



SUCCESS POST COVID-19: SIMPLE CONVERSATION STARTERS

How do you re-ignite conversations
with your customers?

Canon



With more and more businesses getting back to work post-COVID-19 after a long period of extreme disruption, it's important to focus on how you're going to reconnect with customers and prospects to rebuild your sales pipeline.

While many businesses have suffered from the global pandemic, others have thrived, having been able to tailor and adapt their business to introduce new products and services to meet changing customer needs. The next few months are both a challenge and an opportunity to set a new path.

But, as we emerge from this crisis, re-engaging with your customers can feel daunting when you don't know what impact COVID-19 has had on them, personally and commercially. And how do you find the motivation to have positive discussions about the future outlook for your customers when so many things are still uncertain, both for them and for your own business?

One thing is clear. Success post-lockdown will not necessarily come from doing what you always have done. With many businesses still in 'fire-fighting' mode, while scrutinising budgets and resetting priorities, it's unlikely that the phone will be ringing like it used to. You can't rely on the orders flying in. It's time to switch up the conversation and change your approach.

Hopefully COVID-19 gave you some valuable time to reflect on your own business, review your value proposition and think about how you can meet your customers' future needs.

Now it's about getting to know each customer better. Yes, they may have been a repeat customer for years, but have you recently shown them – or reminded them – how print could complement their digital marketing efforts and boost their cut-through with customers?

If the answer is no, then keep on reading.

We've talked to many customers throughout COVID-19, supporting them in planning their business recovery and their approach to the market. One message cuts across all those conversations. It's time to change tack with customers and reach out proactively to them to understand where they are, what immediate challenges they have and what strategies they're deploying to rebuild their business.

When you understand what they are thinking and planning, you'll be able to show them the role that print can play in reviving awareness, stimulating demand, driving footfall or web traffic and provoking customer spend.

Here, we've outlined some conversation starters to support you in those initial discussions, helping to re-engage with your customers and giving you valuable insights that will shape what you offer them, now and in the future.

1. What are your marketing priorities for the next few months and for the longer term? What specific activity do you have planned?

Why should you be asking this question? Because this will give you an opportunity to pitch and upsell print within your customer's wider marketing mix. The commercial end goal always needs to be front of mind.

Do they need to let customers in a specific area know they're back in business? Are they wanting to generate leads in one particular market? Are they looking to shift stock of an existing product? Are they launching an entirely new product to a completely new market? Or do they just want to keep a continuous stream of engaging communications with their customers to encourage repeat purchase and brand loyalty?

No matter what the response, you can then proactively suggest ways in which print can support their communications goals. Have they thought about a postcard campaign to keep their brand front of mind or promote a special offer? What about new POS materials or posters? Have they considered a regular customer magazine? Have they considered adding special discount codes to their direct marketing so they can better track return on investment (ROI)? If they're launching a new product, have they thought about using print more creatively, such as using spot varnishing solutions or embellishments to make sections of a printed piece stand-out? Or use thicker stock for a more premium feel? Have they considered trying different media textures, better engaging the reader's sense of touch to stimulate emotions?

And it's good to gently remind them that now is not the time to be cutting marketing spend. [Did you know that research carried out after the 1981-82 recession found that companies that marketed aggressively had 256% higher sales than those that did not?](#)

When we look at the 2008 financial recession, [Amazon surprised us all by growing its sales by 28% in 2009](#). How? Because the tech giant continued to innovate during the crash with new products, such as the Kindle e-Book, which helped to grow market share (and also resulted in digital print volume growth in the book sector too).

As [Marketing Week's Mark Ritson](#) recently stated, "The reason the recession is such a fertile place to grow market share has nothing to do with the downturn itself or its impact on consumers. It's because competitors pull back and you – hopefully – do not."

Motivate customers by reminding them that success often comes as a result of powering on, keeping business conversations alive through consistent and relevant marketing, even during challenging times.



2. Are you convinced that digital marketing is the right way to engage with your customers right now?

There's ample evidence that print trumps digital when it comes to engaging people's emotions, and never more so than now. Digital fatigue was already a factor before COVID-19 and, after months of life in an online bubble of Zoom calls and virtual experiences, our craving for real things we can touch and see has never been greater.

At a time when brands will want to be standing out the most and fighting hard for attention and consumer spend, this is where the advantage of print lies. Eye-catching digitally printed collateral captivates customers better than any other medium.

We understand that marketing teams have ramped up their digital efforts as an interim measure because it's been relatively easy to do so remotely. But as we emerge from the crisis, consumers will be keener than ever to get away from their screens, and there's a huge opportunity to use the sensory power of print to help your customers get ahead.

It's time to remind them that print leaves a lasting impact and engages people in ways that email and digital advertising simply can't. The added bonus? It's a trusted form of communication, which is critical at a time of such uncertainty. 56% of people see printed marketing as the most trustworthy form of communication.¹

3. Are you aware of the variety of printed products we can create to engage with your customers? I can walk you through them and the benefits of each.

