



KICK-STARTING YOUR MARKETING IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

CONTENTS

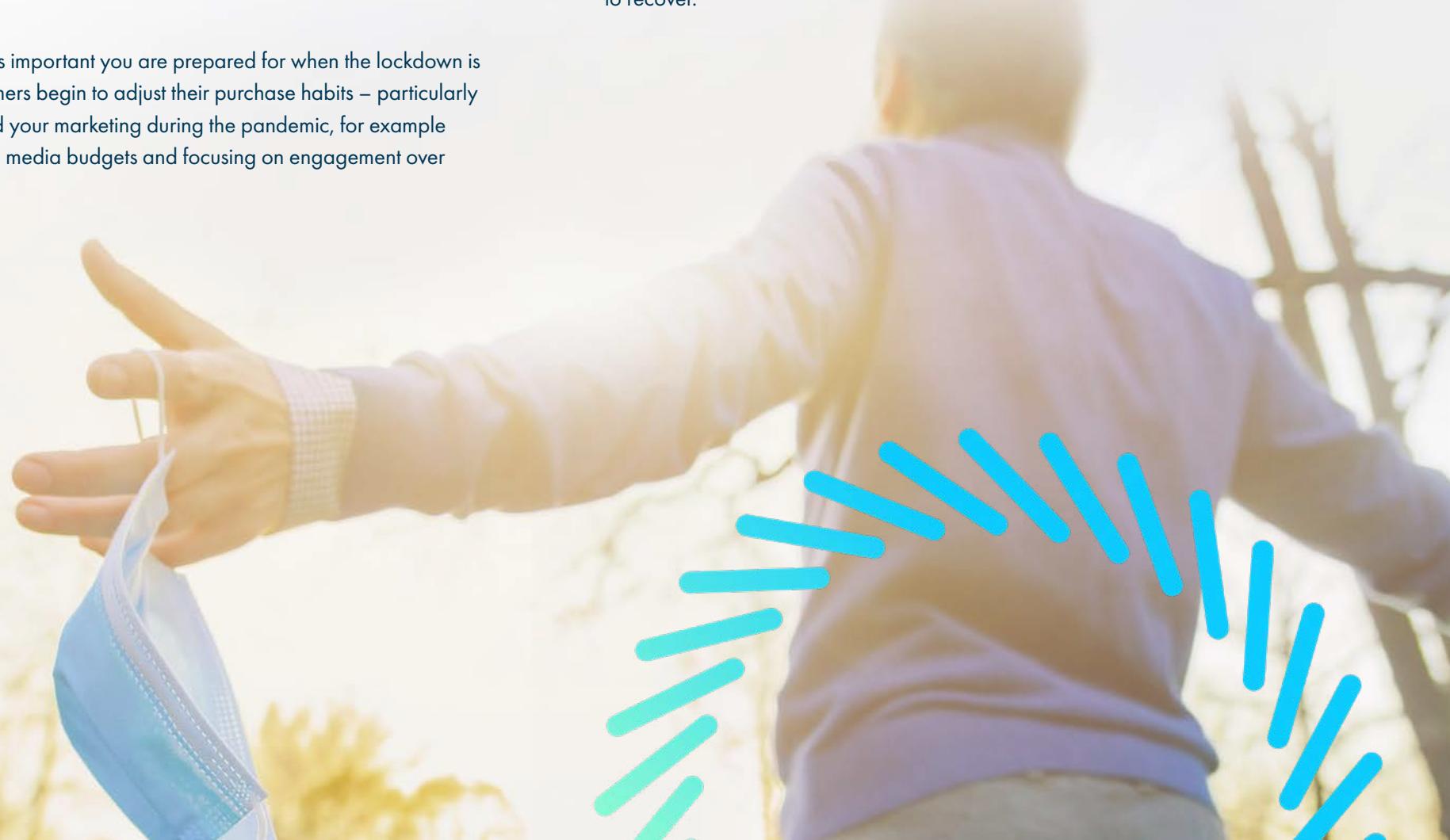
1. Foreword
2. First things first - When to get started?
4. Programmatic
7. Email marketing
8. PPC (Pay-Per-Click)
10. Social media
12. Content and PR
13. The final thing to consider: Analytics

FOREWORD

The coronavirus crisis has changed the way consumers behave, with many verticals experiencing a drop in sales, and others experiencing an increase in demand. While we can't say for certain what will happen next, [history shows that society largely returns to how it was before an outbreak](#) – albeit hopefully with a better appreciation of key workers and hand washing.

