



## NO. 8 BRAND COMMUNICATION “BACK TO NORMAL”? NEVER!

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### KEEN QUESTIONS – GREEN ANSWERS

Four answers to four important questions when it comes to post-corona brand communication. Along with four recommendations.

During the first phase of the corona crisis, many questions popped up about how a company, or how a brand, should act. Many brands carefully pressed the pause button, others the stop key, and yet others went full force into communication.

Those who expertly juggled the two most important factors — **authenticity** and **real time** — were able to achieve positive results.

**Authenticity**, or when big-name brands showcase in a friendly and engaging way that they are with the people. The brand is understanding, thankful, praising, supportive, and motivating.

And in **real time**, because there’s nothing more out of date than praise for the applause from balconies — four weeks after the last clap.

And during the current phase of the corona pandemic (in June 2020), when we carefully and optimistically presume that the worst is behind us for now, at least in the European countries, the next questions arise concerning the future.

One question above all dominates:

Should everything go **BACK TO NORMAL**?  
The answer: **NEVER!**

First, **normal** was never a good thing in brand communication. **Normal** is the enemy of **special**, and only with something special can you stand out from the rest. And therefore have truly effective communication.

Second, corona has not only changed the world, changed the economy — it has also changed the people more than anything else. Not only the new way that they use media, or their consumer habits — but also their beings as people in general.

## **WHAT DOES THIS NOW MEAN FOR BRAND COMMUNICATION?**

### **1st question: Can a company even communicate during times of corona?**

Or an even more radical question: Will brand messages — or advertising — even be adequate for the time after corona?

#### **Answer: Yes.**

According to a survey, only 2 percent of those questioned revealed that advertising should be halted. Nearly one-fourth of the German population, however, expects that “brands should be hopeful and need to be tone sensitive.”

### **2nd question: Should a company communicate also in times of corona?**

#### **Answer: Yes.**

An issue being discussed in the US market is if brands that had continually invested in the building-up of their brand's values in the past will survive the crisis — and the others will not. Talk is of the “time of the brands.”

Why? It's a well-known fact that in uncertain times, people's desire for routine and trust grows.

The next step up from **trusted** is **trust**.

When it comes to gathering information, we trust institutions. For companies that play a role in our daily lives, the big or highly valued brands are institutions. They radiate trust.

Thirty-six percent of Germans say, “I use brands I trust, so that I can feel close to them and safe.” Another 36 percent say, “I trust strong and traditional brands, especially in times of crisis.”

Take Nogger ice cream by the Langnese brand; literally grabbing onto trust?

But: It's about more than that. Brands are expected to be there for us during these times. To quote John Mescall (Global Executive Creative Director at McCann):

**“People will want to trust brands more than ever, and need to. They are going to gravitate back towards brands a lot more; trust becomes such a huge thing. I think the more uncertainty you pump into the world, the more you seek little islands.”**

When big-name brands, or simply brands that we have a connection to, are silent in times of crisis, then it is as if something big took place in the family and everyone gets in touch with one another to show their compassion or to offer their support — everyone except that one uncle. The silence is noticed. We're angry about it. We see his silence as negative and assume that he's not interested in us.

A brand is well-advised to sing in the choir with the competition and to not surrender the pitch to competitors.

In this case, the old principle of “You cannot not communicate” reigns true in a slightly new form: You should not not communicate.

### **3rd question: Which brand communication is right?**

**Answer: There are two megatrends.** Put plainly: **escape** and **engage**.

#### **1. Escape**

The first trend is the desire to **escape**. Following big crises and in bad times, people act in one of two ways, which are then also played out. The one is the desire to get away from it all.

At first glance, this is a form of “getting back to normal.” After the Second World War, all the people in Germany affected by war and misfortune went to the movie theaters and watched films like *Schwarzwaldmädel* (Blackforest Girl) with Sonja Ziemann (the ideal world), or they distracted themselves with Fred Astaire’s musical films (dance and music).

The most effective means among the escapees, however, was humor. We will experience a renaissance of humor and entertainment in all media. Laughter is the best medicine. Campaign UK performed a test with 100 humorous TV commercials that were shown to a test audience both before as well as during the corona pandemic. The surprising result: The humor was more successful among the second test group (during the acute corona crisis).

The universal formula of all successful content formats is: Entertain! This is proven by a number of surveys — however, personal experiences and common sense also play a role. The more entertainment, the higher the success.

#### **2. Engage**

The second trend is the desire to **engage**, in the sense of being genuine, likeable and serious. With standards on personal relevance to consumers in terms of content, messages, and user experience (UX). The demand for credibility. For trust. With the need for the stability provided by a relationship, with the search for meaningfulness, with the return to humane values.

Very important in the process is how the brand matches — how it fits. This means the statements must come from the brand and match the brand’s values.

Corona has led to people developing an even more finely-tuned feeling for insincere purposes. For its meaningfulness. And last but not least, for a standard that is perhaps too high for what the product can deliver (a diaper that wants to make the world better?).

### **4th question: How does brand communication have to change in terms of content, communication, and tone of voice?**

**Answer: Emotional versus rational will become even more significant.**

It is a well-known fact that the decisions, including purchasing decisions, people make are emotion and not rational. The full impact of emotional conditioning unfolds when it is engaged with perfectly controlled machine marketing for a successful customer journey.

This seems to have intensified once again during corona times. Home office, social distancing, global and private uncertainties, etc. have done something to people: They have become more compassionate, more likeable — in short, more emotional — than before the pandemic.

From the field of brain research, we know about the conditioning of the left and the right sides of the brain. Put in a starkly simplified way: Left is more rational — right more emotional. Advertising that speaks to the left side of the brain can be found everywhere. But the corona crises demands from us that we doing things differently. That we focus more on the right side, viewing the bigger picture and understanding the relationships between people and things. This results in more likeability, altruism, and spontaneity. A chance to change brand communication and to rediscover our human instincts from the right side of our brain.

## **FOUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL BRAND COMMUNICATION IN THE FUTURE**

In short, we can say:

Brands have to communicate. From a consumer's point of view: It's expected. From an entrepreneur's point of view: In times when markets are being redefined, the brand must play a role.

Image and product messages are welcome — but in a context relevant to being humane or that follow the megatrends: entertain or engage.

Purposeful messages have to be relevant and, above all, credible — while messages and their sender have to match up with one another. If Nike, as apart of US culture, were to give a socially critical statement, this would be considered appropriate to the company (whereby, for instance, for a dog food company, this would be less the case). Ideally, the company is also doing something and not just talking about it.

In spite of this, we have to closely pay attention to keeping the balance between social, brand, and product messages. More than ever before, real time and authenticity play a role — being at the pulse and in the heart of people. More than ever before, hypocrisy, ungratefulness, and false genuineness are being exposed. More than ever before, the emotional is making decisions more than the rational. If it is a genuine laugh or a massive understanding.

All of these are developments that place new and higher standards on creativity — which is good for good ideas.

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