

Protect for Today; Build for Tomorrow

Adapting your onsite
experience during times
of uncertainty

dentsu
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COVID-19 is impacting our way of life, economies and business across the world. It is on our minds, screens and feeds – and for good reason.

The global pandemic is the greatest test for businesses since the Global Financial Crisis in 2008. Strategies, plans, roadmaps and budgets have been thrown into turmoil, as businesses are having to react to the new challenges they face.

One of key challenges facing brands is the need to change to a digital first approach and accelerate transformation projects. Whilst some businesses are already ahead of the curve, most have been forced into crisis planning -shifting from bricks and mortar to online, reducing dependencies on calls centres to servicing customers online, and delivering operational efficiencies in warehousing and logistics.

Adaptation is key

In a recent report, Dentsu Aegis Network explored the [impact of going dark in advertising](#). In short, during economic downturns businesses often react by turning off their marketing activity, however those who do, are negatively impacted in the long run. Based on analysis of data from the Financial Crisis in 2008, stopping communication for 1 year typically takes 5 years to recover and results in a net loss overall.¹

This same approach can be applied to your digital infrastructure during a time of crisis. Being agile and adapting to market conditions, whilst also modifying in accordance to changes in user behaviour, is critical to success now and in the future.

Changing onsite offerings and experience won't have been on many brand's 2020 plans, but during a global pandemic, plans must be flexible. If brands don't adapt and react, they may find themselves left behind whilst their competitors surge ahead.

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Our User Experience (UX) & Optimisation experts have analysed numerous data sets and carried out stakeholder interviews with clients across several verticals. They have identified a common theme which applies to businesses who have seen uplifts and those who find themselves in particularly challenging markets - the need to address the here and now whilst having the foresight to plan for operations post -COVID-19.

¹ Source: Data2Decisions

In the first of a series of reports, we will share our 5-step process to building the foundations to Protect for Today; Build for Tomorrow:

1. Understand your position in your market and industry
2. Acknowledge your consumers emotional response to the crisis
3. Undertake quantitative research into your onsite performance and user behaviour
4. Do qualitative research to discover your visitors wants and needs
5. Combine research, action and implement in a solution relevant to your onsite experience

Protect for today

There is no one size fits all for driving performance during this time. It comes down to who your audience is, what they want from your brand and how you alter your onsite experience to meet their needs.

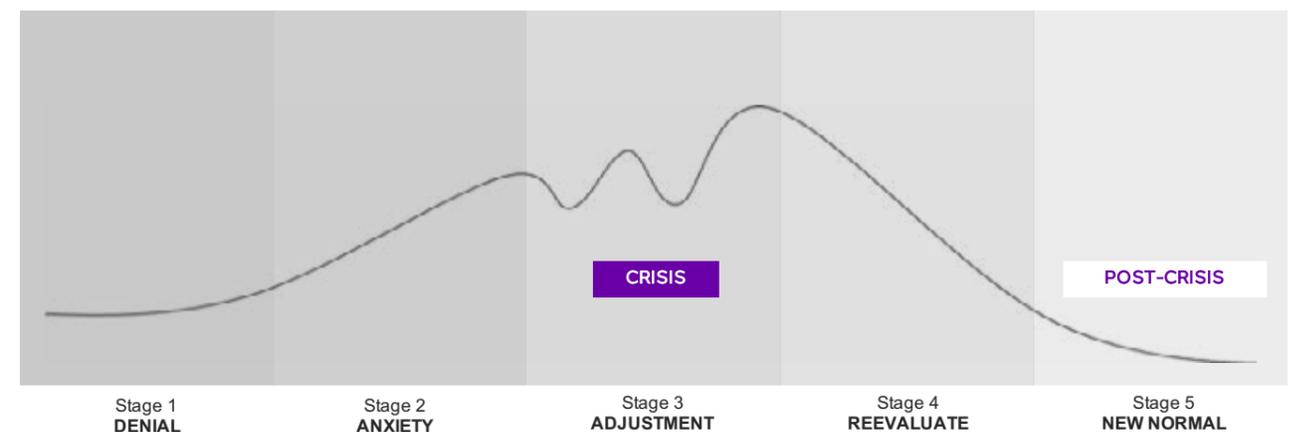
There are various techniques and strategies that can be adopted to maintain and increase conversions and market share. This framework can be applied across the board, regardless of industry.

To drive performance, it is paramount to ensure any uncertainties and user needs are addressed through the correct messaging and the best adapted UX you can deliver.

This starts with understanding your consumers.

Consumers emotional response

Prior to reacting in times of crisis, it is essential to understand your consumers' emotional response to what is happening. This will help you shape the basis of your communications and overall experience. Large global events provide a catalyst for new sets of needs, attitudes and behaviours. It has been recorded that during periods of crisis, people follow the same emotional 'pattern of acceptance' - which is like that of grief:²



The onsite experience you deliver to your audience needs to be different during the stage of adjustment, to that of the stage of anxiety.

