



**Five cross  
industry COVID-19  
responses worth  
considering today**



Quest Worldwide

Inspiring businesses to be their best



# Five cross industry COVID-19 responses worth considering today

As we dare businesses to achieve more during this challenging time, we asked a number of C-level executives the following question:

**“What is one thing you have seen a business from a different industry do, in the past two months, that you and your business should quickly replicate – for better business outcomes?”**

The responses and our research uncovered some valuable insights that we'd like to share. We acknowledge that some of these responses/innovations could represent seismic directional changes for your business. We understand that these are not decisions that would be taken lightly but we would encourage you to consider them (and ones like it) as the pay-off could be huge.

In addition to describing the innovations we have seen, we have provided our views on why this is relevant, and outlined practical steps that a business like yours would need to consider before executing a strategy to deliver these types of innovations/responses.

## Havaianas focuses on Purpose, not just profits, in a time of need



As Coronavirus cases and deaths continue to mount in Brazil, **Havaianas** & parent company **Alpargatas** has developed a multi-pronged approach that benefits individuals that need it most. **Alpargatas** has temporarily repurposed and adapted their factories in Brazil to make protective equipment for healthcare professionals. The company has already begun production on masks, hand sanitizer, COVID-19 test kits, and more.

The **Alpargatas** Institute has also launched a 'goodwill fund' which allows employees, individual, and corporate partners to participate in its COVID-19 relief efforts. The fund will donate one **Havaianas** relief package for every R\$15 (US\$3) raised.

- **Lead with heart:** “We are a team of passionate people, brand ambassadors that stand up for our company, **tackle challenges with resilience** and **always lead by example.**”
- **Take care of the future:** “We act now with our eyes on the future by building sustainable businesses that **generate positive social, environmental and economic impact. We value** transparency, **ethics and integrity.**”

### Why is this important?

Repurposing and adapting equipment to meet critical needs is the right thing to do during this challenging time. Rather than simply making cash donations, **Havaianas** & **Alpargatas** are leveraging their capabilities in ways that are consistent with their values. This approach will resonate much better with its employees, customers and other stakeholders.

### How could this benefit a business like yours?

- Review your business' Purpose and Values and assess whether you are responding to the crisis (internally and externally) in a manner consistent with these.
- As a leadership team have a discussion - are there meaningful acts your company can champion that can help alleviate the pain and suffering resulting from COVID-19?
- Never lose sight of the long game. Consumers, customers and employees don't always remember what you said or did - but they never forget how you make them feel. Creating positive moments of truth is a powerful contributor to sustained business success (**Havaianas** turns 58 this year).

## Twitter trends by offering employees the option of working from home forever



**Twitter** was one of the first companies to go to a work from home (WFH) model in the face of COVID-19, but they don't anticipate being one of the first to return to offices. In fact, Twitter has said "the past few months have proven we can make that work. So, if our employees are in a role and situation that enables them to work from home and they want to continue to do so forever, we will make that happen."

While Facebook and other large and small tech companies are exploring this option, not everyone is fully onboard. Microsoft's CEO Satya Nadella expressed concern saying that early positive remote-work productivity metrics may mask underlying deficiencies in terms of managing and mentoring employees. He also raised worries about potential burnout and mental health issues.

### Why is this important?

It is too early to say how many of Twitter's 5,100+ employees across its 35+ offices worldwide will actually take up this offer, or how it will impact Twitter's culture and employee engagement, but this represents a paradigm shift about how we might (and should) think about work.

This could be a pivotal moment where businesses transition from a traditional workplace-based model to a hybrid workplace/WFH model or, in some instances, fully WFH models. Each of these options will have intended and unintended consequences and redefine the idea of a 'workplace'.

### How could this benefit a business like yours?

- Weigh up the pros and cons of whether a Twitter response should be an option in your 'workplace'.
- Continue to extend the flexibility and benefits that working from home provides, but ensure you supplement it to meet any unintended consequences. A few weeks or months of operating remotely is a different prospect to removing a physical office. Each have pros and cons and it is important to go into any 'ways of working' decisions with eyes wide open.

## Alibaba used 2003's SARS Pandemic as a springboard to become one of the world's most valuable companies



As COVID-19 wreaks havoc on the global economy, **Alibaba** finds itself in a familiar position. It was in fact an epidemic — of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS, which is also a coronavirus) — that put the company on its path to becoming an e-commerce giant.

Jack Ma and his leadership team focused on the opportunities, not the challenges that SARS brought in 2003. They accelerated the launch of their B2C platform (Taobao Marketplace) to take advantage of the internet becoming a mass (shopping) medium in China.

They used the SARS head-start and rapid innovation to build an insurmountable lead in the digital space in China. An example of the key innovation they brought to market in the years immediately after SARS include:

- Aliwangwang – a PC based instant messaging tool that facilitates text, audio and video communication between buyers and sellers in 2004.
- Taobao University – providing ecommerce training and education for buyers and sellers in 2006.
- Alimama – an ad monetisation platform in 2007.
- Taobao Mall (renamed later to Tmall) a brand focused marketplace is introduced to complement Taobao Marketplace in 2008.
- Alibaba Cloud in 2009.

