

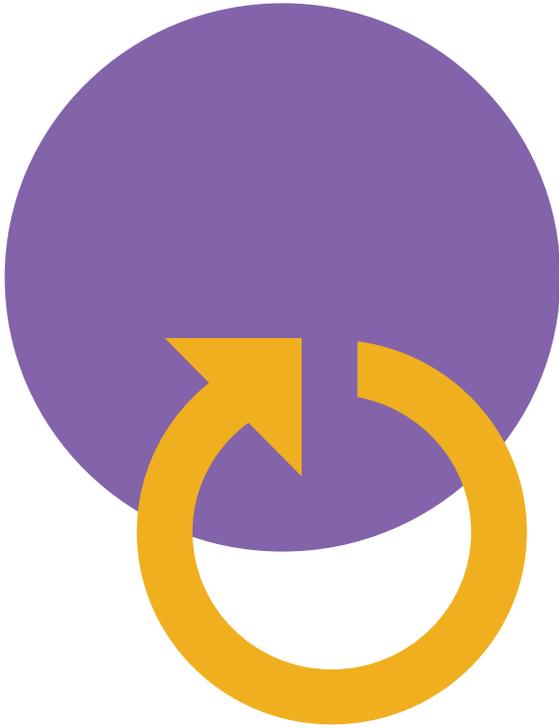


# F^ck funnels. Build flywheels.

A **post pandemic, neo-civil war,**  
**post-apocalyptic** communication  
framework. Because 'the dystopian  
future' is here now, B!tches!



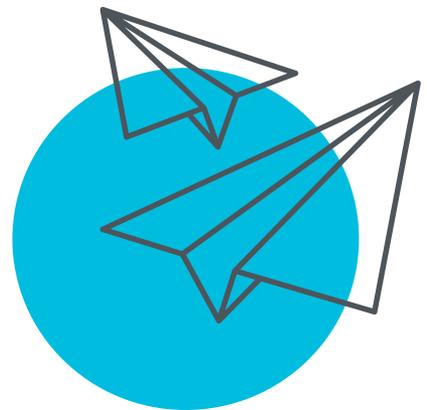




**The funnel is dead.**  
**(long live its new avatar, the flywheel)**

The idea of a flywheel is not a new one. It sounds gimmicky and fly, but hear us out.

Much as we've tried to establish the provenance of this thinking in marketing, its exact origin seems unclear.





### Three very smart people employ it eloquently.

1. James Watt the inventor. “The [flywheel](#) was used by James Watt over 200 years ago in his steam engine, the invention that powered the Industrial Revolution. It is highly efficient at capturing, storing, and releasing energy.”
2. [Jim Collins](#), in his 2001 book, Good to Great. Here’s how he defines it. “The Flywheel effect is a concept developed in the book. No matter how dramatic the end result, good-to-great transformations never happen in one fell swoop. In building a great company or social sector enterprise, there is no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle moment. Rather, the process resembles relentlessly pushing a giant, heavy flywheel, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond.”
3. [Rand Fishkin](#), in his building of the SEO software Moz. He describes it fully in his 2018 book, Lost and Founder. In it Rand talks of how they ‘accidentally’ built an SEO marketing flywheel. “Great fly-



wheels power almost every scaling web property out there. Not all of them call their marketing strategy a “flywheel,” but nearly all employ the philosophy.”

For us the simplest sell for it is this:

*Funnels are linear. Flywheels are infinite in their circularness.*

With that as the beautiful backdrop, we’ll embark upon a 2-part discourse in this guide.

1. How not to need crisis management communication by building a thought leadership flywheel that becomes a gift that keeps on giving.

2. How to fix it if shit hits the fan. Because you don’t already have a flywheel, damnit! And, in these treacherous times, you’re likely going to get in trouble in the time it takes to build one.

## Part 1 - building crisis-proof communication in the form of thought leadership

We brought flywheel thinking to the idea of building thought leadership voices last year. And practiced it both for ourselves, and a bunch of superpower small businesses.

