



Hella

New Behaviors

The future of brand building

May 2020



Executive Summary

Welcome to our New Behaviors report

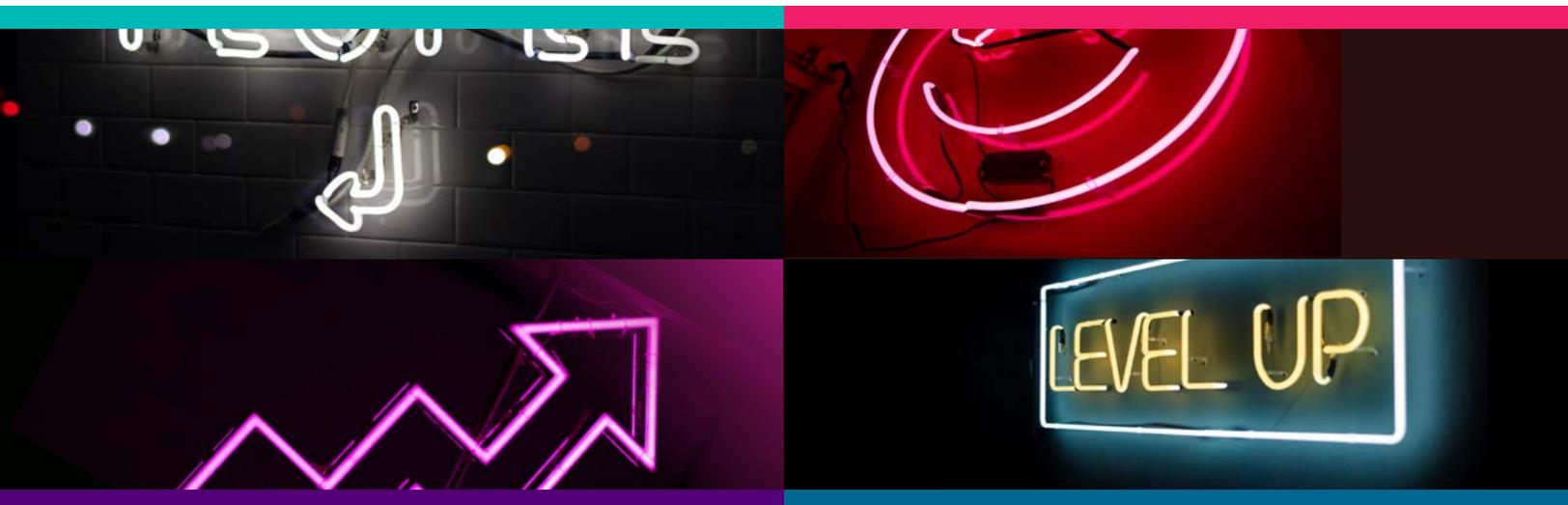
The world has been indelibly altered by COVID-19. New behaviors from consumers and audiences will logically require new behaviors from businesses and brands. Our primary objective for this report was to think beyond the immediate trauma of this pandemic. We devised long-term solutions based on brand building blocks and case studies of some of the biggest brands. While it may feel like a crystal ball exercise, we think of this report as informed anticipation, helping you not through the immediate weeks, but rather the next few years.

We work with some fantastic people, the LRW Group. Through this network, we are able to leverage world-class research. They got the ball rolling with their New Demand framework and four quadrants of *Adapt*, *Disrupt*, *Recover*, and *Reimagine* (more about that on the next page) and have been instrumental partners throughout the conception, production, and publication of this report.

We also work with some amazing clients. Throughout the LRW Group and Salt's 20 year history, we've had the pleasure of working with some of the most influential brands across every category imaginable. We reached out to them for their thoughts and strategy in reacting to COVID-19. Their input was invaluable, and we want to thank them all for their continued partnership and collaboration.

At the end of this report, we hope you gain plenty of inspiration, some lessons of what to do (or not to do), and confidence - confidence that you know how to navigate these tumultuous times. This is, of course, an ever-evolving situation and, as we've all been made painfully aware, everything can change at the drop of a hat.

We here at Salt Branding like to think that by preparing and focusing on the essentials of your brand, you can not only survive COVID-19, but thrive in the world that comes after.