² Source: Canvas8 Understanding COVID-19 (2020)

During collective anxiety, people will turn to brands they trust. These brands must communicate effectively to provide a sense of security and ease any anxiety visitors have when shopping online. During this time many consumers will be thinking practically as to how they can prepare for the uncertainty ahead, seeking to understand more about what certain restrictions mean for them and how they can think ahead to prepare for it.

In the stage of adjustment, many people will grow accustomed to life indoors and maintaining relationships virtually. The behavioural shifts taking place and the subsequent needs under lockdown are many - and will vary by audience. For most, we can begin to understand needs based on how an individual is impacted in different areas of their life. People are looking at ways in which they can take advantage of this new way of life - businesses need to be able to fulfil these user needs, whilst still easing the underlying anxiety consumers have when browsing and converting online.

How do you Protect for Today?

The approach of protecting your site and business can be applied differently depending on current performance.

In prosperous markets:

- Where demand is currently at a peak, businesses are in a unique position where they can capitalise on the opportunity and further enhance their performance.
- The onsite experience should adapt to the conditions and increased demand, ensuring that user needs are met and the end to end journey is smooth and seamless.
- Further optimisation can drive increased conversions and revenue, secure and/or improve the market position and quickly react to any changes during the period.

In challenging markets

- A drop in demand or business constraints mean that traffic volumes have dropped in most cases, and people who are reaching the website have different needs to what they did pre COVID-19.
- The ability to sure up a position and drive improvements where possible will be key to long-term prosperity.
- More so than in prosperous markets, consumer needs will have changed and effective communication in the onsite experience is key. Without adapting and delivering exactly what the audience needs, the business will struggle further.

Every brand and online experience is different, which means consumer needs will be different. However, there are general trends in consumer preferences in times of uncertainty. Research shows people expect brands to respond with empathy and provide them with information which helps them.

Brands should:



Advertising should:



³ Source: Kantar

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It is the way brands respond and their specific onsite communications which will change. For example, a retail fashion website and a UK holiday website will need completely different onsite messaging to help their audience.

From our experience, the fashion website will need to put more emphasis on how they are dealing with COVID-19 and surface increased service messaging, such as delivery.

Whereas the UK holiday website will need to take an operational customer experience approach, for those who already have a holiday in place and want to know their rights. Whilst still putting an emphasis on planning for the future and looking towards happier times when things go back to 'normal'.

Getting to know your consumers

The only way you can truly adapt your site to deal with COVID-19 is through research. By looking at both quantitative and qualitative methods, you can gain insight into the mindset of your audience and discover what is needed to help you Protect for Today.

Quantitative research

Most businesses will be using data to understand how COVID-19 has impacted them, whether it is through traditional web analytics platforms like Google Analytics or Adobe Analytics. Or through a digital experience analytics platform like Contentsquare.

If you don't have an overall view on how performance has changed during this time, then this is your starting point. Look at how acquisition has changed, how onsite behaviour has been altered and how conversion has been impacted.

Once you have a clear picture on how things have changed, you can look at the natural performance of the online experience, what is working well on site and what your consumers want.

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Natural performance

- Now you understand the overall performance, you need to know how the current onsite experience is working for those arriving to your site naturally.
- With a high proportion of businesses reducing spend in paid traffic and other acquisition sources, the overall performance won't be representative of what is actually happening on site.
- By looking at natural traffic sources such as direct and organic, you can clearly paint a picture on which parts of your site are working well and which need more attention.
- Build segments and look how key landing pages perform for those arriving to site naturally, this will make date range comparisons more comparable.
- We have seen this highlight issues on the Homepage, where businesses have communicated their COVID-19 messaging, or lack of messaging. Those arriving to the site naturally see the messaging and then bounce – indicating a need to adapt the page to assist users and drive them into the site.



Content

- Reviewing your site and looking what is helping your audience to convert during this time is essential. As this will indicate what content or messaging is assisting them whilst making their conversion decision.
- If you find certain content is performing well and conversion rates of those people who view and engage with it has increased, then you know that people need this information.
- Surfacing this across the site will stop people actively having to look for it, in turn alleviating anxiety for an increased percentage of your audience.
- To review content, build segments based on people viewing pages or engaging with features on site. Then look at the impact it has on conversion and compare against a pre COVID-19 date range.
- We have seen this work effectively when looking at parts of the site such as the Help section, as this houses key information which might not be communicated elsewhere on site.

Site Search Analysis

Looking at your onsite search results can deliver gold dust in terms of what your audience want from your site.

