in place first in order to show results. If measurement isn't planned in advance, you won't have the information you need to know how your shifted tactics performed.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Review strategies and KPIs. When priorities and spend shift, KPIs must too. Think about what you're hoping to achieve in this environment and how you could re-tool your business intelligence to fit those goals.
- Keep an eye on locational data. As certain geographical areas are impacted differently from others, it will be important to use that locational data wisely to inform your messaging and activity.
- Focus on measuring shifting customer sentiment and reacting to those changes quickly. You need swift feedback mechanisms to match the daily situational changes.
- Define operational and key risk indicators. Your key processes and procedures will need to adapt to potential interruptions, and you need to know when certain processes fail and when to call for additional resources.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- Our analytics team can help you assess the parameters affected by what we're seeing and work with you to see if what you're measuring is appropriate for the changing landscape.
- Although it's too late for existing measurement frameworks to be designed differently, we can help design new strategies with the flexibility to handle crises like these in the future.



SALES ENABLEMENT

Shelley Morrison
Vice President, Account Strategy



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

Big business purchases aren't at the top of to-do lists, and even those that were in process are suddenly under review. Plus, the power of face-to-face sales conversations (dinners and events) has been put on hold indefinitely. In short, it's a tough time to be a salesperson.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Review your sales content (sales and marketing together). Keep it focused on clear needs and solutions, and make sure it lands well over virtual-only sales engagements.
- Review the tools you use for video conferences. Experiment with video marketing tools that salespeople can use to shoot small videos and embed them in outreach.
- Focus on data transparency. Everyone needs to be operating from the same 360-degree view of the customer.
- Map out your normal sales cycle and brainstorm new methods, considering what every sale might look like from here on out.
- Help sales deliver better experiences for the people they are selling to. Sit in sales calls and consider natural-language software to analyze phrases and refine conversations.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- We can review, tighten up, and condense your sales materials so you have a tidy set that emphasizes consistency and focus.
- Our data analysts can review your data sources and dashboards to revise or create a new unified view of the customer to help you stay aligned as customer behavior changes.
- We can run a rapid strategy deployment workshop to get different groups aligned to an action plan for how to handle ongoing changes to customer needs throughout the crisis.



STRATEGY

Keilee Kramer
Director, Growth Strategy



WHAT WE'RE SEEING

At the moment, there's a tremendous effort to adapt in-flight marketing programs to drastic daily changes. It's left little room for CMOs to evaluate bigger or long-term commitments, although we're starting to see long-term plans under review.

WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

- Lean on your brand. There is less appetite for risk in crisis. CMOs and people doing campaign planning should focus on long-term brand stories with lasting customer benefits.
- Rethink and refocus, but don't make substantial cutbacks because marketing is like investing and your job is to market to the market, whatever its condition.
- Don't pause your marketing efforts, especially in B2B tech where the sales process is long. If you invest in getting more strategic now, you'll keep the momentum going for when people can turn their attention to buying again.
- Focusing on business as usual can be comforting. It's as much about building community for customers as it is for maintaining community for your own employees.

HOW YESLER CAN HELP

- We can help you focus on small investments or changes to big investments you've made. For example, ABM, which can be a big investment, is still a safe bet because it has such great ROI even when people are thinking about scaling back. But you're going to need to adapt your program for the crisis.



BUILDING THE FUTURE OF B2B MARKETING TOGETHER

We're in a time when everything changes—even before the crisis, we were. And that's because technology changes so rapidly. We shouldn't think we know what is going to work by drawing on our experiences from the previous recession. The old rules are old. We're all figuring this out together.

The way forward requires being open-minded—trying, testing, and optimizing to a new way of doing things—and using the infrastructures we've built in the last decade to keep us informed, nimble, and innovative.

What we are experiencing now is going to catapult us into that future of work. The COVID-19 crisis will pass, and in its wake our economies and the way we work won't be the same as they were before. This will bring new opportunities and diverse growth, and B2B marketers will be more experienced and more adaptable.

Let us know how we can help you get there.

—the Yesler team

yesler 

HELLO@YESLER.COM