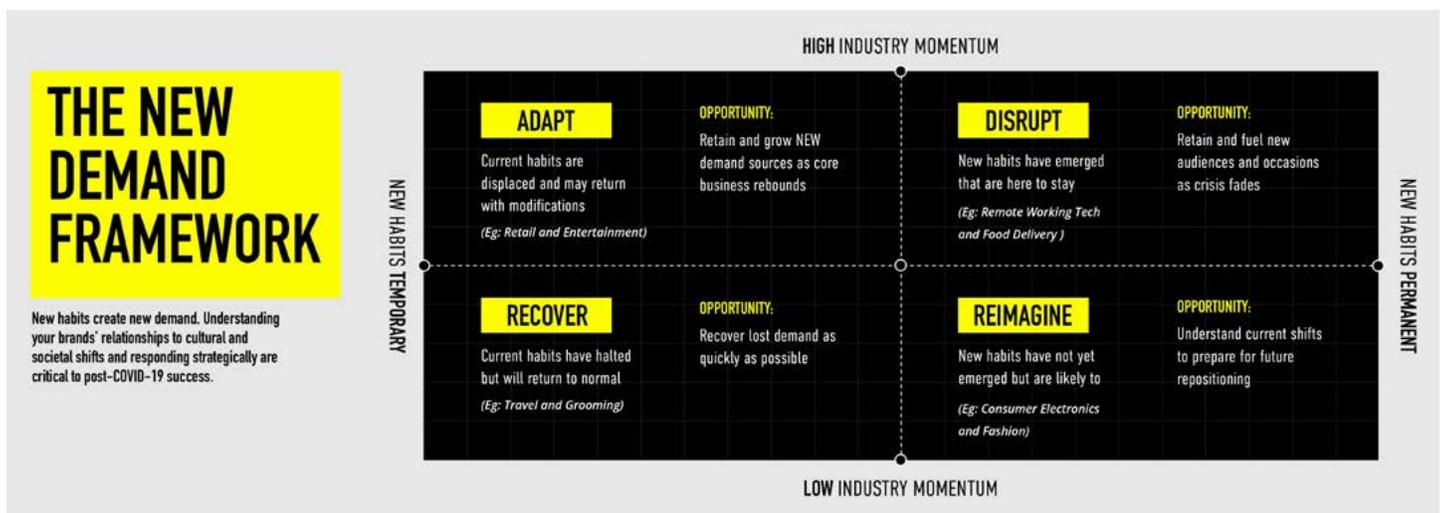
Methodology

In addition to our own research, the observations and recommendations you'll find in this report were organized based on two parts: LRW Group's New Demand framework and survey answers from our many clients and contacts.

The New Demand

The New Demand framework originated within the LRW Group and is focused on *consumer habits*. It is built around two tensions: the *momentum* with which new habits are impacting industries (slow to adopt vs. quick to adopt) and the *permanence* of the habits (temporary vs. here to stay). These tensions create four different quadrants. The New Demand framework was developed with decades of academic research and is really great at explaining *what* is happening in a category. This report goes into more depth and provides answers to the question: what do you do now?

These four quadrants (*Adapt*, *Disrupt*, *Recover*, and *Reimagine*) each have their own set of problems.



We explored, from a branding perspective, these challenges. We've labelled them *scenario groups*. Each scenario has a problem, an action, an example demonstrated through an existing brand, and then a future section. This is where we applied our own unique strategic thinking to push the envelope, giving you the tools you need to navigate beyond the immediate future.

Survey

Conducted in April, the survey covered topics from the current impact of COVID-19 to the future of their brand. The responses have been anonymized. Respondents included categories like:

- Technology
- Healthcare
- Entertainment
- Consumer Goods
- Real Estate
- Transportation
- Education
- Others



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Adapt

Embracing the situation

“Operationally, businesses are going to have to do things differently and their brand needs to reflect that.”

David Neugebauer, Salt Branding

Adapt

Current habits are displaced and may return with modifications
(Eg: Retail and Entertainment)

Opportunity:
Retain and grow NEW demand sources as core business rebounds

How to know when to Adapt

Many brands find themselves in this scenario, the world has dramatically changed and you have to pivot. For brands like Home Depot and The Gap in retail, Disney or NBCUniversal in entertainment, or Resy and MailChimp in SaaS categories, these adaptations are key to surviving.

This part of the framework is best thought of as temporary habit changes that may return to normal, and these changes are being adopted *quickly*. If your business has been impacted, but not completely halted, then you're in an *Adapt* scenario.

It's a bucket full of uncertainty and the first course of action has been triage. Now, after months of quarantining for many Americans, the dust is settling and a new reality is emerging. Options are expanding.

Over **90%** of brands we talked to say they've been directly impacted and need to make changes.

Scenario 1

Parts of your business are struggling, while others have gained



For some Adapters, parts of your business have truly suffered. But other parts of your business have actually been doing better than before COVID-19. It can be a nice problem to have, but the concern is one of sustainability. How reliable is this new business model? And will this pivot permanently shut out a part of the business that was previously vital to your brand?

Problem: Your traditional avenues are closed and you need to get your products or services to your audiences.

Action: Seek out other avenues that maintain a semblance of the old reality, like digital or delivery options.

Example: McDonald's same-store sales have declined by [20% in April \(25% in March\)](#). This is because, in large part, they've shut down all dine-in options, as well as halted all revamp projects across the country (and most of the world). This has had a severe impact on their revenue. But their drive-thru business is booming, now accounting for [90% of sales \(previously only two thirds\)](#).

In addition, they've expanded delivery partnerships. By focusing on how to increase the ways their products are available, McDonald's has capitalized on the situation in a way that doesn't tie them down when the world returns to a version of normal.

Future: The question for the future becomes, of course, how far McDonald's should go with delivery. Right now they're using 3rd parties, but in the future do they commit to creating their own delivery service? Do they do away completely with dine-in options and innovate further on drive-thru experiences?



How far can McDonald's take their brand promise of convenience?

Scenario 2

Your business is impacted by other industries



You may not need to adapt because your business isn't being directly affected. Instead, the other industries or companies you rely on are being heavily impacted. And that ripple effect may be coming, though the size and timing of that wave is unclear. So you're finding yourself having to change based on these outside parties. You might be a service brand that works with restaurants or travel brands. Or your logistical infrastructure is being heavily impacted. You're hurting because they're hurting, but it might feel like you have even less ability to create or implement a solution.

"It will be the ecosystem of struggling partners that will impact [our] business most, so we are not immune and do need to adjust areas of focus."

New Behaviors Research, April 2020

Problem: Impacts to third party partners mean your products and services aren't getting out there.

Action: This is where strong brand building blocks come in handy. If you have a solid brand purpose, then you're well-positioned to show it in a new way. Mine your brand purpose to expand beyond previous engagements, creating new relationships with your audiences.

Example: Zappos' sales might be down because people may not need shoes as much (though slippers and sweatpants are in high demand). But shipping delays are absolutely affecting business, especially customer satisfaction. Zappos' brand purpose isn't to deliver shoes, it's to deliver truly exceptional customer service. So they manifested that purpose through their [Customer Service for Anything](#).

Literally, anything. Do you want to chat to someone about Tiger King? They have a number for you to call. Wondering if your grocery store has any flour (spoiler alert: they don't)? You can call them for that too. Zappos is taking action for the things it actually can control and marketing itself in a genuine way.

