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The

# Reset



# MARKETING DRIVERS

Marketing Execution After the Crisis

**Volume II**

Written by Norman Guadagno  
*CMO of Acoustic*

# THE RESET: MARKETING DRIVERS

## Volume II

by Norman Guadagno

*Volume I of The Reset, Customer Expectations, discussed the forces that have been shaping customers and the market overall in the past year. Three core factors: The Coronavirus pandemic, economic uncertainty, and social transformation were identified and explored. In addition, the three lenses to examine The Reset: Trust, Values, and Action, were introduced. These lenses serve as the foundation for Volume II as we explore the marketing drivers of The Reset and how they will help shape a successful marketing playbook for the years ahead.*

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# Reality and Perception

*“The problem with introspection is that it has no end.”*

**- Philip K. Dick**

**F**or the marketer in late 2020, it is very easy to feel a bit hesitant, possibly even frozen, when it comes to knowing what to do next. The changes the past year has brought can leave even the most optimistic of thinkers wondering if they can be successful, and everyone scrambling to find a path to success. Then, to make it even harder, everyone starts asking for the marketing plan for next year!

The hyper-reactive media environment, “cancel culture,” and endless retconning can often lead to a form of analysis paralysis for marketers. Worry over how something may be perceived in the future is certainly sensible, but it is much more important to worry about how it will be perceived in the present. Marketers must try to read the trends emerging, and not make obvious gaffes, but must also focus on the impact their efforts will have on the business this quarter and next quarter.

Perhaps the future will be even worse than the present – endless pandemics, climate catastrophe, and aliens invading – or the future might be wonderfully better, with healthy growth and a turn towards greater global unity and environmental care. Marketers should not only think about how they react to, but also how they shape the world. Grounded optimism tends to breed more optimism, and positive messages tend to yield more positive messages. Use The Reset as an opportunity to contribute to the direction of the future, not simply react to the present.

To do this, we will return to the three core lenses – **Trust, Values, and Action** – as we forge a path to success.

# Trust



If trust in a brand has been eroded, what do we do? First, we identify the cause. If it is something the brand did, we acknowledge the mistake and articulate a path forward. If the cause is an external factor, something we do not control, we work to take back as much of the brand narrative as possible. Once we identify the cause, we drive forward to rebuild trust.

But what happens when trust has been eroded across multiple brands? This is the situation now, and the response must be a bit different. Instead of fixing a problem with the brand, the marketer needs to consider a more fundamental shift in the brand and brand messaging. This is a strategic shift, not merely a tactical response. Many brands have always tried to stand for something, but that was very rarely pressure tested by reality. We never really questioned that a restaurant was keeping workers home if they had a cold or flu, did we? Instead, we ordered our food, at a quick-serve joint or a fancy restaurant, and did not think twice. We assumed that airlines cleaned the seats and tables between flights. On those flight where we saw someone with antiseptic wipes scrubbing things down, we may have rolled our eyes or at least assumed they had a good reason to worry.

Now, every brand must meet different and evolving standards. The new playbook guides brands to a deeper level of meaning, genuine and persistent credibility, and new relationship dynamics with their audience. Brands can no longer just pretend to be what customers expect but must actually deliver what customers need.

## **Play 1: Find a deeper level of meaning in your brand**

Go back to all that brand work that you did in the past and look at it with fresh eyes. Did you make a promise with the brand that you never actually kept? Now is the time to figure out how to not only keep the promise but ensure that the promise is sufficient for your customers. What can your brand do differently that will set it apart from competitors in the years to come?

Recently I have seen a lot of hotel chains partnering with various cleaning product companies and healthcare organizations. Does a chain promising to use Lysol or Clorox products to clean their rooms change the deeper meaning of the brand? I think that these are stop-gap measures at best to solidify brand positioning as they do everything possible to bring customers back to the rooms. Deeper meaning in the brands will need to come later, through the establishment of a level of transparency and trust not necessarily seen before.

## **Play 2: Remake customer experience**

When we thought about customer experience in the past, we often referenced touchpoints as a key element of the process. Now, touch is one of the very things we are trying to avoid. Ignoring that irony, the truth is that customer experience is more important than ever, for every brand.

Marketers should be leaders in customer experience, and the playbook of the future must be based on the series of interactions that build a relationship between customer and brand. If marketing has traditionally focused only on the interactions taking place during customer acquisition, they must extend their playbook to the entire customer journey. The best interactions are those where

there is a clear sense of choice on the part of the customer, allowing them to proceed based on their own assessment of comfort, risk, and reward.

