

Member Insider: What members are talking about

Background

Earlier this month, we asked twenty eight senior leaders from within the ARF universe for their views on how their organizations are handling the current crisis. These leaders were members of the Advertiser Sharegroup, the Research Leadership Committee. Members of the editorial board of the Journal of Advertising Research also provided feedback on the effects on advertising, marketing and research. What follows is a summary of the collective observations and thoughts about advertising during and after the crisis.

Research Continuity

Several common themes were addressed, describing the extent to which their research agendas had changed. Generally, longitudinal studies and brand tracking were continuing. “What are the customer needs now, and, what will they be during recovery” are the important questions now.

Some studies were halted because of the optics of the message. Most agreed that things are changing so fast that frequency of the research must be increased. Online research and modeling are expected to grow during this crisis and the recovery. In some cases, quarterly reports have morphed into thirteen-week rolling average reports. Researchers noted that response rates are increasing and that open-ended responses are longer and richer.

For CPG advertisers, supply chain modeling and manufacturing monitoring have become of primary importance. For media testing content, all qualitative has moved online, though the uncertainty of production looms large in their outlook. Research is showing that audiences are looking for nostalgic and comforting content.

Advertising

Advertisers said that some of their brands continued advertising and some had cut back. Advertisers were preparing for a more prolonged recession. Most felt that brands “don’t want to sell now.” Brand purpose advertising, safety and family are the themes advertisers will be using. Creative is shifting to softer messages and there will be few or no crowds in the new creative.

While media audiences are up significantly, it can be difficult to sell adjacent to COVID-19 coverage. Research in media organizations are being tasked to help the hardest hit categories, such as travel and retail.

Most agreed that video advertising will decrease in financial commitment, but there was disagreement as to how this will happen. On the one hand, national television is buffered by upfront commitments. Also, most digital is bought through a bidding process which is not encumbered by an advance commitment. On the other hand, digital is far less expensive and offers greater flexibility; for example, you can pivot your creative message far more quickly.

The New Normal

Face-to-face businesses, such as retail and hospitality, share a special need to see what the future will look like. This includes what the customer is looking for, how to talk to the customer at home and what does service look like in the future. CPG companies wonder, “What does hygiene look like in the future?” Asia may provide a window onto what the new normal will look like. Some members were using global tracking studies to understand how people are viewing the crisis and how it may shape their attitudes in the new normal in the U.S. For some industries like travel and hospitality, instilling consumer confidence in the safety of travel is the essential challenge.

Managing Teams

Members described how their CEOs and senior leadership were employing video and vocal programs to motivate employees and allay their anxiety. Town halls and frequent, even daily video programs delivered to the entire employee base were regular C-suite initiatives.

Research’s role supporting the C-suite needed to be frequent and curated. There are so many studies and so much information that curation was an important part of this reporting.

We discovered that collaboration software was actually an effective tool for managing the often-daily staff meetings. Global staff meetings were more cited as weekly. These meetings often, if not usually, started off by asking staff how they were doing. “What is your workday from home going to be like?” Video meetings are often shorter than in-person meetings, ending ten minutes before the hour or half hour to afford a break. Video calls with business partners were cited, although some (especially finance) were not allowed to use certain popular tools because of strict firewalls.

Supplier Partnerships

While most members cited different supplier partners that they were relying on, there was general agreement that their partners were rising to the occasion, delivering very good service and insights.