Future: For Zappos, might the future look even less product-centric and more experience-centric? What if the infrastructure system becomes even more backed up? Will that force Zappos to really hone their brand purpose to a laser-sharp focus on doing one thing right (scaling back their product to a limited selection whose delivery date they can guarantee) or will they expand it out (regardless of the product, exceptional customer service comes first)? Could Zappos make exceptional customer service a product?

Scenario 3

Some anticipated changes have arrived early



You've maybe predicted that 10 years into the future, some core part of your business will change. Consumer habits will go more digital, perhaps. You had ideas about what this future world would look like, but that was so far off on the horizon. Now that hypothetical future has arrived in full-force and you're caught off guard, unprepared. Industries like education, healthcare, and entertainment were already moving towards digital offerings, but many brands weren't ready to transition overnight. A core reason was that consumer behavior hadn't completely changed. But now it has, due to quarantining and shelter-in-place orders. If this is you, then you're faced with a dilemma: how temporary are these changes?

"COVID-19 has accelerated our full move to digital."

New Behaviors Research, April 2020

Problem: Behaviors have changed, but you're not sure how fully you should adapt for this new situation.

Action: Look for options that don't require a long-term commitment, that you can walk back if need be.

Example: In its first week of its digital-only release, *Trolls World Tour* [made more money](#) than its predecessor, *Trolls*, did in three weeks. That is...insane. Contrary to what many studios have done, NBCUniversal decided to not postpone the release. Instead they leaned into digital rentals and charged \$19.99. They gambled on parents dying for some new forms of entertainment and on the rising trend of video-on-demand. And it was obviously a great success. They then announced that, going forward, they will always release new films in both theaters **and** on streaming. Normally it would put them with the **Disrupters** (our second group of scenarios). Unfortunately, NBCUniversal forgot about another audience: theaters. After making those comments, NBCUniversal was met with a categorical banning from many theater chains. For example, [AMC has claimed](#) these plans would be a violation of "windowing" practices where theaters have exclusive rights to exhibit films before the distributor uses other formats (home video, video-on-demand, etc.). While it may be too early to tell the full implications of this, [NBCUniversal's attempt to walk back their comments](#) show how **Adapters** need to consider this situation as very much temporary.

Future: Has NBCUniversal gone too far? Have they upset theater chains too much? Theatrical runs have been the traditional method for a film to make money and theater chains banning NBCUniversal could have disastrous effects. Or is NBCUniversal onto something? Have they accurately predicted that audiences are ready for new releases at home? And why stop at the films themselves. Will other habits around the traditional theatrical experience adapt for a remote world?

NBCUniversal

Are **100+** years of movie theater behaviors coming to an end?

Adapt: Summary



Adapting is a scary bucket of scenarios precisely because change is hard. But change needn't be unknowable. Whether it's finding alternative versions to make your products and services available or embracing changing attitudes you thought were far off in the future, the driving force should always be your brand. Which actions speak true to your brand purpose and mission?

Instead of adapting your brand, use your brand purpose and mission to inform and guide your adaptations. Temporary messaging can help to build on your existing brand platform instead of completely abandoning it. No matter what form the change takes, *Adapters* should be able to go from just surviving the pandemic to thriving in it, before merging these new habits back with their pre-COVID ways of business.

Disrupt

Capitalizing on long-term change

“Consumers are changing faster than brands.”

Annie Hooper, Salt Branding

Disrupt

New habits have emerged that are here to stay

(Eg: Remote Working Tech & Food Delivery)

Opportunity:

Retain and fuel new audiences and occasions as crisis fades

How to know when to Disrupt

This quadrant of the New Demand framework is characterized by the speed with which industries and audiences have adopted new behaviors. These new attitudes and habits are very unlikely to go away anytime within the next couple of years. Short of a vaccine arriving tomorrow, these new behaviors are likely to become an ingrained part of life and business.

Brands in this group were well-prepared for a world of quarantine and physical distancing. This might be those in remote tech, like Zoom and Microsoft, or food delivery, like DoorDash and Uber Eats. Today, they're key to providing the only form of sanity people can get. They're actively building on the disruption to define the new status quo. The quandary for those in a *Disrupt* scenario is how to keep that momentum.

Scenario 1

You're struggling to keep up with the new demand



Maybe your brand provides an essential service. Maybe you're a remote working tech brand. Perhaps you're a yeast brand and amateur bakers are flooding your inbox. No matter which one, if you're a *Disrupter* then you're experiencing demand like never before. But you may not be able to match the demand. This is completely understandable; we are in a global pandemic after all. But how can you meet the rising requests?

Problem: There's too much demand and you physically can't keep up.

Action: Collaborating with other brands can help carry the load. It's a nice way to spread wealth, prevent any shortcomings, and aligns nicely with the current cultural narrative of togetherness. The key to success is ensuring that brand values are similar. A mutually beneficial relationship *and* mutually aligned values generate enduring goodwill.

Example: DoorDash is one of the biggest operators in food delivery, having made a name for themselves with a brand promise of impossibilities delivered. Now, they are in more demand than ever. People want their goods and they want them now. But many restaurants are closing, with nearly [one in five predicted to close permanently](#). In addition, many are claiming delivery companies [exploit vulnerable restaurants](#) with exorbitant delivery fees. This could mean fewer restaurants for DoorDash to source from, and those that are around may refuse to use their service. Fortunately, [DoorDash has found a convenient answer](#) in 7-Eleven, Wawa, Circle-K, and others. In short, convenience stores. On a regular day, convenience stores are designed to have most everything you need. In a pandemic? They are mythical oases, dangerous to reach but full of everything you desire.

