

Leading marketers and key industry experts come together to explore the brand impact of the crisis

The Marketing Society of Ireland recently launched a Community Circle virtual event series to support members as they navigate the current COVID-19 crisis and Recovery. The first event in the series, entitled **THE BRAND IMPACT OF COVID-19 – React/Reality/Recovery**, explored the real impact of the crisis as well as a road map for recovery.

The virtual event brought together leading industry experts such as Richard Colwell, CEO at RedC Research; Andy Pierce, Strategy Director at Core; Rosemary Garth, Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs at Irish Distillers; Cliona Hayes, Director of Global SMB Marketing & Communications at Indeed and Geraldine O’Leary, Group Head of Commercial at RTÉ.

5 Key Take-outs

1) Moving from Shock and Awe to Steadying the Ship as home and life improvements take centre stage

RedC Research CEO, Richard Colwell, began the session by introducing the two phases in which his company is approaching the Covid-19 pandemic: “Shock and Awe” followed by “Steadying the Ship,” the latter being focused on an acceptance of the current circumstances that were firstly met by fears based on uncertainty. He has singled out a new trend of home and life improvements, with society as a whole now turning to media to feed a need for escapism rather than the initial thirst for news which came in the first phase.

2) Time to plan for recovery now and find your role in the recovering economy

Core’s Andy Pierce reinforced the idea of a switch from current affairs, and highlighted the three phases at the centre of their current approach: Adaption, Reaction and Recovery. For Pierce, it is firstly necessary to ask whether previous messages are still suitable, followed by a reevaluation of the objective which should now take into consideration an opportunity to help others. Finally, businesses should decide where they are going to be within the recovering economy, a phase that requires planning as soon as possible.

3) Importance of putting community first and being through to your culture

Irish Distillers has been praised for their reaction to the crisis, and Rosemary Garth, Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs, told marketers that this began with firstly asking how the business could help their community. She noted that the positive brand recognition has come naturally, as the public is willing to recognise the efforts that companies are making.

4) Listen to what’s happening and being discussed in social and in media and plan accordingly

Cliona Hayes of Indeed echoed this point, as she agreed that a main objective of hers is to achieve action based on authenticity, and added that the business is now planning for the rebuild which will come from social listening insights.

5) Evolving tone and content to suit the new reality

Geraldine O’Leary, Group Head of Commercial at RTÉ, referenced campaigns like #createdontcontaminate and the Home School Hub as examples of the broadcaster’s ability to adapt, stating that she has also witnessed an overall willingness and desire by advertisers to change their tone to better reflect the current situation.

Event chair Peter McPartlin summarised the key points that all attendees should take away from the virtual meeting. He explained that first and foremost, this is a humanitarian crisis, meaning that it is always necessary to prioritise the human aspect before thinking about conveying messages. “We market to people, not machines” - this includes remembering the hundreds of small and medium businesses that are in need of support as they continue to make up a vital part of the local economy. Furthermore, there should be a reliance on the right level and the right type of communications at this time, as Mr. McPartlin believed marketers currently have a historic opportunity to assist the economic recovery that will follow. Although the outcome of the crisis remains unpredictable, McPartlin is also optimistic that this is a chance for marketers to define a new definition of daily life, focusing on what gives people purpose and what fulfilment and happiness means for them.

Commenting on the launch of the virtual COVID-19 event series, Marketing Society, Chairperson, Deirdre Wafer said “The principal aim of the society is to provide thought leadership and share best practice so it is important that we at the society do all we can to support our members during these truly unprecedented times. We reached out to our members to hear first-hand the challenges they are facing and developed this complimentary member’s only virtual series in response to their concerns. We will continue to liaise with our members during these difficult times and develop meaningful content and supports that add real value”.

For more information on the virtual COVID-19 event series visit: www.marketingsociety.ie/events