How Digitally Agile B2C Brands Adapt in Times of Crisis
A Note to Our Readers

At the time of this report’s publication, consumer sentiment, market demand and overall economic conditions had become volatile due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report assesses the digital performance of brands in 2019 and hence the data does not capture the impact of the unfolding COVID-19 situation. These insights and takeaways are related to best practices for cost-efficiencies, content strategy and marketing channel optimization.

Please visit Gartner’s COVID-19 resource center to review our resources on how to protect your people, maintain operations and sustain your organization during the pandemic. We will continue to share more resources and updates over the coming days and weeks.

Our priority is the safety and well-being of our clients, employees and the communities we live in, and our thoughts are with those experiencing difficulty at this time.
Introduction

Both B2B and B2C Genius brands understand the power of a forward-looking approach to digital, which enables them to quickly pivot during times of crisis. Gartner benchmarked the digital performance of over 1,500 brands in 2019, but only 58 B2C brands earned the coveted distinction of Genius. The Gartner Digital IQ measures brand performance across over 1,250 data points pertaining to digital excellence. Brand scores are indexed to an average of 100 and then assigned into 1 of 5 classes. The Genius designation is reserved for brands who achieve a 140+ Digital IQ. These brands represent the leaders in digital media, e-commerce, product innovation and organizational structure. While diverse in size, age and composition, digital Geniuses demonstrate the value of a consistent yet dynamic approach to marketing. B2C Genius brands are hyper-focused on the e-commerce challenges of their specific sector. The experience of purchasing a moisturizer versus a tractor online are vastly different, and what designates Genius varies in each scenario (see “Digitally Agile B2B Brands Adapt in the COVID Crisis.”) Brands from all sectors, however, can learn from the leadership of these Genius brands during the COVID-19 2020 global pandemic.

Key Findings

• Existing strengths in omnichannel capabilities make Genius brands like Walmart and Target poised to efficiently adjust fulfillment to new needs brought upon by times of crisis.
• Amidst uncertainty, Genius retailers like Sephora and other LVMH brands bias communications toward actions and assistance, not messaging and brand.
• Periods of crisis invariably alter consumer behavior, and Genius brands like Nike have responded to the unique predicament of their consumers by reorganizing content and other assets to maintain relevance for when consumers are ready to shop again.

Key Recommendations

• Prioritize prudent omnichannel investments, such as curbside pickup, during times of stability, as these afford bandwidth to efficiently adjust fulfillment to new needs brought upon by crises.
• During times of uncertainty, prioritize transparent communication with consumers and on the channels that garner the authentic engagement for you (e.g., email versus Instagram).
• Mitigate the risk of copycat or tone-deaf marketing during periods of crisis by leveraging existing strengths and continuing the business priorities that reflect an understanding of consumer sentiment.

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Gartner research is based on data-driven analysis. Our findings, rankings and recommendations are objective, unbiased and independent of membership.

n = Legacy Brands n = 1,872 Brands, B2B Manufacturing Brands n = 87
Source: Gartner Intelligence Report: In the Company of Genius, January 2019
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