And then 2020 blew in. With its false change-of-decade hope and flashiness. In March, 2020 the SaaS 90-day return policy jokes and memes were rife.

The 'global toilet paper crisis of 2020' rolled out (We like our puns around here. We deal with darkness with humour). In the form of coronavirus. (Cue the day drinking jokes).

There was a mass exodus from traditional workspaces to online. Suddenly virtual work was an everybody thing.

Those that had strong online community or engagement found it drop.

Those that didn't, and scraped together a smattering of the stuff, heard crickets.

The clutter pile was deep and hard to wade through. Even for the experts.

Then May 2020 rolled around. A sad and shocking kind of viral video seized the world's attention. The police killing of George Floyd.

In a collective gasp of horror the world unified in an 'enough is enough,' anti-racism movement that we believe is the 'neo-civil rights movement'.

One Tuesday in June. And two months of working virtually showed all of us marketers and communicators one thing:

*Who had the smart, emotionally intelligent marketing flywheels, and who had the sad boring, tone deaf sales funnels. ad, unprepared marketing teams tried hard to shove more MQLs (minimum qualified leads) down a structure people DID NOT want to go down. Just so*

they (the marketers) could keep their jobs.

It's hard work. Who really can blame those marketers for barely having a minute to look up and see what's going on around them in the world.

### ***What many marketers missed was this:***

Times have changed a whole lot. People have very little tolerance for bullshit. There's tons of post traumatic stress to go around. News is swift, and judgment is swifter.

No one wants to hear about your sales or special offers. No one wants to be targeted by advertising on FB because they Googled "back-packs" or "face masks."

And no brand – we mean absolutely NO BRAND – wants to, unintentionally or otherwise, let fly a social media post that is tone deaf or inadvertently hurtful. What might have been cute and funny a few months ago? Trust us. It quite possibly today could be misconstrued as disingenuous. Or worse, seen as co-opting people's very real pain and anger.

We only have to rewind the clock to see how easily this can happen. There are myriad examples of brands co-opting socio-political events over the years, and there's one thing they have in common: they have failed BIGLY!

In the last few months, we at c+p digital have been approached more often for crisis management communication and reputation management questions than at any other time; understandably.

So we're finally laying out the 'thought leadership flywheel' in which we believe lies the answer to most communication that won't need to get to crisis management levels.

*The thought leadership flywheel for marketers looks like this:*

# Messiah vs Snake Oil Salesperson?



We started to call the early versions of this “The Definitive, Foolproof Framework to Positioning Yourself as a Thought Leader”

Feeling slightly unctuous from the Crisco level greasiness of that title? Yes that was the plan.

Because if we didn't push ALL THE SNAKE OIL ALARM BUTTONS with that name, then something is wrong!!

Why did we do it then?

Because in no particular order, perhaps the least trusted, most high-sleaze professions are:

- ✓ Lawyers
- ✓ Journalists
- ✓ Salespeople (them filthy funnel builders - oh and that includes you too, Marsha Marketer)

Enter us marketers and communicators and our dupery! .Let's be real. We make a lot of lofty promises to sell things. Do all of them get delivered? I'll let you answer that.

*Nobody trusts us. It's true.*



We know that we all have to sell. We sell our asses off every day at c+p digital.

But we only sell what we know. We don't deal in bullshit. And we take it private when the waters are murky.

And we have had zero loss of business during the crisis. Some slowing, but no loss.

And new business continues to come in.

People ask us how that happens to a tiny organization.

How it's possible to consistently cut clutter and get heard and taken seriously?

The answer is strive for more MESSIAH and less Snake Oil Salesperson.

Something we see shockingly often is people get their messaging or campaign sorted. Then run out into the world, blasting it off. And crickets. "But WHY?"

Well, take all the seats and be prepared to be WOWED!!! (Yes. That was sarcasm.)

The shock, surprised indignation, and giving up follows.

"No-one heard me."

