

Looking at marketing trends in the new normal

 By [Nontokoza Madonsela](#)

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If 2020 has taught us one lesson, it's that uncertainty is the cornerstone of our reality. People are dealing with pressures we've never had to face before, both personally and professionally: from learning to adapt to working, collaborating and managing teams remotely, to the blurring of lines between home and work life, and the associated stresses and challenges this has brought.



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These changes to the fabric of our day-to-day lives have had a significant impact economically, socially, psychologically,

and emotionally. Stress, anxiety, depression and burnout are at higher levels than ever before because of the unique circumstances we are still learning to navigate individually and as businesses.

Research from The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) shows that 40% of employees have reported feeling hopeless, burned out or exhausted, with two in three experiencing depressive symptoms at least sometimes, and nearly one in four feeling bad about themselves or like a failure who has let themselves or their family down.

What this means is that even though people want to show up for work, and perform at their best, these are some of the barriers preventing those best intentions. All indications are that this isn't likely to change in the near future.

The world will remain uncertain for at least the next three years – which presents interesting challenges and opportunities for marketing and business leaders looking to leverage emerging trends to provide the mental, emotional and practical support their employees need to drive growth and recovery.

Forecasting trends in a world that is shifting as rapidly as it is currently, isn't easy. But it is critical to be able to address the key issues impacting businesses and their leaders and people. These are my top three trends for marketing and business leaders:

1. Be human. Be kind: Right now, the world needs leaders who are able to give people a sense of hope and show empathy to prove to people that they are not alone. These leaders – marketing, business or otherwise – have a responsibility to provide optimism in the grey areas and support and motivate their people to find opportunities even in a shrunken economy. People will be empowered to identify and make the most of these opportunities with the help of strong and supportive leadership. The rise of virtual volunteering, for instance, has helped give an outlet to people who want to help others in need – which in turn has opened up other opportunities. We are fortunate enough to have employees within our business who take time to do good in their communities and to reach out to those in need. We do however need to get to a point of realisation that being kind and doing good isn't something that is solely reserved for the CSI team and our work-supported volunteers. We as leaders need to get involved and do our bit not only for our employees but in our communities too.

2. 'Make reality your friend': accept that there are certain realities and work around them. This year showed us that it has been near impossible to look three weeks ahead, let alone three months. There is no crystal ball to show us what the next few years will hold: all we know is that it will remain volatile and characterised by change. Within this, there are certain realities we will have to face – such as that marketing budgets will most likely continue to shrink in the face of ongoing economic constraints, and that ongoing regulations and restrictions will continue to present challenges to how we work and plan campaigns. We need to accept these realities and adapt to them to find and create new opportunities.

3. Adapt or die: pivot and adapt at speed. This is true across all industries, and as the pace of change continues to ramp up, it remains non-negotiable for leaders to adapt and reimagine ways of doing business to stay relevant. Marketing functions, for example, are supposed to reflect a deep and authentic connection to society – so, now more than ever, we need to prioritise greater diversity and inclusivity as part of corporate values to impact people positively. In an era of

growing consumer activism, with consumers who have been digitally connected for years and intolerant of brands getting it wrong, it is essential for companies to be intentional about standing for good and making a difference by starting with themselves and becoming more diverse and inclusive.

Ultimately, companies and marketing functions are going to have to continue being agile in adapting and responding to change – those who prove that they are able to pivot in the midst of ongoing uncertainty, stand the best chance of surviving and thriving.

ABOUT NONTOKOZO MADONSELA

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