So DoorDash capitalized on a growth opportunity and expanded its proposition to include “essential options,” sourced by national and local convenience stores.

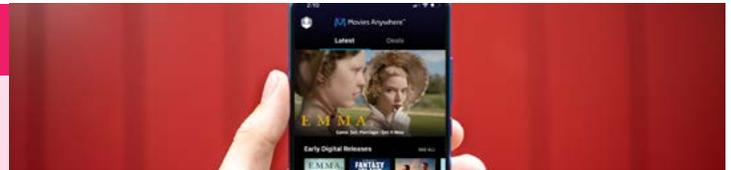
By continuing to deliver the impossible, DoorDash maintains their momentum and guarantees their name stays top of mind. And convenience stores remain convenient.



Future: With shelter-in-place orders, lingering fears of large crowds, and an exultation in easy use, delivery habits will become more entrenched. Will home delivery push categories like medicine and groceries to return to a 1940s vision of home visits and milk deliveries? How will smaller companies without larger infrastructure keep up with bigger competitors? Will the “gig economy” of drivers turn into a full-fledged workforce, union and all? How will autonomous vehicles affect that? Will a delivery option become a necessity and not the perk it is today? The only certainty is that COVID-19 has brought delivery to our front doors in a big way.

Scenario 2

The spotlight now shines more brightly on you and others like you



Thanks to the massive ways in which our lives have been upended, the ratio between power players and upstarts in many categories has shifted. Established brands who weren't well positioned for this current state are now being replaced by **Disrupters**. Whereas these newer brands, or alternatives to the mainstream options, used to have a much smaller piece of the pie, they now have a massive chunk and need to share it with other brands in their position. The forthcoming issue is not how to create more pie (there is, after all, a flour shortage) – it's how to get a bigger slice.

Problem: You want to differentiate yourself when the competition is more magnified than ever.

Action: If everyone is essentially doing the same, focus on doing it in a different way. Use your brand values to guide a distinct and differentiated user experience. Ensure that whatever you create springs from what you believe and say about yourself. Walk the walk, don't just talk the talk.

Example: With the decline of cable and the near extinction of movie theaters, streaming services were already becoming more commonplace. Yet they still weren't the default. The current increase in time at home has changed that. “Adoption of streaming is at a tipping point. Linear cable may not be the first option anymore. The economics are changing.” (*New Behaviors Research*, April 2020). And competition has just gone up a notch. With top players already synonymous with streaming (Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video), private studios launching their own platforms (Apple TV, Disney+), and cable companies entering the fray (Peacock, HBO Max), it's fiercer and more concentrated than ever before. How to stand out? The first step is to develop a killer user experience that combines the best of streaming habits with your brand values. Take, for example, Movies Anywhere. As a cloud-based digital locker, they're in a stream-adjacent category and are the movie lover's dream. The only thing cinephiles love more than watching films is sharing films, passing them along and spreading their enthusiasm. So Movies Anywhere launched [Screen Pass](#), a new feature where users can share

up to three films from their library a month. It is a unique experience in the category that stays true to the brand proposition. It gives movie lovers more of what they want.

Your brand values should also lead in the creation of your content. And that's where Netflix and Hulu currently shine. Their brand positionings prioritize quantity over quality, but only just. They have tons of content, and most of it is pretty decent. Almost every original show becomes a cultural touchstone. But the studio streaming services have an edge in that their brand can act as a guarantor of their quality. The content of Disney+, for example, is held in high regards in large part thanks to the Disney brand. HBO Max will have the prestige television halo effect from the groundwork laid by HBO's premium content (though how it will differ from HBO Now remains to be seen). We're seeing content drive adoption and soon people will have more than the [current average of 3.4 streaming services](#). Bundle packages and streamlined access to lots of content is going to be the next wave of streaming services. And so, like in many other categories, all roads seem to point to Amazon.

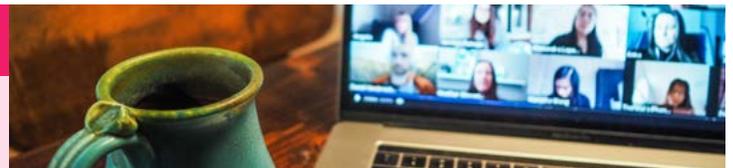


With their ability to add streaming channels à la carte, Amazon Prime Video is continuing to deliver on Amazon's brand promise to provide Earth's largest selection and is clearly setting itself up to become the streaming option with the most choices.

Future: As we look ahead, will the world of streaming come full-circle and reflect the diversity of cable television? Will viewers have the patience, and the bandwidth, for all these services? And what happens to streaming and production-related services when new content doesn't come out? Will we soon be bingeing a teen COVID-19 comedy filmed in isolation? The thread throughout all these questions is now that you're on top, how do you stay there?

Scenario 3

You want to win back trust



No one could have been fully prepared for this pandemic. Even if your products or services are in high demand, you've had to adjust. And maybe that adjustment wasn't enough. Maybe you've let some audiences down during this very stressful time. And now you want to address it. First of all, kudos to you. Many want to avoid owning up to their faults. You've decided to reach out and are now wondering how to do so in an empathetic, authentic way that mitigates any harm to your brand and even builds a richer engagement with your audiences.

Problem: You need to communicate and apologize for any delays, disruptions, or other inconveniences.

Action: Humanizing your brand and internal team is a great way to communicate transparently and empathetically. Because chances are, your audiences are people with jobs who are themselves

working under stressful situations. Emphasize the human cost and appreciate the human effort of your own team so that audiences can connect on an emotional level. The first step? Check in on your brand voice. Is it authentic, personal, realistic? If so, it can go miles towards a resonating message and build deep loyalty.

