

Advertisers will benefit from continued use of trusted media

 By [Josephine Buys](#)

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Media has a key role to play in shaping how we think and act during these uncertain times. South Africans are seeking out trusted, reliable sources of news and information, yet publishers across the board are suffering catastrophic losses of revenue as many advertisers reduce, pause or even stop advertising during lockdown.



Photo by Andrea Placquadro from [Pexels](#).

But some market-leading, global brands are also bucking the trend. For instance, *Marketing Week* reports that P&G has doubled down on its marketing so that it “moves forward not backward”. P&G is using this opportunity to remind consumers of its brands and their benefits, rather than cutting back on marketing spend.



Innovating during the #Covid-19 pandemic

David Lansanah and Nicki Morley, Kantar 16 Apr 2020



Like many other companies, newsrooms and publishers are however forced to cut staff and salaries, while a high percentage of publications are pivoting further to digital models as the current Covid-19 crisis exacerbates long-term declining print circulation figures.

It's a perfect storm in the media world.

"Back us not block us"

Yet, according to a recent Bloomberg article: “fortunately traditional media now has a chance to rebuild its reputation and even augment its essential role in democratic societies”. The fate of many media companies clearly depends on how well they perform their duty to inform accurately and honestly. But that's not good enough on its own. They also need to convince marketers and their agencies to continue utilising their inherent power to reach valuable consumers who read, whether online or still in print.

Widespread reports confirm topics such as 'crisis', 'Covid-19' and 'coronavirus' have been racing to the top of digital advertiser block-lists, potentially stripping news companies of desperately needed revenue from programmatic (automated) advertising placement on their digital platforms. This is done to prevent spam and the spread of falsehoods, but if implemented indiscriminately, it can also counteract legitimate connections with a growing digital news audience.

IAB Australia has encouraged "all advertisers to take advantage of their ability to control with precision where their ads appear and to embrace the opportunity to support the ongoing production of news and journalism in these uncertain times", with media owners appealing to marketers and advertisers to "back us not block us".

Attention to advertising higher

Eye-tracking market researcher Lumen reports that attention to advertising is even higher during this time and indicates "an increase in attention to advertising is driven in part by increased engagement with articles and social media posts concerning coronavirus". This provides further proof that advertising remains a potent force despite the current crisis. Advertisers should not fear to have their ads appear next to news stories dealing with Covid-19.

In its look at past experience Campaign UK notes companies that thrived after past recessions "were those that kept communicating with consumers through the downturn, took a more active posture, focused on through-cycle interventions and acted with urgency". Given that we are likely in the midst of a generation-defining event that will influence how consumers behave for years to come, marketing leaders must consider how to re-architect current marketing models, approaches and tools to get ready for the turnaround.

In its look at the IPA Bellwether Report Q1 2020 that sees marketing budgets plummeting at the fastest rate since the global financial crisis of 2009, Warc cautions:

"When recession looms it is understandable if businesses try and shore up short-term profits by cutting variable expenditure, such as advertising. However, as our evidence from past downturns shows, unless companies are saving cash simply to survive, or because they can no longer supply advertised services, cutting ad budgets – relative to competitor spend – is a high-risk strategy."

Findings in an April 2020 McKinsey & Co report on adapting customer experience (CX) in the time of coronavirus, show that: "Particularly in times of crisis, a customer's interaction with a company can trigger an immediate and lingering effect on his or her sense of trust and loyalty. As millions are furloughed and retreat into isolation, a primary barometer of their CX will be how the businesses they frequent and depend upon to deliver experiences and service that meets their new needs with empathy, care and concern."

Closer to home, advertising agency M&C Saatchi's recent webinar 2020 2.0 Back to the 'new' normal, shared compelling insights into how brands can stay relevant with clear purpose, enriching experiences and tangible value with an overarching message that brands that show up to help during the pandemic are the ones consumers will continue to want to engage with and support post lockdown when forced isolation fades from view.



A day in the lockdown life of M&C Saatchi Abel's Robert Grace

Jessica Tennant 17 Apr 2020



This includes brands that work hard to deliver news and reporting that is verifiable and trusted, whether the news of the day is depressing or uplifting. News is, after all, trusted to inform and engage.

Fran Luckin is the COO of another leading agency, Grey Africa. She was the first South African female jury president of the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity (Cannes 2017) and says in her "Day in the lockdown life" for industry website *Bizcommunity*: "People are confined to their houses, but they still need and want to be entertained, to be given information that can help them, be reassured and encouraged."



A day in the lockdown life of Grey Africa CCO Fran Luckin

Jessica Tennant 14 Apr 2020



South African publishers of news and magazine brands are serving these important human needs every day. A recent Publisher Research Council (PRC) desk research study clearly shows exponential growth in online usage as measured by unique browsers, since March 2020.

Advertisers can trust credible media brands

While printed publication platforms have declined during the rapidly changing environment, millions of readers are still accessing their valuable and trustworthy news and information online. On the digital platforms of credible media brands, consumers find the same inspiration, entertainment and, despite possible CV19 fatigue, trusted, credible news as they would find in these same media brands' printed products.

What all this means is that advertisers will find the valuable consumers they need to reach on the trusted and honest platforms of credible media brands. In print and online.

In physical life and in our increasingly digital lives, advertisers can, therefore, trust credible media brands to continue delivering news, information and entertainment to readers, while at the same time providing access to their high value, reading consumers for advertisers to reach.

ABOUT JOSEPHINE BUYS

Josephine Buys is CEO of The Publisher Research Council (PRC).

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