"So few likes"

"No increase in traffic"

"That thought leadership campaign failed"

There is no WOW to becoming a thought leader. It is not a 'campaign.' It takes NON-STOP work.

## NUMBER ONE: FIND THE HILL YOU WOULD DIE ON

Then prepare yourself for some uncomfortable vulnerability. Because you can't be courageous (and this shit takes courage, friends!) without also being vulnerable.

Sound counter intuitive? It's not. By putting yourself out there, you're opening yourself up to all kinds of potential abuse 😬 Sounds fun, right?? No, but seriously.

V ✨ U ✨ L ✨ N ✨ E ✨ R ✨ A ✨ B ✨ I ✨ L ✨ I ✨ T ✨ Y ✨



Refer to Brenne Brown's body of work on the subject. It's immense. And necessary reading/listening in our opinion.

You're about to get deeply authentic about a subject that means A LOT to your brand – you're about to say to the world "Hey, look, folks. Here's what I know. Here's what I believe in. Here's what I think is broken. And here's how I can fix it!"

And yes 'I' is powerful in this case. It often needs to be one individual, even in large organizations. One subject matter specialist on the hill you picked. (There could be multiple hills, of course. But start your work, or improvement on one hill. Got it? Good.)

Most of all HAVE SOME BALLS. The last thing you want to do is be afraid to shake the joint up. But DON'T BE A DICK (see the difference?)

Find your sweet spot on the scale of kind to clever. We often see people set things up cleverly but they lose their audience because they are not being empathetic to the realness of the people to whom they are speaking.

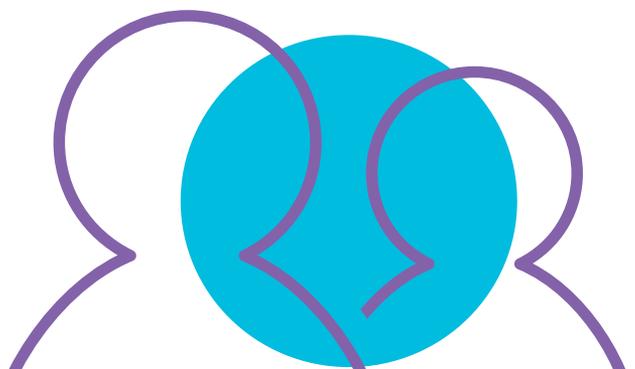
Right, so, take what you know - what you're best at and one thousand percent believe in – and drill down into that. Start mapping out how you'll break through the clutter. And the noise. Because folks it is MOFO noisy out there!

Then use your body of work as proof!

\*car brakes screech\* 🚗🚗🚗

Wait. What body of work???

SURPRISE!



## NUMBER TWO: WHAT IN BLAZES IS 'A BODY OF WORK'?

Trust is earned in the smallest of moments.

It is earned not through heroic deeds, or even highly visible actions, but through paying attention, listening, and gestures of genuine care and connection.

Brene Brown

Start. Building. TRUST!!!

In points 3 and 4 we'll delve deeper into the voice and key messaging of that.

But first, what is your vessel?

We'll go out on a limb here and say the best kind of vessel is a web page of some sort. In this web page you must pick your medium or choice of media mix.

What we mean by that is infrastructure. Build your own material stockpile on the subject(s) at hand. Maybe articles/blog posts. Maybe a video series. Maybe a podcast.

We are partial to three multiformat production ideas anchored in one key property. For us, it's our weekly podcast. [A third of Canadian internet users](#) are podcast fans! That's a lot of eyeballs (er, eardrums 🧠👂👂) out there for us to grab, and we do it by using some strategic nichery.

Think in terms of two-way links. That's SEO, baby. Get some of that shizz in your mix.

In addition to featuring your own property, social proof is established by what you've done outside of your domain. The best way to do it is to pick your own medium. For example, if podcasting is your infrastructure of choice, then get yourself a podcast booking plan. Have a member of your team or an external booking or digital publicity agency be responsible for your presence on other people's podcasts. This is pretty key.