Example: COVID-19 has brought Zoom to people around the world in a whole new way. In the last four months, [daily participants skyrocketed](#) from 10 million to 200 million. Not surprisingly, they've come across some performance issues, most notably security concerns. Instead of ignoring criticisms, Zoom decided to address the issues head on. They obviously fixed the issues, but they didn't stop there. Their CEO, Eric S. Yuan, issued [an apology and detailed plan](#) for how they're going to fix the problems. But he also illustrated how Zoom got into this situation in the first place and announced a freeze on future features, dedicating his teams solely to resolving current issues. What strikes a different chord here is not the actions, but the tone. It isn't trying too hard to be witty or overly emotional. Zoom is a tech company run by people and the letter sounds like a person...who happens to work in tech. Every blog post and tutorial strikes the same balance of human and professional, true to this brand's personality and tone of voice. Understanding that these changes are here to stay, Zoom used an authentic brand voice to keep the users who have come to trust them.

Future: Brands like Zoom are presently a necessity. But what can they do to ensure they remain that way? Maybe they've made drastic adjustments to handle the demand now, but what if that demand disappears as abruptly as it appeared? How can they become entrenched and synonymous in other ways? Will a continued solid brand voice be the rock upon which the world rebuilds?

Disrupt: Summary



Disrupting isn't just about being in the right place at the right time. These scenarios are about maintaining the momentum and ensuring your brand can thrive post COVID-19. Essentially, futureproofing your position. You want to capitalize on your current success with an intentional and confident look to the future. Your biggest tools in that effort are your brand values. They can lead you to mutually beneficial partnerships, guide your user experience design, and establish authentic content. Your brand voice is instrumental in winning trust. Let your brand building blocks point the way towards a vision where COVID-19, for all its flaws, was a catalyst and launchpad for your business.

"It's a matter of understanding that service is, and needs to be, malleable, but brands and values need to be bulletproof. And it's a matter of not wavering, not chasing the instant money."

New Behaviors Research, April 2020

A large graphic of a neon arrow pointing upwards and to the right, composed of multiple parallel lines, set against a dark background with a grid pattern.

Recover

Waiting out the storm

"The new reality of post-COVID-19 economics is going to force businesses to change, and that can be great for brands and consumers."

Rick Herrick, Salt Branding

Recover

Current habits have halted but will return to normal

(Eg: Travel and Grooming)

Opportunity:

Recover lost demand as quickly as possible

How to know when to Recover

Recover scenarios are exceptionally difficult scenarios to be in, both operationally and mentally. Brands that once operated at the top of [Maslow's hierarchy](#) are now being undermined by threats to our base physiological and safety needs. Consumers are turning away from brands that operate at the higher levels, bringing demand to dangerous and unprecedented lows. Some categories experiencing this standstill are travel (like Delta Air Lines and Carnival Cruise Line), hospitality (Marriott International and MGM Resorts International), and retailers (like Macy's and Cinnabon). In addition, businesses where physical proximity is essential are rightfully suspending activity due to safety concerns. Cash burn, dropping stock, layoffs and furloughed employees...this is the immediate situation faced by many in this quadrant.

But being in this quadrant is also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for reflection, soul-searching, and realignment. The world will return to a version of its old self, but the current era will define your brand and demonstrate how you lead. It won't be easy, but this quadrant is full of ash scenarios and your goal is to rise like a phoenix.



34%

of people view changes to their habits and the world as temporary.

[Kelton Global](#)

Scenario 1

You can't engage with your audience like before



For some brands, you're closed down and you can't operate, either due to demand or safety concerns. This is especially true for those of you dependent on large gatherings, like movie theaters or businesses in malls, airports, and concert and sporting venues. We know that the situation will change and people will return to these businesses. But what to do in the meantime?

Problem: Your normal business practices are shut down.

Action: As we've mentioned before, your brand is not just your products or your services. Your brand is also what you stand for and audiences are drawn to purpose-driven brands. A low-cost way to continue your relationship with audiences is to build a community around your purpose and brand values. This can expand your reputation and engage with your consumers in new ways. It may not make money right now, but it absolutely builds and strengthens brand loyalty, a priceless commodity before, during, and especially after a pandemic.

Example: Businesses typically found in a mall food court or an airport have been hit hard. Some are switching to delivery options or [at-home kits](#). But fast-food chain Chick-Fil-A has taken a different approach. They're stepping completely out of their wheelhouse...and are creating a virtual band. [They've asked parents of K-12 children](#) to film and submit videos of their children playing "Rockin' Robin". This new foray into music production does nothing for their bottom line. It does, however, create a way for people to be part of something larger. It attracts and builds a community beyond fans of Chick-Fil-A sandwiches. This is how Chick-Fil-A lives its brand values and invites others to join. They are a family brand and they are creating an outlet for families, so necessary today. And of course, the song they chose has an avian theme - very on-brand. While this may not move sales today, it does everything to build brand recognition and loyalty for tomorrow.

Future: Will community-building efforts like this become more commonplace? How invested in the future of customers will brands become? Will Chick-Fil-A release educational material? Will Nike start giving career advice (Just do it, whatever that *it* is)? How can airlines become better connected with their passengers? The answers to these questions depend completely on your brand purpose and values. No matter what, we expect this to open up the door for brands to have an expansive array of diverse offerings that grow from connections made today.

"We see this as an opportunity to build on our reputation."

New Behaviors Research, April 2020

Scenario 2

Because your business is disrupted, you risk becoming obsolete



You're experiencing a domino effect of devastating consequences for your business. You know things won't always be this way, but you're worried you'll just barely survive with a too-small marketing budget and no recognition to compete in the new world.

Problem: You're losing momentum and attention.

Action: For the time being, make your products more accessible to more people than ever before. We know that's easy for us to say. But right now, your options for generating cash are very limited. Goodwill is the most powerful currency for you today. Do what you have to to ensure your business remains solvent, but your **brand's** survival relies on you maintaining your place in the minds of your audiences.

