

# Cutting back on marketing could



MATT DYKES  
ABZORB

"Lockdown has forced all businesses and organisations to remote work and there has been a dramatic change in culture, processes and day to day work. The COVID-19 crisis will deliver a paradigm shift in remote working and more employees will request to work at home having discovered the benefits it delivers to work life balance. Businesses will discover, they can reduce costs for real estate and improve productivity and efficiencies. Resellers now have the opportunity to educate businesses on how technology can improve their communications, remote working and business processes. At Abzorb we are continuing to invest in marketing by focusing on virtual networking and events and have recently invested in a new PR agency to increase brand awareness to build the prospect pipeline and develop the business. Now, is the time to focus on marketing, raise brand awareness, educate customers and prospects, and seize the opportunity."



DAVID SPARROW  
BLABBERMOUTH

"We've found that offering free advice and insight is currently the best way for businesses to show their value and build trust. As inbound marketing specialists, we already live by this strategy and our public sales advice has already been instrumental in helping businesses survive through the lockdown. For our clients, ensuring teams are 'digitally enabled' is vital and we've focused on optimising sales journeys, getting the right messages across with in-depth sales playbooks to help guide conversations. Having the right CRM integrations is also important to ensure prospects can book calls and sales teams can follow up in the same way the prospect enquired. Not only to build better relationships faster, but to optimise reaction times. Especially with workflow automation, sales teams can nurture prospects without sacrificing a significant amount of their own time, while also being quicker to respond and thus, closing deals faster and more often."

Over the past three months, the effects of Covid-19 have seen UK marketing budgets decline at their fastest rate since the 2008/9 global financial crisis. That's pretty depressing news, but here's the upside: The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising's says spending on marketing is poised to start recovering from the effects of the pandemic by 2021, with more robust growth in 2022.

The £64,000 dollar question is: should ICT channel marketers hunker down for the freeze ahead or spend their way through the downturn?

Indeed, the popular adage declares: "When times are good you should advertise. When times are bad you must advertise."

So, what should marketers focus on as the squeeze on budgets tightens? Here's five tips to consider:

1. Focus on your brand. In



KAREN HEAVEN  
BT WHOLESALE

"Rather than cutting back on plans and budgets, we have redeployed and refocused our activities. It's been important for us to adapt to a virtual event model as we're event-dependent to drive pipeline and leads. We have moved budget away from more traditional channels and now invest in ways to reach our CPs through virtual roundtables and webinars. For example, hospitality is on pause – so we are continuing to do more virtually, investing in data, email automation tools and social media to enrich our reach. Our industry is growing and changing rapidly so we can't afford to rest on our laurels. We believe it's now more important than ever to keep the channel engaged, so continue to do more campaigns and PR activity to achieve this."



NATHAN MARKE  
DWS

"Overall, it will be status quo and then some at DWS, reflecting our continuing business growth. However, what we spend our money on is pivoting from traditional to digital, spurred by three drivers. Firstly, our addressable market is expanding. The convergence of comms, IT and cloud is driving non-telco reseller interest in comms, doubling our target reseller base from five years ago. Secondly, secular trends such as the PSTN withdrawal, 5G and fibre roll-out are disrupting the market, creating a reseller base hungry for education. Thirdly, COVID-19 has meant that every business has had to consider how to replace face-to-face with digital business; digital marketing is a powerful tool to enable us to do this intelligently. Communicating effectively with existing and future partners has never been more critical than in today's 'work from anywhere' economy; mastering the art and science of digital marketing is fundamental to every effective post-pandemic business."



CANDICE CUNLIFFE  
F6

"Our clients haven't just maintained their marketing through 2020; they've boosted it. With the Channel's central role in building the new normal with tech, and the opportunity to gain ground as others cut back their marketing, it was the clear choice. And it's worked! Through a heavy push on mid-lockdown and back-to-work solutions—along with marketing their bread-and-butter products—they're seeing new leads, making more sales, and enjoying business growth; despite the unusual circumstances. One client even underwent a full rebrand. The new coat of paint and alignment of values grabbed their customers' attention and positioned them to thrive, even as we enter uncharted territory. It's all testament that marketing isn't just a 'nice to have'—you can market your way through and out of economic downturns. There's no better time to start nailing top-notch email campaigns, consistent social media activity, powerful SEO techniques, and ace web development."



NIKI FOOTE  
FIDELITY GROUP

"I am going to say NO to cutbacks, but YES to being relevant and making S.M.A.R.T choices. The time for implementing fast and precise decisions is now and we are ensuring there is consistent communication with all our partners during such a fluid time. We are also making sure the new marketing investments we implement add value and cater to the current needs of the new working world. We have extensively reviewed our budget to ensure we are getting ROI out of existing campaigns, however with the post Covid19 new normal – stay alert, control the virus, save lives - this will have to have a varied aspect. As an example, big partner training days may not be possible right now and we need to work with our existing marketing partners to get real life experiences from them to offer our partners specifically targeted campaigns."



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# ld seriously damage your brand

past recessions companies with a strong brand presence have come out on top.