As a business, it is important you are prepared for when the lockdown is lifted and consumers begin to adjust their purchase habits – particularly so if you adapted your marketing during the pandemic, for example by reducing paid media budgets and focusing on engagement over conversions.

Unsure how you should adjust your marketing strategy when your market begins to return to normal? This whitepaper contains all the advice you need to get an action plan in place for your digital strategy so that when consumer confidence returns and sales begin to grow, you are in the strongest position possible to grab a share of the market and begin to recover.



FIRST THINGS FIRST – WHEN TO GET STARTED?

It is all good and well to have an action plan in place, but you need to know exactly when to press go if you are to make the most of your marketing comeback. Get started too late and you risk missing out to competitors on those all-important first sales. You also miss getting in front of top of the funnel users who are doing their research now with the intent to purchase at a later date.

On the other hand, starting activity too early can use up budget on clicks which will not convert, as well as risk brand damage by being seen as cashing in on the situation.

There will be no single universal date that will be right for brands to get started; just as different sectors have experienced the pandemic in different ways and on different timelines, it is likely that the postpandemic period will be different across sectors. Some industries may begin to recover quicker and sooner, while others may see uptake over a longer period of time. Knowing how to spot the signs that activity in your unique industry is on the rise is therefore crucial.

AN INCREASE IN SEARCH IMPRESSIONS INDICATES THAT INTEREST IS RISING

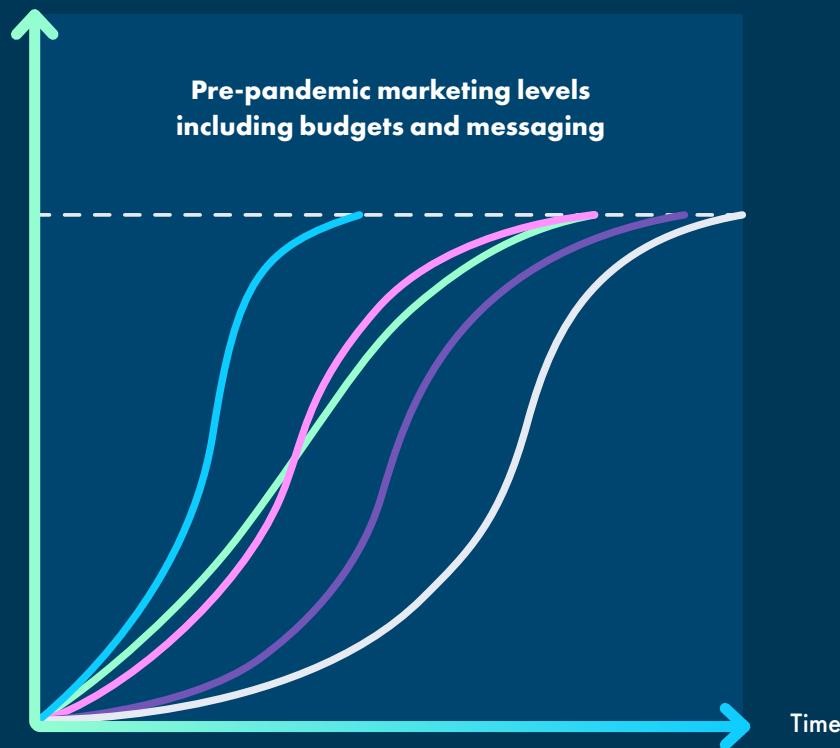
Monitoring search impressions via Google Search Console is the quickest way to gauge when your industry is beginning to pick up. While daily fluctuations make it difficult to spot change as it is happening, comparing the average number of daily impressions of the last three days compared to the last ten and twenty-one days will show if there is an upwards trend.

We have built a [free Data Studio dashboard](#) that helps you understand when the demand in your market starts to increase again. The dashboard takes the ‘average daily number of impressions’ of the last three days and comparing it to the last ten and twenty-one days, so you can identify when search volumes start to recover.

You will need to connect the Google Data Studio dashboard template to your own Search Console data source so you can understand when things are starting to improve in your industry.