A lot of restaurants have moved to touchless menus and payments, with the customer's phone doing all the work. This creates trust and reduces concerns on the part of the customer, but it still feels very transactional. How can restaurants create a more seamless journey with the mobile device that starts when a reservation is made and continues after the customer has left? Looking at the entire journey, marketing can rewrite this scenario to build something better for both brand and customer. Every brand can do the same.

# Values

What do your customers really value today? Is it the same as it was six months ago? A year ago? What will your customers value a year from now? As individuals find their trust being reset, this starts to reset their underlying values. What does a commute look like for someone working at home? What is the value of going to a retail store when online shopping has finally become easy and ubiquitous? Which will be valued more by the traveler: cleanliness or price?

Marketers often talk about brand values, but rarely talk about customer values. The Values Reset involves shifting that dynamic and paying careful attention to the values of customers and the changes taking place. Consideration for these new values underlies the plays marketers must follow in the future.

## **Play 3: Demand generation shuffle**

Email has always been one of the most reliable and scalable tools in the demand generation arsenal, and combined with paid advertising (social, search, display, broadcast) often accounts for a vast majority of what most companies do when it comes to marketing. Yet, clear changes in open and click-through rates during the early months of the pandemic showed an even richer attachment to email messages than many of us ever imagined.

Customers want to hear from brands. More specifically, customers want to hear from brands that they come to trust and align with their values. Whether it be email or mobile messaging, customers are looking for something from the brands they do business with, and marketers must shuffle their demand generation priorities accordingly.

Using the travel space as an example again, how are airlines shifting their demand generation messages when travel is down by 80% or more? Trying to run sales quickly loses steam, and endless notes on cleanliness can only go so far. What else can an airline do to shuffle the demand generation playbook and stay connected? First, they have to invest even more in deeply understanding the data and see how their customers are interacting across all interactions. Second, they have to reach out and ask their customers what they want – if values have changed, then isn't it reasonable to ask customers to reset the types and frequency of communications?

Stop treating demand generation as a one-way street: it has always been two-way, and now there is very little patience left in customers for meaningless or unwanted messages.

#### **Play 4: Events are dead – long live events**

In the past, marketers tended to have a love/hate relationship with events. Large convention centers filled with industry buyers toting bags of cheap tchotchkes and making plans for which party or restaurants they will be attending that evening. Endless badge scans so that the teams can bring home enough leads to justify the expense of the event in the first place. Noise, air conditioning, and fatigue stretched over three endless days in Las Vegas, Orlando, or Chicago.

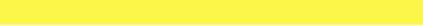
Then everyone went home. Events stopped. Every company made a hard pivot to virtual events, webinars, and a world of video. In no time at all, we were having online roundtables, customer conferences, wine tasting, shoe making, and co-watching of shows on Netflix. We can be together at an event without really being together at all.

The hard pivot of 2020, from the convention center to the laptop, was necessary. Now, as everyone settles into life after the Reset, the playbook for events must be examined and rebuilt from the ground up.

One of the reasons events worked well was the ability to truly isolate people for a period and have highly interactive communication. Technical buyers (and sellers) loved the opportunity to do demos that directly addressed the real challenges faced by a company. Food and beverage buyers wanted to smell and taste. Retail buyers wanted to touch.

I am confident that many people will eventually want to head back to Las Vegas and the show floor, but I am not confident that every company really needs to be there to meet them. Looking at the amount of marketing budget often dedicated to events, and considering how to redeploy that going forward, is step one. Step two is carefully deconstructing the events model – across the era of live events and into the lockdown-mandated all virtual events – and finding the elements that really worked to advance the company agenda. Rebuild your events model around the high-impact items – as measured by you and by your customers – not around the sales pitches from events producers. There will be a place for the show floor in the future, but there will also be a roll for the type of community found in Fortnite.

# Action



As country after country around the globe navigated through lockdown, open, and the return to lockdown, it showed some of the difficulties in creating an action plan for operating worldwide. If language and cultural differences were not enough for marketers to navigate, now we must overlay the current pandemic response as well.

Work at home is the new normal for many professionals, but it would be careless to assume that it touches all cultures and all levels of society equally. Many workers can only deliver their value at stores, factories, and warehouses around the globe. Medical and social services workers cannot always rely upon or assume a digital solution to connect with the recipients of their services. Schools are trying everything and anything to find instructional models that work across ages and socio-economic status.

Welcome to the Action Reset, the new structure for marketing success. Some will argue that once the pandemic is under control, most things will quickly return to “normal.” This book, and many others, argue that too much has changed, at too deep a level, to ever return to what was. Instead, the deep and costly impact of the recent path is an ideal opportunity for comprehensive change and concomitant improvements. Marketing, the persistent and ever-present voice of brands around the globe, can lead the charge in creating new plans, establishing new channels, and delivering on the ideals of a new age.

