

It's time to create meaningful brand connections

By  Lauren Crooks

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Across the board, 2020 was characterised by survival, and the ever-evolving coronavirus pandemic tested the resolve of people and brands alike. Many businesses are still reeling from last year's operational upheaval: the manufacturing sector shrunk in terms of output, supply chains were disrupted and goods and services provided struggled to make ends meet due to a decrease in consumer spending.

2020 proved how quickly individual behaviour can change - from how South Africans live and play to how they work and spend - and this shift in attitudes and values will set the tone for sustained change in 2021.



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2021 will be defined by how brands embrace technology to meaningfully reach their audiences.

“ As marketers, we love a challenge. Though the ongoing pandemic has brought trepidation, we consider it an opportunity to create personalised customer experiences to supplement the face-to-face value of brand interactions - particularly on the digital front. ”

Faced with social restrictions as a result of lockdown protocols in 2020, and a shift to work-from-home business operations, South Africans spent more time online than ever before. As new denizens of the digital world, individuals socialise, shop, work, play, learn and consume their news virtually; as such, the consumer's world views are shaped by what they absorb online.

“ As there are more eyeballs on online news and lifestyle sites, the opportunity lies in curating hyper-specific, useful and relevant content tailored to their needs and interests through these platforms. ”

In the wake of Covid-19, the traditional consumer path to purchase is set to change forever. Pre-pandemic, consumers existed in an outward-focused culture, characterised by face-to-face, tangible experiences. In the throes of the second wave, consumers are less and less comfortable with public interaction; therefore, businesses need to meet consumers where they are.

2020 established the modern shopping experience, where home bound consumers choose to purchase from the quickest, easiest and most affordable online avenues. To meet this need, businesses across industries shifted their offerings to digital platforms and must continue to transform in order to earn their share of the buyer's market.

“ One thing is certain: e-commerce is here to stay, and it is up to retailers to adapt as quickly as possible to best serve the omnichannel customer of the future. ”

2020 saw a rise in mobile phone use for online purchasing, as well as a dependency on digital platforms to research, evaluate brands and make purchase decisions.

In the era of the digital revolution, the agile shall inherit the earth: to maximise on the buying trends of the new normal, brands must focus on technology to bolster customer experience, optimise delivery and offer better prices.

A businesses' approach to their clients and customers this year should be digital-first and driven by core values. The 2021 brand experience will be underpinned by three key things: connection, convenience and value for consumers.

Customer experience is about relationships rather than transactions: this suggests that interactions between brand and customer are reciprocal, authentic and led by empathy. Consumers are increasingly likely to trust in and engage with brands that align with their beliefs, and feel that the brands they support are actively trying to make a difference in their lives.

ABOUT LAUREN CROOKS

Lauren is a psychology graduate and qualified life coach with a passion for words, people and all things digital. Her love affair with all things advertising began in 2015, where she undertook the role of traffic manager in a digital agency. Her true strength lay in copywriting and creative strategy and she naturally progressed into a conceptual role. She is a Lead Strategist at Coalition Communications.

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