WHEN TO RAMP UP ACTIVITY BY CHANNEL

Marketing activity
including budgets,
messaging



Key

- Programmatic
- Email marketing
- PPC
- Social media
- Content and PR



PROGRAMMATIC

In many verticals, the pandemic has resulted in a lengthened sales cycle, with consumers holding out on purchasing and spending more time in the research phase during this period of uncertainty. If you were tracking users who engaged with your website during the pandemic, ensure you have segmented them and know what messages you want them to see ready for when the market picks back up.

WHAT TO DO WHEN METRICS INDICATE YOUR MARKET IS RETURNING

SEGMENT YOUR PIXEL AUDIENCES AND CRM LISTS

Lookalikes and similar audiences are usually very effective at using machine learning to find relevant users in your programmatic campaigns. However, as they are based on recent data, it is likely these lists are skewed due to a change in customer habits during the pandemic. For example, users who normally prefer to shop in store may have moved to online shopping during the lockdown but will return back to offline shopping when the chance arrives; targeting these users with purchase heavy ads when lockdown restrictions are lifted would be an ineffective use of budget.

Segment your pixel audiences or CRM lists to create user groups before and during lockdown and test the difference to identify different audience groups; you can then tailor the messages shown to each group for better performance.

ADJUST YOUR CAMPAIGN GEO-TARGETING

It is likely that, even as lockdown restrictions are lifted, people are going to remain more local than they would previously – at least for a while. For businesses where customers need to visit to complete their purchase, consider narrowing down the ‘local’ areas you target to reduce wasted spend during the immediate post-pandemic period.

ASSESS AND ADAPT YOUR AD CREATIVES

While it may seem like everything is returning to normal, it is important to avoid simply switching your pre-pandemic ads back on without assessing them first. Review both the creative itself and the ad text and make sure that it reflects the world your users live in right now. For heavily impacted industries such as travel, customers will still need reassurance and information before they feel comfortable enough to convert, and ads should reflect this.



ACCOUNT FOR LEARNING PERIODS

If you paused or reduced campaigns during the lockdown, your auto-bidding or platform-managed optimization will have to go through a new learning period when you switch activity back on. Move budgets to where it needs to be as normal but be aware that it will take a while for the system to get enough data to make the best decisions.

Making drastic changes to budgets will also reset the learning period – where possible, keep any changes below 15%. This may mean launching slowly by gradually increasing spend (to avoid lots of new learning periods), or it could mean launching very quickly by making a drastic change once. When deciding which route to take, consider the budget you have and the results you need to achieve.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR CPM

Campaigns are often judged by CPA, ROAS and CPC, but CPM represents the ‘real’ cost of advertising – without distortion from metrics like ad or site performance. With brands pulling ads in lockdown, there has been a reduction in advertising in many areas, resulting in a considerable drop in competition and much cheaper ad placements. We have seen CPM drop by as much as 30% for some clients – meaning we are able to get the same reach as pre-pandemic but for much less budget.

If you are seeing a similar CPC cost to before the pandemic, tracking the CPM can help you understand whether your ad or your ad placement is behind this.

THINK LONG-TERM

Everyone wants to go back to ‘normal’, and consumers will be preparing for the eventuality when their situation matches that from before the pandemic. While people wait for normality to return, they may hold off on purchases (either voluntarily, or due to financial insecurity) despite being at the bottom of the sales funnel. During this period, it is important to track audiences which would usually be considered ‘top of the funnel’ as they may be ready to convert in a similar timeframe as those at the bottom of the sales funnel. Tracking interest in all audiences will ensure you are ready to go as soon as they show intent to purchase.

TRACK ALTERNATIVE MEASURES OF SUCCESS

It may take a while for conversions and sales to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels, even after you have restarted activity and increased budgets. Setting up and tracking ‘soft’ conversions will help you to track engagement and the user journey during this period can help you understand how to optimize campaigns, as well as identify users who may be preparing to buy or convert at a later date.

The engagements you track should be unique to your business – analyze your data to understand which engagements count as success during low periods of sales. For lead generation sites, consider adding softer leads where users can enquire about specific information without having to commit – for example, by only requiring a name and email in a form.



EMAIL MARKETING

With sales and traffic down during the pandemic, you may have chosen to pause or reduce your email marketing to avoid bombarding customers and risk them unsubscribing. Recovering search volumes indicate that consumer interest is beginning to return – making this the ideal time to switch your emails back on.

