

MARKETING

What types of marketing should brands resume as lockdowns ease?

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Louis Vuitton has reopened stores in select markets. Image credit: Louis Vuitton

By DIANNA DILWORTH

As stores around the globe begin to reopen, it is going to take some strategic marketing to reconnect with consumers and entice them into bricks and mortar.

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Savvy brands have kept in touch with loyal customers over digital channels during the global lockdowns and experimented with new ways of deploying tactics, from Instagram Live and videos of recipes to leadership soul searching, music lists and using mobile apps to schedule curbside pickups.

"The lockdown has given us a great opportunity to sit back and really examine our marketing strategy for what is working and what isn't," said Skip Fidura, fractional chief marketing officer of **The Overmore Group**, London.

"As we come out of lockdown, brands should keep an eye out for opportunities in new marketing channels but really focus 99 percent of their efforts on what has worked historically for them," he said.



Chanel's personal care campaign. Image credit: Chanel

Sensitive messaging

When the lockdowns commenced, brands began to tread lightly with messaging.

Take two examples.

Chanel offered a shower gel with a calm and relaxing message to offer anxious consumers barricading themselves at home a way to unwind ([see story](#)).

Dior Parfums took consumers to the picturesque flower fields of France to show off the source flowers for its fragrance, offering a vacation through digital, a soft glimpse at better times ([see story](#)).

Brands will have to continue to keep the tone light and adapt to the latest context.

"If the last three months and especially the last week has taught us anything, calibrating the right tone is more fluid and more challenging than it has been in recent memory," said Mario Natarelli, managing partner at [MBLM](#), New York.

Luxury brands should monitor current events and social media to see how everyone is feeling when creating campaigns.

"People are very fragile at the moment and everybody's mental health has been stretched to the very limit," Mr. Fidura said.

"Brands need to be very careful about using coercive tactics that play on people's guilt, anger or anxiety," he said.

"Things like false scarcity or artificial deadlines may make the sale in the short term, but will do your brand irreparable harm in the long term. There is a fine line between influence and coercion."



LVMH Joins Forces campaign shows how the luxury group is helping out during the coronavirus pandemic. Image credit: LVMH

Authenticity

Luxury brands have loyal fans and rely on rich cultural heritages to be authentic. This will suit them well in the current marketing landscape where consumers are expecting brands to be real.

"Before the pandemic, we used to talk about authenticity but now we actually mean it," Mr. Fidura said.

Many brands came out of the gate with pandemic messages when the lockdowns started, promoting how they were using their resources to help with the crisis.

French luxury conglomerates LVMH and Kering both had campaigns showing how their family of brands were pitching in and donating.

Many retailers sent messages about store closures and explaining how they were paying employees.

Not all of these types of messages were necessarily well-received.

"As a consumer, my baseline expectation was that you were taking care of your staff, that's table stakes," Mr. Fidura said.

"All I had to do was watch the news to know that your supply chain was disrupted, deliveries would be delayed and your stores would be shut," he said. "These messages were meant to be reassuring and maybe the first one or two were, but after that it was just piling on the misery.

"As we move on to the next phase of the pandemic and in light of the palpable angst surrounding the murder of

George Floyd, brands need to be authentic. Marketers need to be honest with themselves and think about what their brand really means to people."



Global luxury group Kering, like its peers, claims to be values-based to align with customers' concerns. Image credit: Kering

Promote values

Luxury brands typically have high standards, valuing quality goods, sustainable practices and creative originality.

These elements should be core to the messaging right now, as consumers will rely on the certainty of these values during uncertain times.

"The best brands are finding unique ways to communicate that align with their brand's values and are time/place or moment sensitive," Mr. Natarelli said.

"Consumers aren't looking for much," he said. "Brands that are broadcasting or reaching out to consumers need to remain true and relevant now more than ever."

Values will help brands stand out in the clutter of marketing messages that is sure to ensue.

Many brands lightened their marketing output during the pandemic. Once things reopen, every marketer will be out with its messaging to draw customers back.

Consider the customer experience and avoid overloading experiences.

"When the marketing spigot opens, it will be a gusher, so brands will have to be working doubly hard to get cut through and reach their audience," Mr. Fidura said.

"I suspect we will see some amazing work over the next 18 to 24 months, so brands will need to focus on strategy, creativity and results, and will not have the time or should not take the time to explore new channels," he said.