Example: Museums have not been top of mind for many people lately, a continuation of a long-lasting trend. Before COVID-19, [nearly one third of museums](#) surveyed in the United States were either in the red or close to it. For an industry that was already struggling, this pandemic will be disastrous. The Metropolitan Museum of Art is [projecting to lose \\$100 million](#) and museums across the globe will lay off significant portions of their workforce. [A third of museums](#) in the United States will not reopen if closures continue.

But instead of doing nothing, [many museums are giving away digital access](#) for *free to everyone*. They aren't charging for access, nor are they only giving access to first-responders, a caveat to many charitable efforts. Even niche museums are moving online. People have so much to see, like [Porsches](#) or Japan's infamously secretive [Studio Ghibli museum](#). Some museums are creating additional content beyond digital tours, like [the Met's drawing classes](#). With people bored at home, viewing works of art and poking around an online exhibit may be just the sort of calm technology activity our brains need. In addition, actions like this may very well change racial demographics in museum attendances. Currently in the U.S., [people of color represent only 9% of museum visitors](#). This sort of radical accessibility will hopefully lift those numbers and introduce fine arts, sciences, and history to more people than ever before. We are potentially witnessing a new era of democratized art. Once quarantine orders are lifted and restrictions are eased, museums will see increased attendance. But people will only think of visiting if museums are already on their minds. Museums offering free access are whetting the appetite and improving the likelihood that patrons will want to see and experience their collections IRL.

Future: We can't help but wonder what other alternative offer structures business and organizations will implement in order to reach more people. Will digital not be a perk, but rather the first option? Will tiered access and multi-layered pay models become more commonplace?

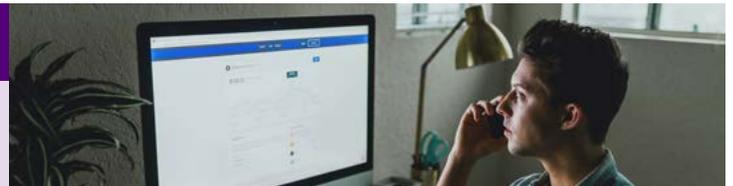
How robust can auxiliary products and services be, all in order to better communicate the brand's positioning?



If so, how can all these offerings work together? And what are the overlooked customer demographics that brands will seek to engage during this time? This is a particularly rich scenario for B2B brands to find new partnerships and audiences.

Scenario 3

You want to feel like a hero



Right now we're hearing a lot about heroes, like healthcare workers and other essential business employees. And they absolutely are the frontline in keeping so many of us safe. But for those of you not in those fields, it becomes hard to talk about actions or charity in a way that doesn't seem dismissive to those who risk their lives.

Problem: You want to do good acts without appearing self-righteous.

Action: Times of crises allow brands to prove their mettle and gain ironclad loyalty. An excellent opportunity to stand by, support, and invest in your team as much as possible. Now is the time to experiment with creative work schedules and styles. Amy Balliett, CEO of our sister agency, [Killer Visual Strategies](#), [implemented a four-day work week](#) for her offices back in 2017.



"I think what we're about to see, as all of these companies that have been set in that tradition for so long are forced out of it, that there's going to be a new level of trust and a new willingness to consider alternatives to the traditional going to the office nine-to-five."

Amy Balliett, CEO Killer Visual Strategies

You can highlight how you're helping your internal team to show how you've truly reevaluated your priorities and changed your own values. Everyone loves an underdog-cum-hero and now is your moment to rise up as a leader. Start today on your comeback story and commit to delivering it.

Example: There are too many examples of brands showing their COVID-19 actions to count. But the ads and brand efforts that get the most traction are the ones where a promise is loudly pledged, and the proof is crystal clear. For instance, a handful of CEOs who have announced that [they will not lay off any employees](#). Statements like these are, of course, a huge relief for the employees. But it's also a testament to the audiences, current customers and not, that these brands value and care for their employees. In fact, Kelton Global's research shows that taking care of your own is a valid business strategy, with [54% of consumers](#) saying they will stop buying their preferred brands if they don't feel the companies are doing good by their employees.

Today, you can't get louder than Twitter. In an eight part action plan, Marc Benioff of Salesforce [encouraged all CEOs to take a 90-day "no lay off" pledge](#). He then followed it up with another tweet that his own company will not be conducting any "significant" layoffs and [will pay hourly workers](#), like cleaners, while their offices are closed. He encouraged others to do the same, citing Ohana, the Hawaiian term for "family". Benioff is setting himself and his company up as the heroes coming out of COVID-19.

Future: This is an extremely fascinating moment for many brands. Will private brands be the next wellspring of heroes? What other norms will corporations change? Will these sorts of actions generate fierce loyalty? How far can the loyalty to a brand go before the adoption goes from lifestyle to lifeline? Could brands become new schools of thought. If we take the intangible aspects of your brand and transform them into belief, you have the very real possibility to position your brand as the next savior.

"The ecosystem surrounding them will change, but the human values that guide the desire behind them won't change at all."

New Behaviors Research, April 2020

Recover: Summary



If you've found yourself in a *Recover* scenario, you might feel stuck. But this is your opportunity to rise to the occasion, however inventively you can. It's a trial by fire to embrace new aspects of your brand and become a leader.

Your brand building blocks can go far in brainstorming new, brand-authentic ways to engage with your audiences *and* your employees. Your brand purpose and brand values are instrumental in revealing these opportunities. Your messaging can communicate a perseverance that might unlock a new chapter for your brand. Like so many of us right now, use this moment to take stock of yourself and your real emotional connection with your audiences. There is energy and potential in this quadrant. You might be surprised at the wealth you already have to work with and hopefully will come back stronger than ever.