WHAT TO DO WHEN METRICS INDICATE YOUR MARKET IS RETURNING

CONFIRM THAT IT IS BUSINESS AS USUAL

Announcing any updates to your services, such as an increase in stock or a shorter delivery time, will help to reassure your customers that you are open for business. Getting into your customers' inbox when they are thinking of making purchases can fast track your business to the front of their research.

OFFER PROMOTIONS AND DISCOUNTS

Post-pandemic is the perfect time to build noise around any offers you have as it can push someone who has been using the lockdown to research a product, into buying it. While interest during this period is beginning to rise, it is likely that a large portion of your audience is still wary of committing to any purchases; discounts and promotions can turn the tide and increase their confidence in their decision to buy.

SEGMENT YOUR AUDIENCES

If you have the capability, segment your email lists to see who has been responsive during the pandemic, as well as customers who have been of high value prior to the crisis. These are likely to be high responders to any marketing messages they receive – your strategy should take this into consideration when looking at both the messaging and frequency of emails you send.



PPC (PAY-PER-CLICK)

While you may have found that search volume went down during the course of the pandemic, it is possible you saw an increase in volume but a drop in conversion rates, indicating that people were using lockdown to research products, rather than to buy. Whichever scenario, monitoring search volume alongside your regular ad platform metrics and auction insight reports will tell you how and when your audience's search intent is evolving and give you the best indication of when the market is growing post-pandemic.

Implementing your post-pandemic paid advertising at the earliest opportunity possible will allow you to capture conversions before your competitors do, at a lower CPC than normal, giving you an invaluable head start on the game.

- Metrics to monitor**
- Search volume
- Conversion rate
- Impressions
- Impression share
- Cost per click
- Time on page
- Bounce rate
- Goal completions

WHAT TO DO WHEN METRICS INDICATE YOUR MARKET IS RETURNING

BE FLEXIBLE WITH YOUR BUDGETS

The rate at which the market returns will differ for each industry and it is important to be flexible with your budgets so you can ramp up spend when demand increases. Monitor spend and performance to ensure you have enough budget set for your campaigns to avoid capping out early in the day and losing impressions.

ADJUST YOUR BID STRATEGIES

During lockdown, device usage habits changed with more consumers switching to desktop and tablets. As restrictions are lifted and people begin to resume their normal life, mobile usage will increase again. Ensuring that bid calculations are adjusted accordingly or that you are using a bid strategy that can handle these changes will mean campaigns are better optimized for post-pandemic purchase behavior.

UPDATE YOUR ADS TO COMMUNICATE THAT SERVICE HAS RESUMED

It is important to clearly communicate to customers how your business is operating, particularly if your services were affected during lockdown. Updating your ad copy and landing pages lets people know that normal service has resumed, and that you are fully able to fulfill their orders. This reassurance may be the difference between someone clicking on yours or a competitor's ad.

REGULARLY REVIEW SEARCH TRAFFIC

As more businesses begin to open their doors, you may find an increase in people searching for informational terms you do not want to pay for – such as ‘is company name open’. Regularly review search queries and negative match any terms you do not want to show ads for to prevent your budget from being wasted.

TARGET YOUR ADS TOWARDS HIGH-VALUE AUDIENCES

Use audience targeting to get your ads in front of people who have historically shown themselves to be your top customers. If you find that your remarketing lists are smaller than normal due to recent downswings in traffic, consider expanding the length of remarketing audiences so you can reach high value users from before the crisis, or use Google Customer Match to reach people from your CRM.

AVOID EXPERIMENTING WITH NEW STRATEGIES OR AUDIENCES

While we always encourage innovation, post-crisis is not the time to try a new strategy. Adopting a new strategy at a time when customer behavior is abnormal makes it difficult to attribute whether changes in performance are due to the strategy, or due to the pandemic. Wait until things have fully settled before you experiment with your strategy so you can accurately assess whether it is suitable.



SOCIAL MEDIA

While increasing search volumes gives a good indication that the market is beginning to return, it is important to monitor your social media channels to understand when your followers want to move away from coronavirus related content. Are you seeing less COVID-19 queries than before? Which posts are getting more engagement? If 'normal' posts seem to be driving through more engagement, it is a good time to start slowly adjusting the mix of content you put out.

