4 Avoidable Pandemic Marketing Failures

When the pandemic forced the country into lockdown last year, yoga studios were among the many non-essential businesses forced to close. Although yoga is best practiced in person with close instructor supervision, yoga studios adapted to the situation and figured how to provide classes online.

Having good email lists became essential as yoga studios had to contact students to let them know how to proceed. Good websites were also important. There, yoga studio owners could post new COVID policies and new schedules. Most yoga studios were already using the online Mindbody software for people to enroll and pay for classes, so that aspect was seamless.



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Up to this point, all three studios I have attended in the past couple of years were doing the same. Each studio was offering classes on Zoom and registering for them was easy to do online. Studios would send out links to the Zoom class and with the click of a mouse, we were doing yoga in our spare rooms and basements. In June 2020, Maryland started lifting restrictions and began allowing non-essential businesses to reopen with capacity limits. Also, the weather got nicer. And that's where these three studios showed their business savvy.

Studio A found a nearby park and negotiated a permit with the city to start providing outdoor classes. Outdoor classes cost $25 ($5 more than the pre-pandemic drop-in cost) but were offered several times a week over the course of the summer and into early fall.

Studio B found a several locations that were willing to host outdoor classes, including a brewery and a plant nursery. Pretty soon, they were offering various outdoor classes. This studio charged regular drop-in ($18 or donation) and offered a minimum once a week outdoor option in addition to its Zoom offerings.

Studio C kept doing Zoom and found a place to offer outdoor classes on a limited basis (four times total in the summer of 2020) and charged a workshop price of $30 for these. Drop-in classes at this studio had been $18, and it offered a $15 Zoom drop-in rate.

As cooler weather started and Maryland further scaled back pandemic restrictions, Studios A and B started offering limited in person classes, with few students, air purifiers and open windows, lots of social distancing, and masks required. In the spring of 2021, as more people were getting vaccinated, Studios A and B added more in-person classes and as the weather got warmer, also added more outdoor options. Studio C opened last, but not before announcing a GoFund Me campaign to raise funds to be able to open its doors.

I don’t know the financial situation of any of these studios, but it seems to me Studio C’s situation was precarious to be asking for donations. And not coincidentally, out of the three, Studio C did the worst at marketing.

Failure #1: Failure to adapt

Studios A and B were the quickest to figure out that people wanted to do in-person yoga instead of over Zoom, and the only way to do it was to hold classes outdoors. Studio C, on the other hand, was very slow to figure out how to offer outdoor yoga, and when it did, it only did so infrequently and at a high cost.

Failure #2: Failure to communicate

Studios A and B sent weekly email blasts about current classes and upcoming changes and generally to stay in touch. Studio C only sent emails sporadically and instead spent the pandemic redesigning its website. When Studio C sent out an email announcing its new website it failed to announce (disclose) that it had also raised prices. During the pandemic, there was a Zoom drop in rate of $15. From one week to the next, the drop in rate for Zoom classes became $19, a 25% increase. Once Studio C opened its physical location, it started sending out semi-weekly emails announcing “new in studio offerings” and a link to those, except that link never worked. Studio C didn’t use email marketing to its potential.

Failure #3: Failure to check out the competition

If you don’t know what others are doing, you can’t effectively compete with them. If Studio C had taken a moment to sign up for other studio’s emails or even check out their websites, it would have seen that these other studios were offering in-person classes outdoors.

Failure#4: Failure to seek out reliable business advice

When interviewed by a local TV station about pandemic effects, Studio C’s owner admitted that she did not like to ask for help but that she was forced to run a GoFund Me campaign to be able to pay back rent and open. If Studio C’s owner had sought out business advice early on in the pandemic, she may have been in a better position. We are not all born with business sense, but we should have sense enough to know we don’t have it and that we should seek it.

The bottom line

Keeping your business open, and by extension, doing a good job at marketing, was hugely challenging during a global pandemic. The businesses that survived were all able to adapt to the changing circumstances. And those that did the best job at marketing, not only survived but thrived.