- If there are clear trends in what people are searching for and you don't communicate it onsite, then you know you need to do a better job at talking about it.
- If there are clear trends in what people are searching for and you do communicate in onsite, then the user experience needs to be improved so they can find this content.
- If there are clear trends in what people are searching for and your brand doesn't offer it, then you might have just stumbled upon a new opportunity and approach for your business.

Qualitative research

Whilst quantitative data will tell you what is and isn't working, qualitative data will tell you why. The most successful companies will triangulate quantitative data with qualitative data to get a holistic view of their user's needs, wants and motivations.

As well as providing insight into data trends, qualitative insight allows you to keep your finger on the pulse of your customers. This can help you to facilitate innovation by identifying unmet customer needs, anticipate trends and ensure you react in the right way in the face of challenging circumstances.

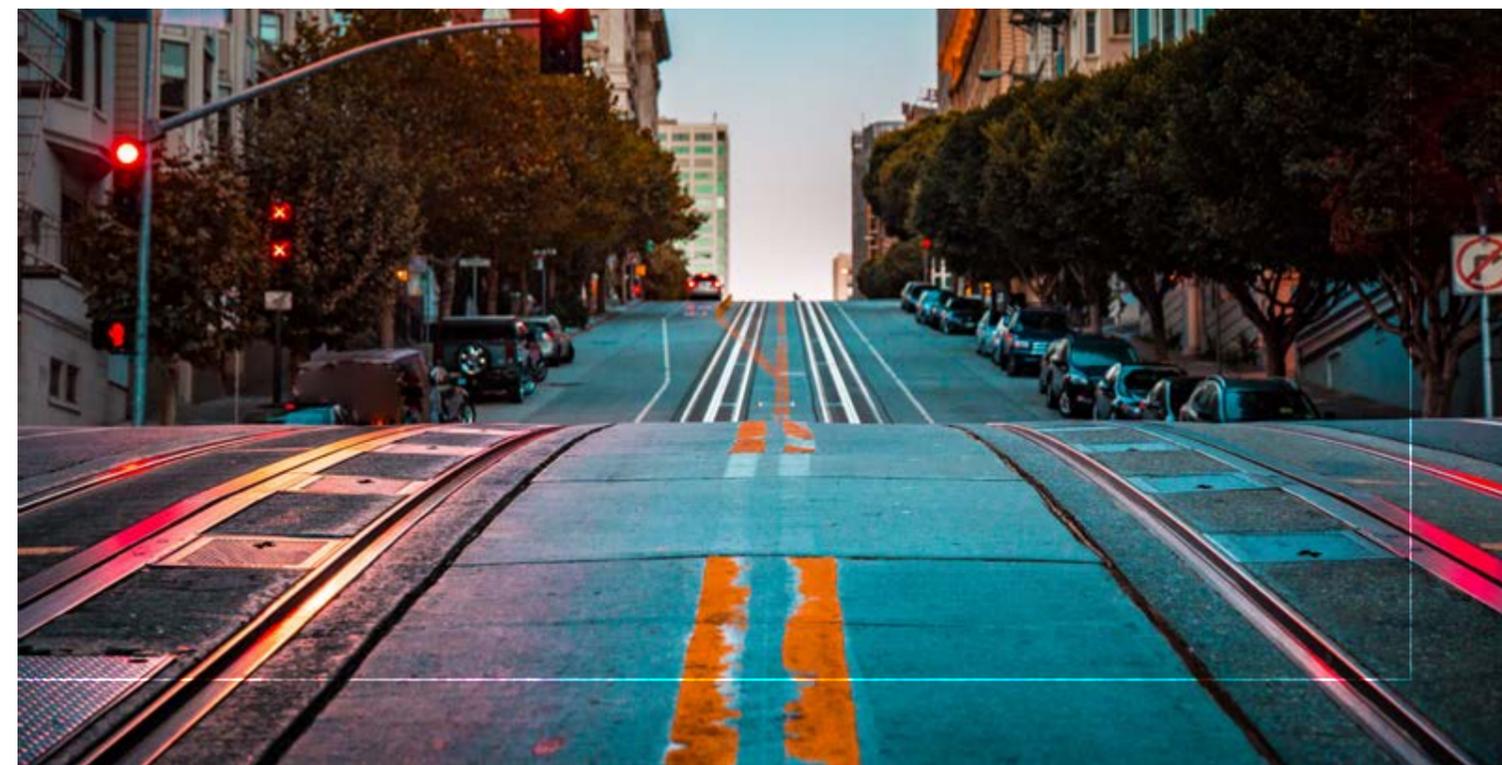
On Site Polls

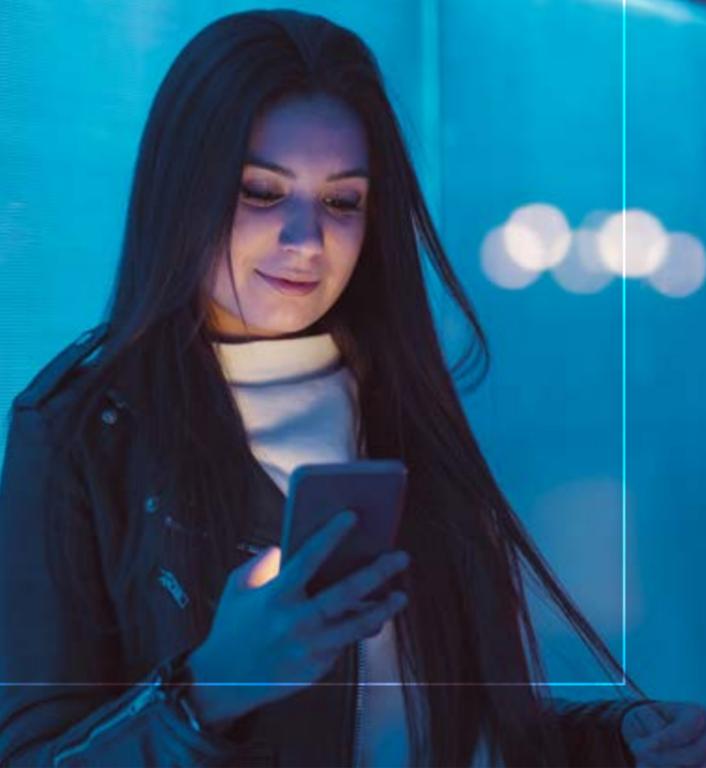
Voice of customer research is the single most important way to get inside your customer's heads. This is important when times are good, but is especially pivotal in a crisis, where market conditions get more volatile.

Common voice of customer techniques include on-site polls and customer surveys. You can use a tool such as Hotjar to deploy polls quickly and easily. Depending on your levels of traffic, you could have insights in as little as two days.

Common poll examples include:

- Asking users who have spent a long time on a page if there is any information they are looking for and can't find.
- Polling users who have just purchased to ask whether there was anything that almost stopped them from checking out.
- Multiple choice polls are great for getting quantitative answers to concrete questions, but make sure you aren't biasing the poll by presuming what the user's answer will be. It's usually best to include an 'other' option on these types of questions.
- Open text polls are great for getting rich and nuanced data about customer perceptions and conversion barriers.
- Try to avoid putting polls anywhere where you don't want users to be distracted – such as your checkout funnel.





NPS Tracking

NPS is a single question, asked at various points along the user journey (this can be both online and offline). It is widely considered a 'North Star Metric' when it comes to customer experience.

Brands with a strong customer experience have been found to grow five times faster than their competitors.