2. Talk to you customers and monitor their behaviour and outlook. By tapping into and appealing to their emotional side you have a better chance of persuading them to stick with you.
3. Go digital. Digital marketing has long been accepted as the best low cost, high-return marketing strategy, largely due to measurability and targeting capabilities.
4. Look back at campaigns that worked well in the past and repeat rather than experimenting with new ideas.
5. Finally, focus on current customers.

"Put your customers' needs at the heart of everything you do today," says Louise Abby, head of customer marketing at 9 Group. Never a truer word.



ELLIE ALLSEYBROOK  
INFORM BILLING

"Rather than cutting back or simply carrying on, we are adapting our strategy and re-focussing resources as the Covid crisis plays out. It is always prudent to review and contain costs during any recession but investing in marketing is absolutely critical to maintaining awareness, understanding the changing needs of your potential and existing customers and positioning your offering in response. In the past our events programme has always delivered an impressive ROI and without that we are focusing on different activities that may not have an immediate impact, but will yield long-term results and put us in a stronger position as the economy recovers. The immediate future is uncertain with little chance of a quick or full recovery in 2021 - another reason why marketing needs to focus on longevity and the 'new normal'."



CHERIE HOWLETT  
JOLA

"I think it is really important to maintain your marketing strategy during economic downturns. Non-essential spend is often put on hold, yet additional investment is often required to fund customer re-assurance campaigns and to promote new services. By staying visible and communicating with partners or end users, and helping out where you can, you develop trust and stay connected with the changing needs of your audience. Instead of removing your presence from the marketplace, I would recommend reviewing your messaging. Companies who can adapt to the new environment and help to meet demand without being opportunistic, are most likely to thrive post crisis. We continued our marketing strategy during lockdown and signed up record numbers of partners. By working together, we have the technology to help homeworkers, keyworkers and students with the technology they need during this crisis and beyond."



MARK CURTIS-WOOD  
VAIONI

"At Vaioni Wholesale, we're maintaining our planned investment in marketing which is a 50% increase on last year. We've also invested in senior-level marketing expertise in the past month by bringing Jane Rigg into the business as Group Head of Marketing and Product. In the current climate, it's more important than ever to respond rapidly to changing customer needs. Our commitment to marketing means we can do this through continued investment in new products and services, offering more flexibility through times of uncertainty and supporting evolving business priorities for our wholesale partners and their customers. The winners in the market are listening to their customers and evolving with them. For Vaioni Wholesale, investing in marketing puts us in prime position to do that."



NEIL WILSON  
VIRTUAL1

"Changing market conditions will always dictate the need for a flexible marketing approach. Cutbacks are likely, especially with high uncertainty around physical events for the foreseeable future. The cancellation of these events constitutes an easy cost saving, especially as they are often the most expensive. That said, new customer acquisition is likely to be an even higher priority than normal in 2021. Many businesses are likely seeing higher churn as a result of the extreme pressures in the market. This revenue and profit loss will need to be addressed. Scaling back on marketing too far should be carefully considered. The absence of marketing activity or brand promotion could send out other negative signals about the health of that business. As UK business recovers, digital transformation might finally reach the mass market, creating opportunity for the channel and you would want your brand at the front of this trend."

"As we enter a period of economic hardship, we understand many channel businesses may need to make cuts and marketing budgets can often be hit first. However, it's important to keep in mind that the purpose of your marketing activity is to drive long term revenue. Although it can be difficult to focus on the long-term in times of crisis, we would caution against making drastic reductions. If cuts must be made, we wouldn't suggest removing face-to-face activity altogether as we've all become more accustomed to attending online events or webinars. You could reinvest any savings made into boosting your digital marketing activity. Today's buyers research before pursuing a purchase, so it's essential you still provide valuable and insightful content to your target audience. Whether they are ready to buy or not, you'll maintain your brand position and ensure that when they are ready to purchase you are front of mind."



CHRIS WIDOES  
VVOW PR

"Marketing is the main route of customer communication and it's more important than ever to maintain activities and work creatively; to not just survive but thrive, whatever the future holds. I have seen many companies navigate through stormy conditions by booting up marketing activities. It is vital to keep your brand in people's minds and show that you are leading the fightback rather than drifting off the radar. In today's digital age, marketing doesn't have to be expensive. With some good publishing software and a database, you can quickly and easily send out pdfs informing new and old customers of your products and services. Social media is a great friend of the budget pressed marketer too and remember, you can easily create effective PR opportunities such as helping a local charity or sports club – or highlight how your own company continues to flourish in challenging times."



CRAIG HOWELL  
XELION

"Business marketing plays a very important role when it comes to promoting and selling your business services. Unfortunately for many companies Covid19 has decimated this privilege with companies retracting all marketing spend to maintain operational levels and staff retention. For those financially stable, marketing should be a key focus to future proofing their business, by inspiring confidence in their partners and helping them win more deals. Studies show, companies that maintained or grew their ad spending increased sales and market share during the recession and afterwards. Here at Xelion, we're in a very fortunate position whereby we are able to continue our marketing efforts by supporting the channel media through publications and events. We wish all our colleagues the best in these difficult times and we look forward to a healthy community when we reach the end of this pandemic."

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