## **Play 5: Communications, transparency, and trust**

When was the last time you refreshed your social media strategy? The best brands are doing it weekly, riding the waves of change and finding new ways to remain relevant. The past year has seen an endless evolution of social channels and communication, and the most significant changes are likely yet to come. As Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms face pressure from governments, advertisers, and brands, they race to maintain some standards around facts, nonetheless the elusive concept of truth.

In the face of this, brands must elevate an integrated communication strategy to the top of their stack. Even for brands that avoid proactive engagement in social channels, they can be pulled in by others in a heartbeat and get swept up in a maelstrom of facts and opinions they cannot control. Most brands would love to be trending, until they are trending for all the wrong reasons.

The playbook must be built around transparency and trust. Brands cannot hide and they should not even try. What brands can do is learn to become active and astute listeners and develop carefully articulated steps to take as soon as they hear something important. Investing in AI-driven tools for listening and analysis, as well as automated response (because no company will ever be able to keep up with the torrent of posts by millions of humans) becomes a must-have in the future.

Marketing must integrate all their communication channels because customers see contradictory messages as a reason to lose trust. Internal integration among PR, social, content, and campaigns will be essential to execute well-timed and impactful customer communication.

## Play 6: The futureproof playbook

Marketing is truly a discipline of the moment; what seemed like great marketing a few years ago might not even be considered today, and what we do today can lose relevance overnight. The artifacts produced by marketing – ads, events, videos, white papers, eBooks (like this one) – are usually nothing more than ephemera, forgotten quickly in the relentless march forward.

Being of the moment can make it seem that marketing is worthless, but nothing is further from the truth. This is the secret strength of great marketing: being able to speak to customers as they exist right now. People are overwhelmed with information, and increasingly skeptical of the truth of most of that information. The pandemic and economic reset has left typical people weary and concerned for the future. In that, they increasingly turn to brands for comfort.

The opportunity for marketing to meet the needs of people around the globe in new and exciting ways has never been better. To do so requires deep understanding of society and societal trends, updated investments in technology for listening, measuring, and responding, and playbooks that are as flexible as those used by the best professional sports teams.

Every week, a football or basketball team plays a different opponent, with a changing roster of players on both sides, and changing weather conditions around them. If their playbook was fixed, and they simply executed the plays that worked last week, or last year, their losses would mount quickly. The playing field is nearly infinitely dynamic and complex for a team, just as it is for a marketer. Building a futureproof playbook now means evaluating and updating the plays regularly, consuming vast amounts of information about customers and competitors, and being willing to iterate endlessly.

Marketing *is* a discipline of the moment, and that is the unique opportunity right now. **The Reset is here, the moment is now, and the well-prepared brands will thrive in the years ahead.**

## NORMAN GUADAGNO

*Norman Guadagno is currently CMO at Acoustic, where he is helping reimagine marketing technology. Over the past two decades, he has held a number of marketing and strategy roles with a deep focus on business transformation, marketing acceleration, and brand building. Norman was previously SVP of Marketing at Carbonite, helping to successfully transform that company from B2C to B2B. He has also held senior marketing positions at digital marketing agency Wire Stone (now part of Accenture Interactive), Microsoft, and Oracle.*

*With both a B.A. and M.A. in psychology, Norman has always viewed marketing challenges first through the lens of human perceptions, motivations, and emotions. Combined with a deep understanding of data, proven skills as a storyteller, and rich experience as a business and people leader, his unique perspective on the social and business landscape today offers valuable insights for professionals across industries.*

## ABOUT ACOUSTIC

*Acoustic is an independent marketing cloud with the open platform needed for success in a dynamic world. We're reimaging marketing technology by lessening the burdens of repetitive tasks and equipping marketers with powerful technology that is simple and easy to use. We give marketers more time to do what really matters—to think bigger and put themselves back into the work. We help marketers aim higher, bringing humanity back into marketing. Acoustic serves an international client base of more than 3,500 brands, including Fortune 500 companies, providing digital marketing, marketing analytics, content management, personalization, mobile marketing, and marketing automation solutions.*

*For more information, visit [www.acoustic.com](http://www.acoustic.com).*

The logo features the text "The Reset" in a dark blue serif font. The word "The" is smaller and positioned above the "R" in "Reset". A yellow circular arrow graphic surrounds the text, starting from the top left, curving around the top and right, and ending with an arrowhead pointing down towards the "t" in "Reset".

# The Reset

Stay tuned for more content in  
**The Reset** series—coming soon!