Marketing in times of coronavirus…do or don't?

To market or not to market, that is the question today for anybody working in marcomm.

As the novel coronavirus pandemic sickens more people around the globe while upending daily routines, businesses struggle. Should they market or not? Perhaps it is even a question of *can* they market—do they have the personnel or can they even do business? On Tuesday, I walked into a local hair salon to buy conditioner, and they had no customers. Yesterday, the hair salon announced that they are closed until the end of the month.

Advertising is still going on…somewhat

Inside my print Washington Post (yes, I still get the newspaper delivered) yesterday was a flyer advertising Kohl's spring sale. On Wednesday, there were several supermarket circulars inserted in the Food Section. A couple of days ago, there was a half-page advertisement for the Wolf Trap 2020 Summer Concerts (Wolf Trap is a concert venue in Northern Virginia). But today, there are a no flyers and fewer ads overall, most for retail and a full page ad from Safeway thanking its employees (I think an image ad, portraying them as a concerned corporation).

Then, on Facebook, I was served an online promotion for the Starz app. Also for a couple of online shopping outlets. And via email, I keep getting offers from Lands' End and Eddie Bauer (since I have shopped from them before).

It's clear that some marketing is going on *regardless* of the coronavirus, and some of it *because* of the coronavirus. But not all marketing makes sense right now.

Who should market

For some businesses, it really is the perfect time to get your message to the public. Online retailers and streaming services are prime examples. If people can't get out to the physical stores or if the bricks and mortar stores are closed, it makes perfect sense to market. People may be looking to shop online instead of leaving home, and also are looking for more entertainment.

Nonprofit and advocacy organizations should also ramp up marketing now. There may be a lot more need among and it makes sense to solicit donations or other type of support.

Who should not market

It is counterproductive for airlines, hotels and other travel industry to advertise right now. Flights are being cancelled and countries are being shut down. Also, travel may be risky as it exposes people to the virus.

Likewise, any advertisement for anything that requires a future commitment, such as upcoming concerts, plays, events, is at best, too optimistic. Most people don't know when things will get back to normal, and can't commit to any type of future plans.

Gray area

Although some businesses are open, it is risky to promote right now. If say you are big box retailer, do you really want to have a great promotion that would bring in large crowds when the CDC is asking people to practice social distancing?

Bottom line

Marketing should be responsive to what is going on. People are worried about covid-19, but they also have ongoing needs.

Marketers should weigh carefully how and what they promote.

What do you think? Should marketing go on as usual? Suspend altogether? Please let me know in the comments.