Then make sure you create a website "sizzle-reel-type" page of all

your media appearances, whether as a guest contributor, columnist, video guest or audio guest. Update this often. Toot your own horn because no one else will do that for you!

This hub becomes your thought leadership body of work.

In it there are no sells.

This is important.

Just intelligent calls to action to take people into more of your concepts.

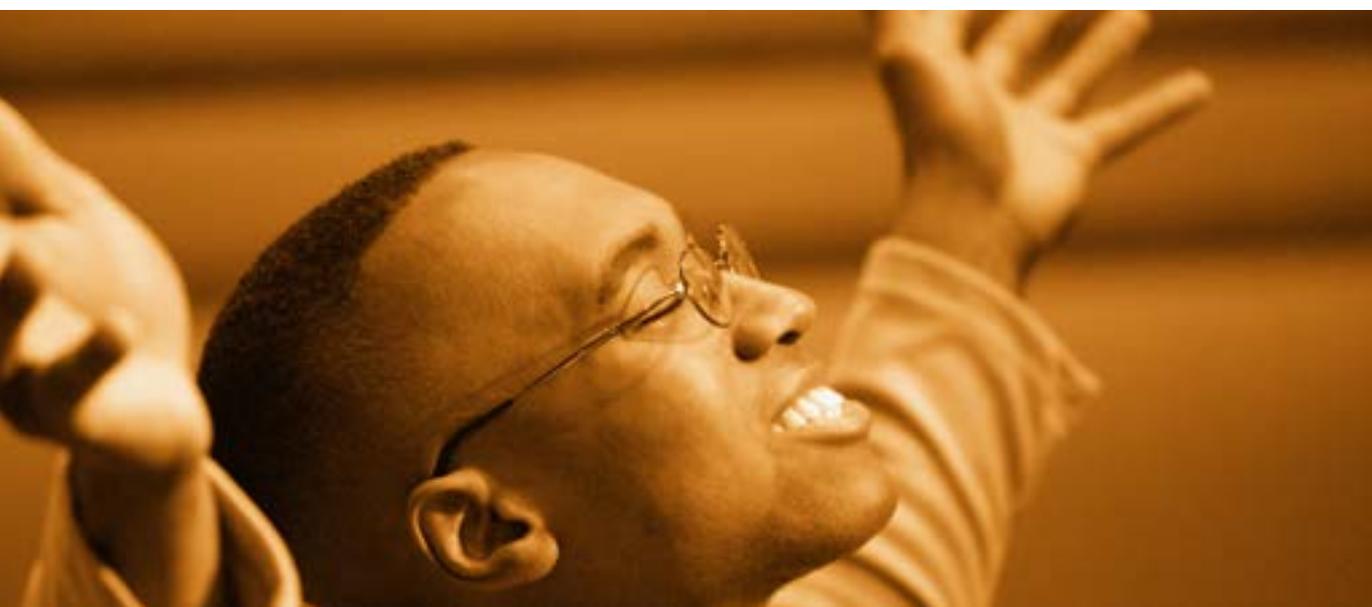
This can get as complex or as simple as you want. But the bottom line is that it needs to live somewhere on the internet and be intuitively findable so people can binge on more of your brain.

### **NUMBER THREE - VALUES, VOICE, THAT SORT OF FLUFF. OR IS IT?**

The week of Blackout Tuesday, in honour of the BLM movement we spoke about above, we saw one influencer voice after another get it wrong, and then come up with self indulgent apologies, which really did not serve their audiences.

Everyone from mayors and politicians to influencers to business voices and large brands messed up their "crisis messaging." Some were being really quiet; conspicuously quiet for the times. Or they were taking a misstep and then being defensive about walking it back

While highly cliched, the idea of values is the reason why Nike keeps coming up repeatedly in the news. hey really, really, REALLY subscribe



to a set of values. At least in their communication.