WHAT TO DO WHEN METRICS INDICATE YOUR MARKET IS RETURNING

KEEP CORONAVIRUS RELATED INFORMATION EASILY ACCESSIBLE

Although there will be less people needing information on your COVID-19 policies post-pandemic, it's important to ensure they are still easily found so that those who do need it can access it without having to get in touch. Pin the information to the top of your page or continue to share relevant links and policies on a regular basis until you are sure they are no longer required.

MONITOR ENGAGEMENTS AND REACTIONS

As you begin to share more content, monitor how it is received by your followers to ensure it is having the right impact. If engagement for COVID-19 posts is significantly higher, or you experience negative replies to other types of post, it may be that your audience is not ready for you to alter the mix.

STAY AUTHENTIC TO YOUR BRAND

When you are in a place to share different types of content, it is important to stay true to your brand to avoid confusing or upsetting your audience. Now is not the time to reinvent your messaging or tone of voice; not only would doing so be confusing to your followers, trying a new strategy during a time when consumer behavior is different to normal will make it harder to attribute changes in performance to the strategy.

CONTINUE TO BE MINDFUL OF HOW PEOPLE'S LIVES HAVE CHANGED

Even as everything starts to clear and people appear to return to their normal lives, it is worth remembering that things are not the same as they were before. Some of your audience may have lost family or friends, or their source of income – be mindful of this and keep your messaging sensitive even when you return to normal posting. It is possible your posts will appear next to negative or sensitive posts related to the pandemic in your followers' feeds, too – this is something to consider when reverting to your usual messaging.



CONTENT AND PR

During the pandemic, news outlets and national publications have been busy covering daily coronavirus stories, meaning less opportunity for PR coverage. As the lockdown restrictions lift and the pandemic loses its grip on our everyday lives, media outlets will be looking for more stories to fill the space which is left. The timeline which this occurs will vary per sector, so it is important to monitor demand for your specific niche if you want to make the most of opportunities as they arise.

WHAT TO DO WHEN METRICS INDICATE YOUR MARKET IS RETURNING

MONITOR THE INDUSTRY DAILY

Keeping up to date with your industry news is always important in PR, but especially so during times like this. Monitoring publications daily will allow you to spot when the news agenda begins to change and there is a greater opportunity to get PR coverage.

Checking in with your key contacts can help you to understand what type of stories they are looking for post-pandemic but bear in mind they may be experiencing a heavier workload than normal due to many being furloughed or companies downsizing through the pandemic. Reading journo requests daily is a good way of finding what types of stories are in demand without adding to overflowing inboxes.

ASSESS YOUR UPCOMING CAMPAIGNS

It is important to assess any PR campaigns that were put on hold during the pandemic to make sure they are still suitable. Look at what it is your audience wants right now – will your campaign deliver this? You may need to adapt the content itself, the angle you promote with, or even delay promotion until later in the year. Being flexible will give your campaigns the biggest chance of success.

STEP AWAY FROM OBVIOUS HOOKS

It is likely that many bands will be pitching the same angles when restrictions are lifted – for example, how to get back into office life or ways to celebrate being able to socialize. While publications will cover some of these stories, a saturated market means only the highest quality campaigns produced by relevant brands will be picked. Assess how you should be contributing to this conversation - is it relevant to your brand? Can you offer something truly valuable and new? Be creative in how you approach PR during this period, and resist adding to the noise just for the sake of it.

THE FINAL THING TO CONSIDER: ANALYTICS

Even as sales begin to climb back, it may be a while before the customer journey and sales cycle gets back to normal. With consumers taking longer to purchase than before, it is worth tracking and measuring engagement alongside conversions and sales so you can measure all forms of success and use this data to inform your budgeting decisions.

Analyze your analytics data and identify what site interactions and behaviors high-value users and customers took before purchasing before the coronavirus outbreak. Whatever the unique behaviors are to your site, finding and measuring these highly engaged users with a higher rate of conversion is a relevant way of measuring successful sessions if sales are lower than they usually would be.

We have created a Data Studio dashboard to help focus your attention on engagement during this period which can be accessed [here](#); just connect your own GA data source for your unique report.



SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH IN DATA

Strategic growth

Customer insights

Activate audiences

Global reach

www.searchlaboratory.com/us

@searchlabs

347 763 6933

Austin | New York | Leeds | London



amazon ads