You are the print expert. You know your product portfolio inside out.

Do you have a small business customer that's about to re-open its store and wants to let local customers know with a flyer? Have you thought about suggesting a high-quality personalised invitation for customers who have remained loyal during COVID-19? What about a voucher offering 10% off next time they come in store? Or how about some promotional posters in-store to promote customer safety and social distancing, or to highlight new ranges?

Maybe you have a corporate customer who comes to you to help produce a printed proposal for a new business pitch. You could suggest doing some design proofs or mock-ups, or even customised presentation materials and printed displays, to win over their client by helping to visualise the end result and bring their creative ideas to life.

Here's another scenario: you have a customer that wants to produce a brochure to tell clients about new products and services they are introducing after lockdown. Depending on their company and the product in question, could you recommend a landscape or gate-folded brochure to give their brand a more luxurious look and feel, or deliver the 'wow factor' for a premium product?

From matt and gloss effects and textured and embossed media, to using different paper weights, there are plenty of ways to maximise the impact of print within the marketing mix.

4. Do you hold data about your customer? Have they given you consent to use it? If so, have you considered completely personalised print communications beyond name, address, age etc.?

COVID-19 has accelerated digital transformation and forced many of us to adapt to new ways of working. For PSPs, a focus has been on automation and on optimising online ordering capabilities to suit a customer base confined to their homes.

The advantage of digitised processes and digital print on demand is its agility. For your customers, it means that small adjustments in campaign targeting and messages can be made quickly and simply.

Consider the fact that, in many countries, government regulation and guidance on matters such as social distancing is changing week by week. This dynamic situation has an impact on what businesses are communicating to their customers.

From retailers and restaurants to small businesses, this means they may have to continuously adapt their marketing materials over the next six months at least. Your on-demand capabilities are key to helping them to do this flexibly and cost-effectively.

The benefits of on-demand production mean you can also take advantage of personalisation too. And we don't just mean name, age and address. We're talking about real individualisation – from completely tailored content and selected imagery, to exclusive offers just for you on your favourite products. You can now address consumers with targeted propositions packaged with all the emotional appeal of high-quality print. All at the right time and in the right context.

But there's probably an assumption from your customer that producing individualised print collateral can take longer and be more expensive. But they're wrong – thanks to digital print solutions, you can create personalised print communication instantly with workflow automation and send it to your customers literally on demand. This is the time for brands to remind customers that they are valued and appreciated, and there's no better way to do that than by sending them personalised print. And the more tailored it is to the reader, the more it will provoke engagement and response (and therefore, ROI!).



5. Did you know you can demonstrate ROI with print, in the same way you can with digital? And did you know that print can be seamlessly integrated within your wider marketing campaigns?

Today, marketing teams can integrate print intelligently with digital marketing formats, enabling them to measure ROI at every stage of the customer journey, offline and online. An individualised mailer featuring a unique voucher code redeemable via a web link, for example, could simultaneously enable data gathering and response rate measurement. Print can enhance the customers' brand experience and prompt actions online to support lead generation by incorporating innovative digital technologies. And similarly, online activity can trigger print in exactly the same way that digital advertising can be prompted by online behaviour. It's now possible to embed print seamlessly into a digital marketing journey too.

'Bricks and mortar' retail may remain challenged for some time post-COVID-19 by the combination of social distancing measures and boosted consumer appreciation of the sheer convenience of online ordering.

For customers with e-commerce capabilities, it's a positive opportunity to talk about the power of print to drive traffic to a website, to re-engage a lapsed customer, or even to stimulate customers to re-activate an abandoned online shopping basket.

And here are some stats to use with customers to underline how print cuts through and delivers results:

- Including mail in the marketing communications mix increases ROI by 12%²
- 75% of businesses using direct mail say it has delivered a positive return on investment³
- Direct mail recipients purchased 28% more items and spent 28% more money than people who didn't get the piece of direct mail⁴

Welcoming back business

The pandemic is likely to have a long-term effect on the outlook of consumers – which will have a direct impact on your customers' businesses. So, if you haven't reached out to your customers in the past month, now's the time to do so.

As a PSP, you need to sell the value of print and your role as a proactive partner to support their business recovery. These conversations may also help bring to light any customer needs you currently can't meet and give rise to an opportunity to expand your offering.

Maybe you could even use print to re-introduce your services? How about sending your customers a 'welcome back' letter and sample pack to reassure them you're ready and waiting if they need any advice on how to re-engage with their customers?

Now's the time to help your customers navigate a changed landscape for business and re-ignite their marketing efforts to ensure they rebuild and grow.

¹ Direct Marketing Association

² Royal Mail MarketReach and TNS, 2017

³ Royal Mail MarketReach and TNS, 2017

⁴ Data & Marketing Association (DMA) Response Rate Report, 2017