This is not a statement hidden in a dusty powerpoint somewhere. Hopefully your values are something your brand, however big or small, is living and breathing in the way you operate.

That spirit of values becomes the radar that guides you as you decide your brand's alignment with the state of the world.

And if your company's values have nothing beyond commercial words, then rethink that. Now's the time. People align with brands that believe in the things they believe in.

During Blackout Tuesday, we saw a bunch of lifestyle and food influencers whose entire brand was already skewed in a certain direction - changing that direction suddenly. Of course that is going to get you backlash. Let's preface this by saying people mean well, we get that. But the execution is nine tenths of the challenge. You have got to be authentic.

You know some iconic brands are obviously killing it. The aforementioned Nikes of the world have always taken a stand; they stand for their brand values and they made an early video supporting the movement that simply said "don't do it". They took their "just do it" tagline and subverted it. Don't do it. Don't ignore this. Don't pretend we don't have a problem. Brilliant.

It's one thing to look at them on YouTube and say, 'Well done, Nike.' But it's another thing to ask what does this mean for each of us? How can we, while not a company as mammoth as Nike, deliver on-point messaging in times of crisis.

Dust off your values.

And ask what your brand voice will be, post pandemic?

Are you brave and on the frontlines?  
Are you reflective and thoughtful?

Brand voice is one of those jargon'y terms, an often overused, clichéd sounding idea.

All it's about is this: Determine stand for, and how you will articulate that, across all your channels.  
And it doesn't have to be absolute.  
Things evolve.  
So finding that brand voice is worth spending time on.

#### **NUMBER FOUR - KEY MESSAGING; AKA THE ANSWER IS ALWAYS 3 THINGS.**

On to another cliched idea. The elevator pitch. The reason it exists is so you're able to deliver the essence of the subject (usually about



you and your business) quickly and succinctly. But equally important is establishing a longer form, clear story about your company, for those in depth discussions around voice and tone.

Develop your key messaging. Re-message as needed for the times. Break it down for your department.

For yourself.

For each specific pillar of your work.

Then, determine your own unique value proposition. Fine-tune and focus on what you know, and ditch the rest.

Be inspired by ideas from other folks who are killing this thought leadership shizz. Don't steal, because stealing's for d!cks. But research what's working for others, and then use that information to craft your own thought leadership ladder

We're not the first goddamn people to record a marketing podcast – but we'd put money on us being the first to do it at 4AM in our PJs and facemasks (sometimes with wine!) 🍷 asking people what keeps them up at night.

Just remember, key messaging is not a 20 page manifesto. It's short, and conveys, ummm, the key messages.

Really good key messages are those that answer people's questions about who you are and why you are speaking in the moment, without seeming contrived. Further, really really good key messages are ones in which no matter what the question, you can guide people back to your opinion on a few key things. Also known as stellar thought leadership articulation.

## **NUMBER FIVE - PERSONALITY, PITCH, PLACEMENT - LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER**

So speaking of wine swilling podcasters. Might we introduce the idea of personality? Nothing cuts clutter like personality. You can have the best values and \$\$\$ messaging in the world, a singing-dancing website, a superb product line up, and still - potentially - no one will care. Unless you have personality.

Nothing cuts clutter quite like attitude.

People will begin to sit up and take notice of you. People will begin to find YOU online when they're searching. People will know what to expect from you because you have a set voice and tone, a defined personality, and an information-centre (hint: your brain!) that is 100% reliable and trusted.

Key point alert here: Don't forget the SEO (search engine optimization) of this. If you're not being smart about tagging and linking the right shizz, God Google can't help you. So if left brain discipline is not your thing, surround yourself with an SEO team. We can help.

Now, throw that sh!t at the metaphorical wall. Establish your expertise by PUBLISHING the h3ll out of yourself first.

### **Step 1: Create a robust calendar.**

And if you intend to make any impact you need to publish daily. Sorry! But don't despair. Read on. We have ideas.

