

Meaningful brand management in the time of Covid-19

 By [Carla Enslin](#)

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"Unprecedented" - this is one of many terms that have been ubiquitously used to describe the times we find ourselves in now, as the impact of Covid-19 is felt across the world. And while brands and businesses couldn't realistically be expected to have contingency plans and strategies in place to weather a global pandemic no one would see coming, there's merit in going back to the basics, taking stock of the lessons learned so far and evolving to handle crises in the future.



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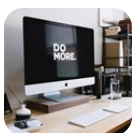
There are three key principles that brands trying to weather the current storm would do well to remember. I recently gave a webinar talk in partnership with Adlab McCann on how to go about tackling brand management in a meaningful way under crisis. Here are some highlights:

1. Hold your strategic north

It's crucial for brands to return to their purpose strategies (which have come to define the brand management process), now more than ever, to ensure that they are still 'walking their talk' and delivering the unique value and meaning that they have intended from the start.

In a context of crisis, it's becoming so important to constantly and in concrete ways demonstrate why we matter. Are we genuinely adding value to people's lives beyond communicating, beyond our advertising campaigns?

Two examples stand out: holding firmly to its belief that 'people belong, anywhere', Airbnb's decision to offer priority stays to frontline workers is a great example of how brands can shift their activities and still remain aligned with their purpose strategies. In the same way, Crocs – which has come out as a brand that offers the "most comfortable shoes and clogs for nurses" – committed to a daily donation of 10,000 pairs of shoes to frontline health workers.



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2. Review your contact strategy

Contact or touchpoint strategies in terms of stakeholder experience are not always given enough consideration in companies but reviewing the most influential points of contact is crucial, particularly in times of crisis.

Every touchpoint influences what people think, feel and believe about a brand, and will obviously differ from business to business, but as brands are encouraged to live and embody what makes them different and why it matters, these touchpoints are living proof of how brands are actually serving and demonstrating their purpose.

The points-people assigned by Outsurance to help direct traffic at busy intersections across the country - is a great example of an influential touchpoint that, as a result of Covid-19 would need to be revisited. Staying true to its commitment to offer a valuable service to SA's motorists, Outsurance identified an entirely new way to continue offering value – by sanitising taxis and taxi ranks, to stop the spread of Covid-19 on public transport.



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3. The “co” challenge

Co-sense, co-lead, co-create – these are just some of the areas that brands need to pay attention to and perhaps even revisit especially in times of crisis, in order to ensure that all parts are working together to deliver on brand purpose. Clients, internal and external stakeholders, communities and even competitors form part of these considerations, as brands delve deeper into understanding how a collaborative approach might serve to reinforce purpose.

It is certainly a challenge and of course a risk, as leaders may want to avoid sharing sensitive information or asking for input from staff, customers and clients, and competing brands. However, now is the time to adapt or sink – there's value and opportunity in approaching the people who make your business what it is, and there may even be a great deal of benefit in joining forces with another brand in your industry to deliver a strong, cohesive and unified message together.

At the heart of it is trust. Leadership is a very courageous act of supporting the brand and what it stands for, the touchpoints that have the most influence on people's experience of the brand, and the relationships (employees, stakeholders) that are key to business.

And I think vulnerability is important too. We are trying to hold the course, to deliver on purpose and be meaningful in how we go about managing our businesses and building our brands. Sometimes we may misstep. We may even fail. But if we're honest and transparent throughout the process, while demonstrating a genuine commitment to delivering meaning, isn't that a measure of effective leadership under crisis?

ABOUT CARLA ENSLIN

Dr Carla Enslin is head of postgraduate studies & research at The Independent Institute of Education's Vega School. Carla's interest and experience in brand building includes the design and implementation of brand identity systems and brand alignment strategies. She lectures widely in Africa and abroad, conducts corporate training, consulting and coaching, and heads the Master of Arts and the Doctorate in brand leadership at IIE Vega.

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