The classic NPS question is "On a scale of 0 to ten, how likely are you to recommend our business to a friend or colleague?" This can be followed up with more in-depth surveys to shed more light on the scores you see.

NPS is great at highlighting exactly where the weak points in your customer journey are – allowing you to effectively allocate resources and prioritise your actions. You should be measuring NPS consistently, allowing you to get a strong view of performance over time.

User Testing

User testing is the single best way to uncover usability issues and conversion barriers on your website. It can be conducted in person, remotely or online in real time. User testing can be great for benchmarking your on-site experience against your competitors.

- Set users tasks and watch where they struggle.
- Record your notes and then group them into key themes. You can also 'bucket' insights into 'just do it' fixes and A/B tests.

Turning Insight into Action

Combining all this research together can give you a clear steer on the direction you need to take your onsite experience. However, it is essential to remember that during a pandemic, things change regularly, so your onsite experience needs to be reactive to this as well.

Don't be afraid to talk about COVID-19 onsite, because your consumers will want information on your business standing prior to even thinking about converting.

If you are struggling, then put fixes in place to your onsite experience to help improve the UX for those who are still coming to your site and drive increased performance. If you are thriving during this time, then continue to optimise the onsite experience to maximise on the increased demand and gain a greater market share.

The research you do this week, probably won't be relevant in 3 weeks' time. It is a evolving process to ensure you're delivering for your audience, when they need you most. Additionally, this research shouldn't form a long-term strategy for your site. As when we come out of the other side of this, then the mindset of consumers and your audience will be completely different.

There is no recommended general approach for how you should implement your findings and change the onsite experience to suit your user's needs. It depends on your website and what you offer.

In the world of UX and Optimisation, continuously analysing the "what" and "why" of evolving consumer behaviour, benchmarking performance and reviewing UX against competitors. Whilst not forgetting the essentials of analysing content, data and site speed, is the key to success during times of economic downturn.

If you would like to discuss the best approach for your onsite experience in the current climate, contact:

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