

3 Rules to Inspiring Customers Right Now, According to Studio Black Tomato

"We're all lucky to work in a very inspirational industry. But right now, inspiring people has never been harder."

If you work in travel, we're one hundred per cent sure you agree with the aforementioned statement. As Studio Black Tomato's Co-Head of Strategy, Adam Larter, explained during their enlightening webinar and workshop session, the last three months have forced travel brands to drastically pivot their marketing and communications strategies. But at what cost? While many brands are fighting to survive, the marketing landscape has become homogenised by 'COVID-speak,' as everyone adopts the same protective, caring and, well, boring tone in their social media and comms. "Careful, cautious messaging has had its time – it's time for travel to move on and inspire people again," urged Adam. "For us to keep our industry alive, it's important we start to sell, inspire and get people thinking responsibly – and excitedly – about travelling again." Here's the new rules

1. Remove the phrase 'unprecedented times' from your marketing vocabulary.

Time for a spot of COVID-19 bingo: if you've used the words 'uncertain', 'unprecedented' or 'new normal' in the last three months, you're like all of us – trying to keep up your brand's presence in the market, reassure customers and avoid appearing irresponsible or uncaring. "Everyone's ditched their personality to follow the personality of everyone else – it's almost as if coronavirus has created its own tone which everyone is talking in," Studio Black Tomato's Brand Strategist Sophia Kay added. Don't forget what sets you apart in a crowded industry and how you're interesting and unique. A helpful starting point is to identify your brand archetype, and from there, make sure your messaging matches up. For example, if you're a 'Magician' brand – you exist to make customers' dreams come true – positioning your messaging around the experiences people have been dreaming of in lockdown will enhance, not detract from, your company purpose.



2. Know when to inspire – and when to educate.

The two key messages most brands are focused on right now are educating and inspiring their customers. That's fine, but be sure to map out where you're using these messages in your customer journey – "it's all about being smart with where you place them," advised Sophia. Use inspirational messaging – strong visuals and beautiful images, aspirational language – twice as much as your educational comms, which might revolve around health and safety protocols or steps you're taking to protect future travellers. "We've seen a lot of people trying to promote and excite people with their COVID message, which is crazy," laughed Adam. You wouldn't promote a safari by using the inherent danger and risk involved as the key selling points; and while you might be excited by your high-tech sanitisation policies, it's unlikely your customers will feel the same (sorry). Instead, keep COVID-related announcements to your product and SEO pages and DTC emails. Your regular newsletters, videos and social media should be strictly inspirational.

3. Transport people to your destination with rich, textural language.

The brands that survived the 2008 financial crash were those who didn't shy away from talking to their customers, but found different and interesting ways to talk to them," Studio Black Tomato advised. The worst thing you can do is disappear for fear of appearing insensitive; instead, adopt a tone of "responsible excitement and optimism" in your language and comms. For example, celebrating your hotel's reopening as if it were your actual opening, or encouraging travellers to work from home in a different location. This isn't the time for a hard sell, but you can still transport people to your destination with rich, textural language and a human-first approach. "More than ever, brands right now should be thinking about humans again – it's the real understanding of human stories behind travel that will inspire people," advised Adam. The first rule of great writing is to show, don't tell – so think about your property or company's USP, the emotions and feelings they evoke, and use these as a jumping-off point to inspire existing and potential customers. Like leaping into the ocean – how do the waves feel against your skin? How does the feeling contrast with the hot sun above? "Focus on the parts of your offering that haven't changed, which is the feelings they create," added Sophia. "Why sell a half-open pool when what people are really missing is the fresh air, wildlife and running freely outside?"