Reimagine

Forge your own path

"Creatively, this is a real opportunity to define your brand for the next 10 years."

Paul Parkin, Salt Branding



Reimagine

New habits have not yet emerged but are likely to
(Eg: Consumer Electronics & Fashion)

Opportunity:
Understand current shifts to prepare for future repositioning

How to know when to Reimagine

Reimagine scenarios are tricky. There's a lot of opportunity for brands to recast decades of business practices and cultural norms. Any developments that come from this quadrant are going to be the habits of the next generation, perhaps even longer. These aren't flash in the pan marketing responses. *Reimagine* scenarios don't assume the world will go back to the way it was before. Instead, they take it upon themselves to visualize new possibilities. Right now we're seeing the geometric outline, but not yet the full shape.

These scenarios are the nascent hintings at a new order. Brands in this quadrant haven't been affected too badly by COVID-19. Other than that, there are no hard rules defining the brands here. They could be in consumer electronics (Apple or Nintendo), web services (Airbnb or Facebook) or B2B brands in the materials world (Milliken or Braskem America). The only certain thing is that they are well-poised to act not out of desperation, but direction.

Scenario 1

You know change is coming



So far, you've been completely or only slightly affected by COVID-19. You might currently be playing a waiting game, holding your breath and waiting to see if and how COVID-19 will ever touch you. But you know this bubble is unsustainable and eventually change will come knocking on your door. So how can you proactively plan for the unknown?

Problem: You want to prepare for change.

Action: You won't always know what shape a disruption will take, so focus on what you can actually control. This is an excellent time to take stock and do some future-proofing. Audit your production, inventory, and supply chain. Look at your messaging frameworks and tools. Can they support future messages? Review your brand building blocks. Your brand values can help you find brand-appropriate solutions when you run some simulations and conduct scenario planning (this series is a great first step in that). Can the fundamentals of your brand positioning support new models and channels? Where are the weak points of your business and your brand? What could impact them? Identify these priority tasks and take this moment to bolster them.

Example: Let's look at the structure on which many companies rely: the supply chain. Everything from sourcing to manufacturing to HR, almost all aspects of a business are part of a global network, composed of layers of specialized suppliers. It's what has made COVID-19 so devastating - affect one part of the supply chain and the whole system comes to a halt. If anything, COVID-19 is showing that we need to stop thinking of it as a linear "supply chain" and instead adopt a

network mentality, one where the network is resilient and can withstand multiple interruptions. But many don't have visibility into their complex supply chain.

Nestlé shows us how beneficial it can be to prioritize internal supply chain transparency. Besides the fact that Nestlé has high-demand, shelf-stable food products, their ability to continue delivering goods has seen [the company grow by 4.3%](#). When talking about their success, Senior Vice President and Global Head of Supply Chain at Nestlé [Vineet Khanna says](#) "Internal supply chain transparency played a key role. Knowing which ingredient comes from where, in the end-to-end Supply Chain [...] and having a clear visibility on the real-time demands and needs of consumers in any market help line up supply alternatives and anticipate risk and disruptions." Critical evaluations and scenario planning set Nestlé up to adapt, endure, and even thrive in COVID-19. As summarized by [Morris Cohen](#), a professor of manufacturing and logistics at the University of Pennsylvania, "The nature of this problem is not forecasting, but anticipating."

Future: This pandemic has shown the vulnerability of the ways in which we create our goods and deliver them. It is a multi-industry element that is ripe for reimagining. Will big brands who already have large infrastructures in place continue to dominate? How can smaller brands succeed? Do they actually need to step away from many distant specialized suppliers and instead bring everything in-house? Will we see a rise in one-stop shops? Will branded communication incorporate guaranteed delivery of products and services? Can brands differentiate themselves via supply chain models? Or will trade secrets and brand differentiation become less important as we adopt easy-to-replicate standardization (like IKEA)? And while we're increasing transparency of suppliers and supplies, will ethical, fair-trade practices become a heightened brand value? As mentioned, supply chains span many industries and categories. Reimagining them will have world changing affects.

"We work continuously with our supply chain to help them navigate challenges as well."

New Behaviors Research, April 2020

Scenario 2

You're struggling to find the right groundbreaking idea

You might be thinking to yourself, "Yes, I understand, I can really change the world. And I'm excited to do so. But how?" You most likely have stable resources, and in a world where stability is difficult to find, you in turn are hard-pressed to know where the opportunities are.



Problem: You're at a loss for how to innovate.

Action: Adopt a scarcity mindset. Frequently a lack of materials or options forces us to come up with the most inventive solutions. Case in point - research depicts "the aftermath of the Great Depression as [an era of incredible technological progress and innovation](#)." When doing the scenario planning suggested above, prioritize solutions that account for a shortage of supplies while still

delivering on your brand promise. How can you still elicit the same aspirational mindset in your core audiences without your key ingredient? You'd be amazed at how much you can do with so little.

Example: The aviation industry has been hit hard by COVID-19. International shelter-in-place orders, health fears, and economic insecurity have all led to thousands of grounded flights. The industry is [expecting to take three to five years to recover](#). With many airlines posting their [first losses in years](#), many are [now seeking bailouts](#) from their governments. The airline industry of tomorrow will look vastly different from yesterday's. Changes to boarding, servicing, costs, and scheduling are all to be expected. But what about environmental changes?

