



HELLO? BRANDS? ARE YOU LISTENING?

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From lockdown measures to social movements to consumer trends changing on a dime, it has been a tough year to stay on top of what Canadians' mindsets and habits are at any given time. Karen Vera, Wavemaker Canada's associate director of insights and strategy, used Wavemaker Listens to get a handle on where consumers are looking for brands to show up, and how.

Reassess your product offerings

In 2019, the top five themes talked about online, based on volume of posts, were "promotion", "intent", "discounts", "expectation" and "experience." But in 2020, those last three were replaced by "service" (quality of experience), "quality" (how a product is made or presented) and "place" (cleanliness and accessibility). Euromonitor reports that priorities have changed amongst consumers with an emphasis on affordability, convenience, and wellbeing. Currently, consumers place more importance on products and services that they can easily access and afford while ensuring quality and peace of mind. Sticking to one brand is the least of their concerns.

Now more than ever, brands need to become more innovative and flexible to add value and relevance in the consumers' "new normal" lifestyle. Reassure consumers that your brand is accessible online, goes above and beyond to serve and address concerns, and still has the same quality (or that it has improved), despite the pandemic.

Don't forget about the Baby Boomers

Millennials and Gen Z may have been dominating online conversations, but Baby Boomers have quickly learned the ropes of social media and have become more active online. In the past year, they comprised 18% of the total online conversations. In a survey by Media Technology Monitor, 20% of Canadians aged 65 and up used social media more because of the pandemic. Moreover, 45% of Baby Boomers are shopping more online and this will likely continue to increase in the foreseeable future. Although these numbers are well behind those of younger generations, Baby Boomers in Canada still make up a third of the total population and hold the most wealth, with an average net worth of \$1.2 million, according to Statistics Canada, making them worth a second look.

If relevant to the brand, check if there is an opportunity to explore the potential of Baby Boomers online. If your brand is selling mortgages or financial products that Baby Boomers are already veterans at, how can they be used to influence the purchase decisions of Millennials and Gen Zs?

Determine how the brand can become a catalyst for positivity

Before the lockdown, online conversations were mostly negative. Ironically, the pandemic has shifted

overall conversations in 2020, with 55% of them having a positive sentiment and women being more positive than men (49% vs. 44%). While the pandemic has made people more critical towards others whose behaviors do not align with their expectations, the pandemic has also taught people to become joyful, grateful and supportive at a grassroots level. In general, 2020 has taught the world not to take anything or anyone for granted.

It is unknown, however, whether this trend will continue in 2021 as more and more people begin to feel the effects of pandemic fatigue. The vaccine rollout gives a sense of hope and optimism, but the light at the end of the tunnel may still seem too far away for the restless.

Consider how your brand can help consumers to continue finding joy at home while recognizing their daily challenges. How can your brand help in ensuring a positive transition once the economy reopens?

Define the brand's role in supporting local causes and businesses

2020 was the year when social justice movements took center stage. The pandemic has amplified cries for justice, not only within society but also within the economic system. Staying at home and being exposed more to social media have moved people to become more aware about social issues and local communities that need support. From the Black Lives Matter movement to #ShopLocal, Millennials and Gen Z take their activism to social media and support the causes they care about.

As the pandemic has accelerated consumer awareness and involvement towards social issues, brands are now expected to deliver beyond their product offerings with an increasing lens on social responsibility. Brands can become more socially involved by finding ways to support local businesses and causes related to the pandemic through partnerships, virtual events, or content.

Conversations and sentiments are shifting as fast as the virus is spreading. Brands will need to be flexible and quick to adapt to constant changes and impacts on consumer lifestyles and wellbeing. Understanding consumers more as they go through the motions of a pandemic life will help make brands be on top of their product offerings and perceived relevance by being mindful of trending themes, topics, and sentiments. It is now more important than ever for brands to closely follow online conversations in the hopes of staying relevant amidst this fast-paced and ever-changing world.