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*Bob Grigsby is the CEO of Empowering Your Brand. He leads small, medium, and corporate business teams around the Greater Iowa City Metro area who plan, buy, run, and assess branding and marketing digital strategies on behalf of their business brands. Here he shares how his team is navigating and consulting businesses on their branding and marketing campaigns through the COVID-19 outbreak.*

To say it's a unique time in the world is an understatement. As we all collectively grapple with what this global pandemic means for all of us — first as humans, but also as professionals — there are often more questions than answers. There is no playbook for times like these, but what we've found is that crisis can provide clarity with “Why” you are in business.

Though we're uncovering new challenges every day, we've worked to identify and establish a set of principles to use not only internally, but also externally with our clients, to evaluate media campaigns in this altered marketplace.

We want to share five principles that we hope are helpful to other brands undoubtedly navigating the same uncharted territory.

We certainly don't have all the answers for navigating these turbulent times. But we're organizing internally to evaluate our media efforts through the lens of these five principles and guiding questions. Thinking through these has been a helpful exercise in itself for us, bringing a bit of clarity to our teams in a moment of chaos. We hope it's helpful as you navigate the coming weeks and months with your own teams.

## Our 5 Guiding Principles

*1st Guiding Principle: Is this campaign right, given the current context in our local market?*

**Context: Always**

Though this is a global pandemic, its impact is local. We've found it helpful to carry that thinking into the evaluation of our branding and marketing campaigns. Our regional team is providing guidance centrally, but we've

found it's best to trust each market to make decisions locally. In other words: direction from the center, but decisions on the ground.

At a very practical level, we have built out a centralized process for all paid and owned tactics across markets, so we can capture and learn from what is being decided locally.

One example of what we've learned from this process is context matters: As interest in news surges around the world, there are many more ad impressions being served in the news category. We're having to ask ourselves, "In what instances are we comfortable putting our client's brand alongside global news content?" This debate, and local nuance, has helped us make choices, especially around the use of paid social media. Local context is key.

*2nd Guiding Principle: Though we may have green-lighted a campaign last month/last week/yesterday, is it still right for the context of the moment?*

## Constantly Reassess

As market dynamics change rapidly, we're constantly reassessing campaigns, creative, and even our guidelines. What we decided two weeks ago may not be necessarily appropriate today. The one constant assumption we have in this situation is that things will change. Because of that, we're reassessing every possible touchpoint for our brand and our client's brand across paid and owned channels, from video ads to the automated emails we're sending via customer relationship management (CRM) systems.

We're asking ourselves every day, "Is this creative or ad placement right for this moment and in this context?" And when the answer is no, we pivot. For instance, we've had a real estate campaign running that referenced "Open House Tours" for a new listing. Was that OK in the Iowa City Metro market a few weeks ago? Sure. Today? Not so much.

*3rd Guiding Principle: Are all of the creative elements — tone, copy, visuals, keywords, placements — appropriate and relevant to this new reality?*

## Creative Considerations

In the spirit of reassessing campaigns, we're finding that all kinds of creative elements need scrutiny right now. From tone and visual imagery (shaking hands, group gatherings) to copy and keywords, the context of our media

buys needs to be carefully assessed. We're asking ourselves these questions with every campaign, no matter the channel or size of spend behind it.

For instance, we don't think slapstick humor is appropriate for our brands right now. So we're holding off on some campaigns that were funnier in nature. We're reevaluating creative that shows interactions like hand-shakes, hugs, and high-fives, since social distancing is an important tactic for slowing the spread of illness. We've also reviewed all our Search Ad copy to spot phrasing that's now awkward — "virus checks," for instance, have taken on a whole new meaning in light of this moment.

**4th Guiding Principle:** *What are the most relevant brands, products, or campaigns our media can support right now, and do we need to shift budget spends?*

## Changing Priorities to Navigate Uncertainty

As business professionals, we recognize that we have a responsibility to navigate uncertainty. Through it all, we're evaluating our media budgets through the lens of what's most relevant to our consumer-clients.

Our guiding principle as a brand, particularly in this moment, is to be helpful. And as people turn to technology for information and connection in these times of need, we're mindful that some of our products — like website consulting, Search Engine Optimization(SEO) strategies, email marketing, and digital marketing consulting — can be more helpful today than they were even yesterday. In that spirit, we're shifting our paid media priorities to help business brands bridge the gap between what was once "normal" and their current reality.

**5th Guiding Principle:** *What ways can our company — and even our owned media channels — be helpful to people and businesses in this moment of need?*

## Coming Together

If there's ever been a moment for us to come together and help one another, this is it. In this unprecedented moment, we feel a great responsibility to help. We're always asking ourselves how we can help our consumers, our business clients, and our business partners — especially when it comes to digital branding and marketing channels.

## Our Qualified Recommendation

Every brand has its own digital branding and marketing media channels, whether stores, websites, or even social handles, so the primary challenge now, at the time of this crisis, is to integrate and streamline your digital infrastructure at various stages of your business model.

Particularly in the context of “micro-moment” forecasting and decision-making. Brands must make proper use of branding and marketing in order to remain present before their target audience whenever any micro-moments happen.

Micro-moments are: "I want to...know, go, do, buy...moments." The question is...is your company optimize to capture the user-audience looking for them?



Having an ultra-clear understanding of "why" your brand exists during these micro-moments, above a simple "to be successful" or "make a profit", is essential to your brand's value and your company's growth.

This has less to do with your profit margin and more to do with your customer-client users and their "why" experience with your company. No clear communication of your "why" value to them, equals no relationship resonance. No resonance, no loyalty. No loyalty...well, they will go to your competitor instead.

Today's digital technology provides consumers with the power to be smarter and more informed than ever before. Product information and choice has never been more accessible and accessed then it is right now.

This gives consumers an undeniable advantage in the marketplace. No longer do consumers have to wait for print media or television to inform them of their choices for goods or services; with a few simple keystrokes or screen taps, consumers can find a wealth of information about multiple companies, products or services they are interested in and that will be beneficial to them. And in due course, this process of online engagement has been defined as the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT).

In order to win at the Zero Moment of Truth, business professionals must synergize their "why" branding, marketing, and digital micro-moment messaging with their consumers' "why" micro-moment profiles and build relationships with them. Essentially, businesses must focus on optimizing their branding language for the information their customers are looking for, want, and trust in these micro-moments.

Our effort here is to inform you, and support you and your company, and advise you that although this pandemic will undoubtedly be contained...its effect on our human lives and our economy will have long-term consequences for years to come.

The landscape of doing business as usual has changed forever...and having a well-articulated, customer-focused "Why" value proposition going forward is a must with developing alignment within your company and executing your brand strategy.

From our company to your company, stay safe and healthy!

Bob Grigsby, CEO