The environmental cost of air travel has been a hot topic. Climate activist Greta Thunberg made headlines by [refusing to travel by air](#), citing its environmental impact. In 2019, the industry was responsible for about [2% of total global greenhouse gas emissions](#). As described by the [European Commission](#), "If global aviation was a country, it would rank in the top 10 emitters." COVID-19 has already created a dramatic drop in emissions, but a global pandemic is not going to keep airlines grounded forever. That's why many are proposing [mandated green practices](#) as part of airline bailouts. These are drastic demands, but where there's a will, there's a way. It's just never been financially attractive to pursue. These conditions will put the pressure on the airline industry to innovate. By rendering the old way of doing things scarce, airlines will have to get creative and may just embark on a whole new age of responsible travel. The question for airline brands is how their current brand positioning will support, align with, and reinforce these changes. You obviously want to be in the pilot's seat when innovating and can ensure agreement between your brand positioning and business practices, but this example shows that dramatically overhauling everything you do can tie in nicely with other desires your audiences may have.

Future: Can COVID-19 provide some of the most controversial industries an opportunity to save the day? Fifty years from now, will we herald airlines as the industry that shepherded the world away from the brink of environmental collapse? That seems absurd today, but we're seeing rapidly emerging habits that reject unsustainable and harmful practices.

Are current brand positionings enough to incorporate greener practices, or will it require a total renovation?



Are brands willing to take on that challenge? Will a solitary brand rise to occasion, distinguished by a brand promise of salvation? Or will we see industry-wide standards and practices upheld by all? We're witnessing a whole reprioritization, a cultural revolution that many traditional categories cannot afford to ignore.

"We work continuously with our supply chain to help them navigate challenges as well."

New Behaviors Research, April 2020

Scenario 3

You don't know what the future holds for your category



You're seeing entire categories become absolutely obsolete. You obviously don't want that for yourself and your category. Perhaps you're dealing with essential items, or your business is fundamental to the world continuing to operate. But as consumer habits continue to change, you understand just how precarious your position is.

Problem: Your current model won't operate in a vastly different world.

Action: Be an agent for change. Use this time to completely remake the world, centered around your business and brand. What are the future opportunities that you can create for yourself? Unshackle your imagination from the limits of today and aspire for your utopia. Because if there ever were a time to shake things up, it's now. If your current brand blocks are solid, any change will feel authentic. If your brand positioning and values don't support your new vision, then it might be time to update them in order to follow your new course. It's all about cohesion between what you believe and what you do.

Example: We mentioned in our last post, *Recover*, that those in the travel and hospitality industries are not doing well. Airbnb is top of mind. The brand that redefined the hotel category is now [laying off 25% of their team](#) and [lowered its internal valuation by 16%](#). And yet, Airbnb is still innovating and working towards a new world, instead of worrying about their place in it. It's in their brand DNA.

Airbnb's culture will always be marked by its pursuit of and willingness to try new things. These innovations don't always have to work - Airbnb just has to keep aspiring to make travel and hospitality richer and more accessible to their audiences. The first to change was their Experiences. Launched in 2016, Airbnb Experiences are an extension of their local experience brand promise. Local hosts offer up tours and classes to visitors, usually with a unique angle or insider knowledge. These have now [gone virtual](#). Some on our team even tried a few of them for Mother's Day. And while this is an attempt to stymie losses, it also presents a new way for people to explore different topics, not just different cultures. It leans into the existing trend of self-education, [branches into entertainment territory](#), and allows far-flung families to share in experiences without the price ticket of a big international trip. In short, it builds loyalty around the Airbnb promise to experience the novelty and accessibility of exploration. [Airbnb's move into sublets](#) is further proof. Working from home has recently been introduced on a global scale, with many companies announcing that [it will be a permanent system](#). With that sort of flexibility, Airbnb is staying true to its brand culture by transforming their network of rentals into dream remote working environments.

We just have to wonder, if Airbnb continues to proactively push the boundaries of their offerings, will they soon outgrow the "bnb" of their name?



Future: A brand's culture, ethos, mission, positioning, purpose, values...whatever you want to call it, it acts as a North Star, guiding a brand's actions and informing business decisions. How will this role change in the coming years? Will it have even more importance? Will more and more brands join the already-existing trend of "purpose-led" brands? Are those brands going to become the next era of culture creators? How much priority and attention will a brand's purpose receive in communications? Will the *what* and *how* fade away in favor of the *why*? How many brands will redefine themselves in order to find their purpose? As we said before, we are facing a new age of radical reassessment. Brands will have to look deep within themselves to see if their culture can stand up to it.

Reimagine: Summary



Those of you in the *Reimagine* category have a responsibility. You are in the best position to pivot, not out of necessity or to recover any losses, but rather purely for the sake of pursuing a new vision. For that reason, you can rise to be leaders who show us a new way of living. We've shown you some exercises to prepare. These are critical to ensure your business remains profitable, but also that your brand stays relevant. In *Reimagine*, you can evolve your brand positioning to point towards a new vision. Your brand values can keep you honest to yourself, your teams, and your audiences. Now is the time to build a new world. What part will you play?

Final Summary

You've made it, congratulations! Whether you read each scenario group or you just poked around, you are now equipped with plenty of inspiration and knowledge of how better to wield your brand building blocks, like your positioning, values, and tone of voice.

If there's one thing we want you to take away, it's that whether you're *adapting* to remain agile, *disrupting* to stay on top, *recovering* to maintain relevance, or *reimagining* the norms of our next chapter, you aren't stuck. You have options. Use your brand building blocks, anticipate the future, and believe in your brand to connect with your audiences.

No matter what your next actions are, we cannot stress enough how important it is for you to look far into the future. Don't pursue an idea that can carry you one day forward. Take the time to (re) position yourself for the next 18 months, minimum.

Again, we would like to thank the entire LRW Group for their thoughts, feedback, and guidance. And to our clients, whose cooperation motivated us to think bigger.

If you want to learn more about how to set your brand up for success in the post-COVID-19 world or you just want to chat through some of these ideas, please reach out to us at insights@saltbranding.com.

Stay tuned for more thinking and news at:



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