### Why is this important?

The Alibaba example shows that there is always opportunity in adversity. It also shows that clarity of purpose and pragmatic leadership need to be in place to take advantage of the initial opportunity, and then extend your head start. The SARS crisis taught Alibaba serious lessons which have helped to transform and define the business. These lessons have provided a form of 'immunity' for businesses like Alibaba, giving them the resources and knowhow to weather a new crisis, which is fundamentally the same challenge at scale.

### How could this benefit a business like yours?

- Use scenario planning to consider which elements of your customer/consumer landscape will change irrevocably.
- Review and rank your existing innovation projects to identify those that should be accelerated (and stopped) as a result.
- Repeat these first two steps regularly (e.g. quarterly) using an agreed upon set of criteria (e.g. strategic importance; ease of implementation; payback period; ROI; other project dependencies etc.)

## Avid Reader, a small but vibrant independent bookstore, reinvents and extends its delivery model five times in ten weeks to keep meeting the needs of its community

I suspect most of us have a shop, café or place in our local community that brings us joy and that we are committed to supporting so they can survive the COVID-19 pandemic. **Avid Reader** is that place for me.

The team at Avid have shown amazing resilience, creativity and agility in how they are responding to this evolving crisis. As a small business, it must be tempting to throw in the towel. However, that is not what they have done. Since mid-March they have extended their engagement, sales and delivery model at least five times by my count and I know they will continue to evolve:

1. Online click & collect – Avid always had a small online store that was used for people out of town to buy books. Straight away they told us, their local audience, to use this to buy books which could be paid for and collected from a table in their store.
2. Online book clubs and events using Zoom.
3. Online click and ship/courier – sounds fancy, but in reality it meant the owner got on his push bike, later upgraded to a motor scooter - to deliver books to our door (or to the post office).
4. Social media purchasing – we are able to simply send the owner a Facebook message and the next day we have a fresh pile of books ready to read.
5. Brought back in-store browsing and shopping – while retaining Zoom and their online bookstore - there is nothing better than browsing the books in store, and luckily for us and other super fans – this option (as well as all the others) are now open to us.

### Why is this important?

Rather than sitting on their hands, Avid took positive steps to reduce and adapt to the changing market conditions. The speed of the response was something to admire.

The team at Avid show the value of creating 'Super Fans' in good times and then enabling those fans to support you, by changing the way you go to market, during difficult times.

By Identifying and tagging 'Super Fans' this group can have a strong 'Influencer effect' in the local community.

### How could this benefit a business like yours?

- Identify and tag who your 'Super Fans' are and invest the time and effort to not just meet, but exceed, their needs.
- With survival being a powerful driver for behaviour, businesses like Avid are executing Agile and Lean methods at speed. Which of these methods could benefit your business?
- Be ready, willing and able to change how you go to market. Even if you know the temporary nature of some of the changes.

## Sentient Computing

**Sentient Computing**, a Perth-based software development company, has utilised their skills in VR training, 3D visualisation, process control and automation to create Social Distance Dash – a free browser-based videogame that teaches children the importance of hygiene to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The aim of the game, which is aimed at children, is to get a packet of toilet paper to their granny's house in the fastest time possible. There's a time penalty for coming too close to people and bonus time for collecting bottles of hand sanitiser.



### Why is this important?

Sentient Computing's leadership team have shown the benefit of a broader perspective of who their customers are in developing this innovative product. A product that has real health and social value. By adopting a free model for the game they removed a barrier to access and showed off their expertise and ability to innovate to a much broader audience. The fact that the Australian Financial Review has written about it won't have hurt their prospects.

### How could this benefit a business like yours?

- Use brainstorming and other techniques to align around what the business' core capabilities are and discuss how these may be applied differently to solve current and evolving problems.
- Encourage idea generation by recognising team members with the best ideas + those with the craziest ones... it is the crazy ideas that sometimes lead to something highly valuable.
- Use sprint/scrum/agile methodologies to rapidly bring a minimum viable product to market. Leaders need to be clear on the speed versus quality requirements for any product launch.

**"Perfection is the enemy of progress."**  
Vince Lombardi

### Final Thoughts

**The ability to adapt and pivot during times of change is a game changer. The best businesses regularly challenge the status quo and don't just accept 'the way things are done around here' because they believe there is always a better way. They also understand that key advances in innovation and creativity often arise around times of Crisis. These advances can mean the difference between a business surviving and one that actually moves into the Post-Crisis world in a stronger position than before.**

### We hope that you find this useful. If so please share.

This summary was produced by Wiet Pruijm (Regional Director) and the Team at Quest Worldwide.

Quest Worldwide is an award-winning strategy execution consultancy. Areas of focus include working with organisations to improve strategy execution, operational excellence and people engagement.

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