### **Step 2: Think big!**

Don't just stick to your own blog (if you don't have one, my dudes, fix that!). The content certainly doesn't have to be, and shouldn't always be, yours. Use social media to share on-point curated content and connect with influencers, and use those connections to nab guest publishing opportunities.

Start a video series. Record a podcast. Create Facebook stories. Use Instagram, TikTok and other social networks to spread your decidedly NOT OILY knowledge! 🍷🍷🍷 Play with visual content. Depending on budgets this can be low key or high end. Everything counts. Focus on continuous improvement starting from where YOU are now.

### **Step 3: Be patient**

It's an organic process (though you can play with inorganic ad-campaigns if you're confident in those abilities and are ready to commit to 3-6 months), but they will come. And when they do...don't be a d!ck-head.

SERIOUSLY THOUGH!

Many so-called “thought leaders” out there are actually not very nice people. It’s like their heads and their sense of self-importance grew along with their follower counts. It’s really exhausting to be a cr@p person.



So don't do it. Refer to the start of this report. Have b@lls, don't be d!ck.

Share what you know and help others who are just on the way up. Use your authenticity and the trust you've built to be a ZERO BULLSH!T person (there should be a yearly award for that! 🏆🏆🏆🏆🏆).

That's WAYYYY too Much Work, you say?

Do you need to be seen as a thought leader in your field? We guess not.

But [consider these Edelman stats](#) (out of 1,200 respondents):

58 percent read one or more hours of thought leadership  
60 percent of decision-makers said thought leadership convinced them to buy a product or service they weren't previously considering  
And 55 percent said they use thought leadership to vet organizations they may hire (DING DING DING!!!)

Yes, it's a lot of work. But we're not a BS'ers. We've done all of the above and more and have landed some incredible clients because of it. And it's more important than ever in lovely pandemic times.

So, get your fine self primed for thought leadership big time. And, if you feel a bit overwhelmed by podcasts and blog posts and videos (Oh my!) then reach out! We'd be happy to help.

#### **Step 4: Pitch others**

Once you've built your house, invite others to it. It may be a blog, a podcast, a video series. Invite guests. These guests, if any good (and not homeless) are likely to have properties of their own. They'll likely invite you to their house. (If they don't, either because they are a d!ck, or because they are overwhelmed, or because they delegated so deep that they don't know they've been dining out without paying bills, remind them!)

Build a solid pitch. You'll need a 'keynote'. Go back to the key message and elevator pitch part of this, if you don't remember. Keep it short, be interesting, and focus on how you help other people's audi-

ences.

## **Step 5: Feed your body of work**

This is where the flywheel begins to gain momentum. It's less elbow grease and more rotating on its own. Well done!

Don't forget to update not just your material but to link to, shout out, and gain leverage from your appearances on other people's content.

If you're only blasting off by yourself in a room, and not presenting other perspectives or letting other people speak, OR exposing yourself to new audiences and letting your audiences cross pollinate, you're likely a broadcast-only BLOWHARD. Don't be that guy.

And, as we mentioned above, we can't stress highly enough the value of a 'new age media page'. A space in your corner of the interwebs where you're establishing 'proof of concept' and letting people know you have 'social cred'.

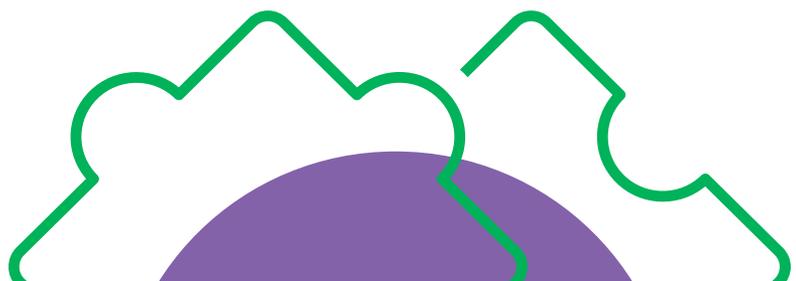
## **NUMBER SIX - HOLD YOUR NUMBERS CLOSE AND YOUR INSIGHTS CLOSER**

Love pointless metrics slide decks? Yeah, nobody does.

