



HOW TO MARKET

Your Agency Through a Pandemic



COVID-19 has disrupted nearly every industry and has forced many companies to substantially alter the way they conduct business. According to an industry outlook report published by Yext, web searches for the insurance industry have gone down by about 25% when comparing March 2020 to March 2019 . Phone calls and web traffic, however, have remained relatively stable indicating that the insurance industry is in a safer position than most. Although searches may be down, your customers and those in your community will still look to you as a resource in these uncertain times.

Use this opportunity to focus on how you can build new relationships in your community or strengthen existing ones by not only making yourself available for policy sales, but also by being available as a local expert that can answer the questions consumers are asking.

To best prepare your agency for what lies ahead, look at consumer behavior to help guide your decisions. Many experts agree that consumer behavior will unfold in three phases on our way back to normal:

THE FEAR AND QUARANTINE PERIOD

THE REPRIEVE PERIOD

THE NEW NORMAL

Below are some suggested tactics and tips for each phase that can not only help your agency weather the storm—but even pivot the way you do business long term to help build long-lasting relationships that can make your agency stronger than ever.

THE FEAR AND QUARANTINE PERIOD

This phase began in mid-March as states around the country started to shut down and will continue until the quarantine period is over. In this phase, consumers are focusing on essential items only and gathering information to try to and forecast what comes next.

TOP CONSUMER CONCERNS WILL BE:



Fear of contracting
COVID-19



How to do
business remotely



What do I need to
purchase now?



What do my current
policies cover?

HOW TO ADAPT YOUR MARKETING

COMMUNICATE OPERATIONAL CHANGES AND INCREASE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS

Customers want to feel safe when doing business with you. That feeling of safety, combined with your availability and accessibility, will be important factors consumers consider when doing business.

Follow CDC guidelines during any business conducted in person

If you are still having face to face meetings in your office, be sure to comply with CDC guidelines for social distancing and other safety precautions. Communicate any changes to your normal schedule that have been implemented on your website, via email, on social media or any way you directly communicate with your customers—including in your advertising.

Update your Google My Business listing

An up-to-date Google My Business listings is one of the easiest ways to help your customers know how to reach you during these times. If your hours have changed due to circumstances, make sure to update them here. Note, there may be a delay in processing updates from Google during this time.

PREPARE TO SHIFT GOALS AND ROLES

Your projected goals may need to be adjusted. Consider prioritizing relationship building goals over sales goals in the short term.

Some great goals to consider would be:

-  Build and segment your email lists
-  Grow social followings
-  Identify new or more frequent touchpoints with customers



Demonstrate your knowledge and expertise and reevaluate your content strategy

Try thinking about what you can do for a prospect that isn't necessarily selling them a policy. Consumers are desperate for reliable and accurate insurance information that can serve them now and inform later decisions. Who better than their local independent agent to be that resource? Demonstrating your knowledge and expertise now could end up building a relationship that pays off later.

Ways to get started include:

- Update your copy for social posts, website and email. You want to reflect being knowledgeable as well as showing a human side. This pandemic is affecting every person differently and be mindful of your audience.
- Post resources for your clients or relevant articles on relevant insurance topics. Some sample places that you can find freelancer writers on Upwork, Fiverr, or Freelancer.

Think about your overall messaging and how you can adapt in this time. Don't forget to use the Big "I" COVID resource page as a tool to share with members:

www.independentagent.com/nsc-resources/coronavirus

The Trusted Choice Brand Resource page also contains some sample content, messaging and campaigns:

www.trustedchoice.com/agents

FOCUS ON ONLINE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

With so many people at home, social media usage has been on the rise. Facebook alone shot up nearly 30% in early March. As consumers media consumption habits change there is a greater opportunity to engage in an authentic way. Which in turn builds trust and lets clients get to know more about you and your agency's values.

A few ways to increase engagement include:

- Shift your content to match what customers are thinking about (consider that people are spending much more time at home and online).
- If any clients have pivoted their business to serve first responders or your community, consider showcasing them on your social media for mutually beneficial exposure. Conduct a short phone interview so you can share details about their business plan and give them some well-deserved recognition.
- Share helpful or relevant wholesome content that shows you care. Share any essential community updates or involvement that may help your customers.

THE REPRIEVE PERIOD

The next period is when the stay at home orders begin to lift and many non-essential businesses and activities will resume operation (likely at limited capacity). When this happens, hours will vary by location. Paying attention to what is opening and what restrictions are being eased or lifted will inform you on who in your community may need guidance.

It's hard to forecast exactly how long this period will last, but many expect through late 2020 and possibly into early 2021. Consumers will mostly continue to be anxious and cautious about many of the same things as phase 1, including doing business in person. By this stage, many small to medium sized businesses may be considering whether they can continue operating—especially in the food, beverage and retail sectors.

ASSESS CONSUMER BEHAVIOR AND DETERMINE HOW YOU WANT TO REACH THEM:

Fine Tune Your Messaging

Begin this phase by continuing with some of the same strategies and messaging used in phase 1 that aimed to build relationships within your community. Sincere and authentic messaging that demonstrates how much you care about customers and their families will go a long way and paint you as trustworthy a reliable. Now is your opportunity to build a strong bond that could last for years.

As we get to the later stages of this phase, begin transitioning away from crisis referencing messaging. Instead, aim to highlight the value and support you have delivered so far and will continue to deliver going forward versus a sales pitch. Adjusting your messaging will remind your customers how much you care and ultimately highlight your value.

Resume or Continue Advertising

As you can imagine and may even be contributing to yourself a bit, TV viewership is way up – as much as 35% in some instances. However, according to Adweek, advertising spending is down an estimated 23% - 29% (approx. \$10b - \$12b) . That means networks are desperate for ad revenue and you can likely get significantly more bang for your buck in this media market. In any ads your run (TV or otherwise) be sure to let customers know the safety measures you are taking and/or digital tools you have incorporated into your agency.

Direct mail has also had somewhat of a resurgence. If you have a mailing list of residential addresses, this may be a good time to schedule a direct mailing to your local market since nearly everyone is at home.

Online advertising continues to be popular but is also seeing many ads pulled and reduced revenue. Consider starting to (or increasing) advertising on social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn or running some PPC (pay-per-click) ads or investing in search engine marketing.

Do what you're comfortable with. Consider re-allocating funds that were earmarked for things like sponsorship of now canceled events to fund these efforts.



Fortify Your Digital Presence

At this point, you should be preparing to integrate digital solutions that simplify doing business remotely on a long-term to permanent basis. Evaluate the programs you've been using and determine which you'd like to continue with then do some research to make sure your budget can accommodate any new subscriptions.



A NEW NORMAL

Phase 3 is when things will finally start to settle into a new normal. What that new normal looks like is difficult to forecast. Many of the implemented changes and restrictions will be lifted and begin to fade but business practices in most industries will be permanently changed.

The independent insurance agent industry will undoubtedly experience growing pains, and the Big "I" and Trusted Choice is here to support you.