Ask for insights.

Whatever level of metrics you're looking at and whomever is presenting them to you, ask what they mean. In those reams of numbers lie nuggets of logical sense. But nobody will find them if you're dizzy from the graphs. Spend the time to figure out what you're measuring and how you know things are working.

Once you see some trends, you'll be able to do the highly obvious thing. More of what works, and less of what doesn't.



Typically, in a thought leadership measurement model, the following can be said to be true:

Ditch the vanity metrics. While there's no denying the value of a metric to show you continue to grow your base, we all need to be measuring much more than that.

Figure out your 'customer journey map' - that's mumbo jumbo for: who is your customer, how do they think, and what will make them come down the rabbit hole with you?

Switch to leading indicators over lagging indicators for measurement.

"A leading indicator looks forward at future outcomes and events. A lagging indicator looks back at whether the intended result was achieved."

"A financial indicator like revenue, for example, is a lagging indicator, in that it tells you about what has already happened. Strictly speaking, last year's revenue doesn't predict future revenue (although it has been used to do just that by many businesses in the past). But an indicator like customer satisfaction does point to future revenue – because satisfied customers are more likely to repurchase and tell their friends about your company. Customer satisfaction, therefore, is a leading indicator."

Here are some ways to practice that in the email marketing space.

Think about a top 5 list of people (yes actual people on your list) that you want to know have opened your email (put them on a special list) Agree on a logical minimum open rate on emails. (Anything less than 30% needs reevaluating. And if your list is small, that needs to be 40-50%. (#HumbleBrag - we have got 100% and 77% as our 2 highest open rates.)

Tap into the review culture to work the algorithms. Nothing works quite as well as a peer endorsement.

## **Part 2 - How to fix it when shit hits the fan**

Ok the hard work is up top. Putting in place a smart way to sustainably build, measure and add to your thought leadership is key.

But what if you don't have that flywheel yet?

It's going to take time to build for sure, though a small, "just getting started " presence is better than no presence at all. Start somewhere. Then keep going. Grandiosity is optional.

Consider that you're in the middle of a crisis NOW.

Or maybe you said something on social media that people piled onto.

Maybe you release your organization-wide pride campaign on Monday - just after the announcement of Blackout Tuesday.

There is backlash.

You dealt with it.

But you're scared.

And quiet.

And stressed.

You feel "damned if you do, and damned if you don't"

We get it. The socio-political waters run deep, and mistakes happen. But it's not the end of the world!



## STEP ONE: STOP AND RATIONALIZE

When sh\*t hits the fan, stop! The first thing to do is acknowledge the problem, whatever the crisis.

It doesn't have to be this particular moment. It doesn't have to be specific to COVID-19, or Black Lives Matter. Other things could happen.

Trump could be removed.

Trump could be re-elected.

Trump could shut down the elections.

(Ok we're done with the Trump ones. But extrapolate for your own amusement. It's a fun rabbit hole. Promise!)

It could be specific to your business or industry.

It could be social.

It could be the things your customers value.

For example again, the Blackout Tuesday campaign. While the general criticism of the campaign is that it's not enough – it's "[activism for non-activists](#)," we don't agree.

It's easy to call it politically-correct woke'ism or woke-washing, but just like corporate social responsibility can be called greenwashing, if used correctly, it can drive real, meaningful change.

By saying nothing around large issues, or even rushing out with statements of support, brands can be perceived to be agreeing with the status quo, or mouthing simple platitudes.

It's the aftermath of Covid-19, aka post pandemic times. (It's like AD and BC, isn't it? It'll forever be called pre-pandemic and post-pandemic, you mark our words) The focus these days seems to have shifted (and rightly so!) is to social issues. If almost a third of all consumers are buying brands whose social and political values mirror their own, we need to put '[purpose over profit](#)'. So think about that when you plan your crisis response.

Whatever your crisis is, first of all, acknowledge that something's dif-

ferent or out of sync; atypical, if you will.

If you keep your head down and continue on with your promotions and your planned automation as usual - that's not acknowledgement. People will see that you're in a totally different dimension than everyone else right now. That's not a good thing.

A bunch of digital people out there, the big voices, make it their mission to name and shame the tone deaf brands. It's merciless.

Don't be that brand.

You don't have to know the answer instantly. And even if you do, especially in the case of large enterprises, it's not always easy to mobilize in a few hours/days.

It's usually the smaller, more agile organizations that get it right more often than not. The larger organizations do have the weight of multiple processes, sign-offs, and compliance issues they have to deal with.

We don't mean to oversimplify the issue at hand, but the solution is to focus.

Focus on what's important. Instead of rushing to get your new and improved messaging approved, get the shutdown of your automated marketing approved, while you're working on getting the messaging cleared.

## **STEP TWO: RE-MESSAGE**

Once you've paused and considered, think what you want to say in this moment. And making one corporate declaration doesn't count as remessaging.

Go over all your live campaigns with a microscope. That's where you're likely to miss something.

For example, old copy may need to be reviewed. (Maybe you use non-inclusive language, or you address things as Ms/Mr/Mrs by default?)

Maybe your images need to be looked at for relevance and timeliness. (Maybe all 43 of the images in your ebook are straight, white people?)

Maybe what you need is simply a 50 word message up at the top, showing you're being sensitive to the fact that you're in a crisis, whatever it's make-up.

Nobody wants you to fix the world's problems. They just want to know that you're not tone deaf and completely unaware of their experience.

### **STEP THREE: RALLY THE TROOPS**

We cannot stress enough the value of a team when it comes to crisis communication. Response to crisis can rarely be one person's job. Most brands obviously have some type of communication team. Now is when you lean on them. Get proactive with auditing and questions and involve them in the decision making.

If your internal team or existing comms arrangements don't involve crisis expertise, it's certainly worth seeking that out.

### **STEP FOUR: HAVE A BACKUP PLAN AND PRACTICE A GOOD APOLOGY**

Even with the best laid plans, things can go wrong. And when things go wrong, how do you default? A lot can be learned about brands from how they deal with things when sh\*t has hit the fan.

Early in your crisis response planning, hopefully you played out some scenarios. If this, then that. If that, then this. Agree which scenarios will be your backups, and ensure they're used if required. .

Also, learn the value of a good apology.

A good apology is 2 words. "I'm sorry."

You'll be tempted to to add 'but' or 'and' and explain yourself. Just don't.

For several years, we wrote apology letters for large financial institutions. To let customers know there had been 'an error in (their) account' and that it would be fixed post-haste. The big improvement we brought to these apology letters was to make them...an apology letter! To say sorry, point to glitchy technology, say when it would be fixed, and STOP. Many letters, when we found them, had lots of compliance-driven, a\$\$ cover-ey wording, and far too much descriptive and repetitive language. Which meant people would reply and ask lots of questions, or want to talk to someone. A waste of time.

## **STEP FIVE: LET YOUR VALUES TRULY GUIDE YOU**

And finally, this is highly cliched, but the idea of values, that we talked about above, is an important one.

The words that you put out in your material. on your channels: that is your brand voice. That can't be an impromptu thing.

Values don't just live in a dusty slide deck, reinforced by some obscure colour in your logo.

They are living, breathing things in post pandemic times and beyond.

If you talk about growth and customer experience, and if you're cutting your staff by 30% and it's taking customers an hour on hold to reach you, for example, that is no longer something the 2020 customer is forgiving of.

Live your values.

So there you go.

How to build a flywheel in treacherous marketing times, why it's so important that you do, and how to clean up the crap that will inevitably hit the fan. You're all set to go!

If you'd like to chat some more about crisis communications, and how to build a consistent, intelligent, crisis-proof digital voice for your brand, [book here](#).

