Annual Planning During the Unplannable Year

We explore how marketers and product managers can build marketing plans for 2021 in an era of so much uncertainty.

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Table Of Contents

1 STRATEGIC ROADMAP

2 PRODUCT OR CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES

3 TARGETING STRATEGY

4 CHANNEL MIX

5 CREATIVE STRATEGY

6 ANNUAL PLANNING CHECKLIST

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Humility and flexibility will carry planning for 2021

Annual planning sessions typically run like a well-oiled machine. Product managers, insights groups, and agency partners gather to review performance from the previous year against long-term plans, and set marketing goals aligned to KPIs for the upcoming year. While the format varies by company, it's usually an intense multi-day process of brainstorming, creative concepting, and budgeting, after which the team has their marching orders for the year.

This process is even more meticulous thanks to advances in performance-based marketing and marketers' ability to track success from the macro to the individual ad unit.

The events of 2020 have left annual planning sessions for 2021 in flux. With no indication how the pandemic will evolve, or when specific countries will see economic recovery, marketers must somehow attempt to plan the unplannable.

In this report, we explore key elements of marketing strategy and the annual marketing plan through the lens of COVID-19 uncertainty. Each section contains recommendations to help teams conceptualize and brainstorm an element of marketing strategy, and offers a few key examples from early adopters that are already embracing these principles.

STRATEGIC ROADMAP

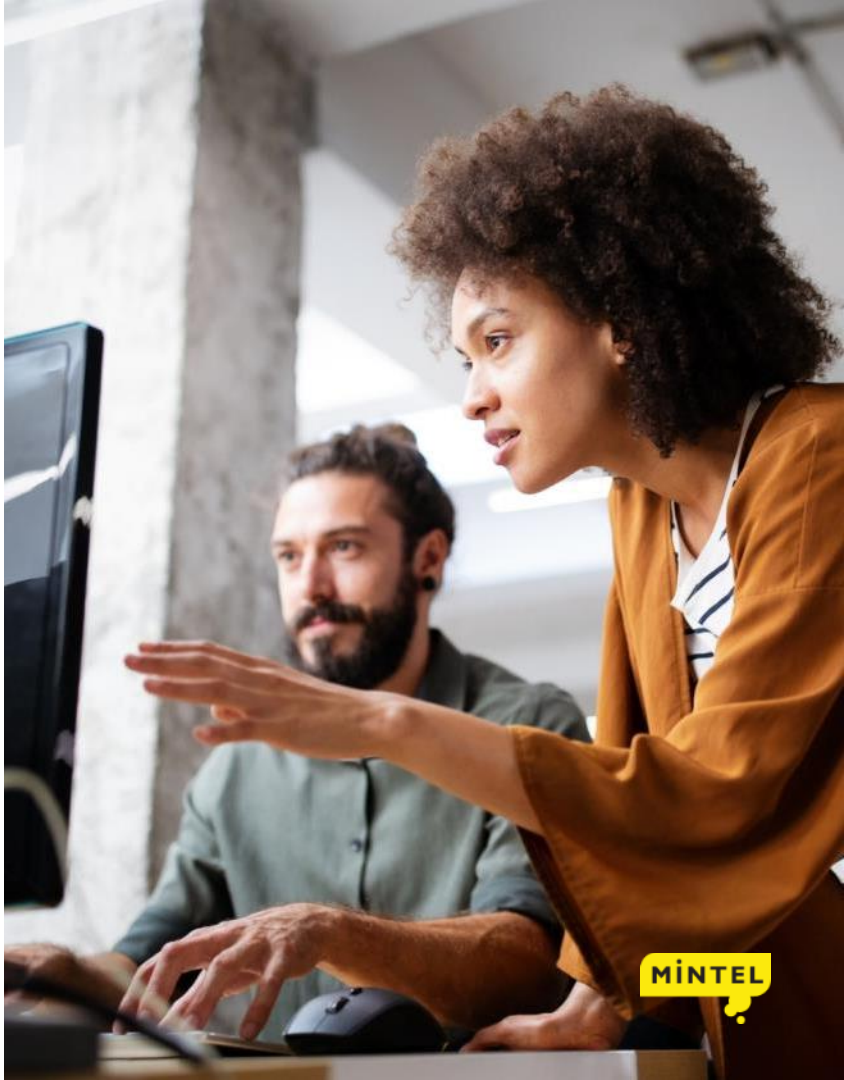
Expand success measures for KPIs

Brands' chief KPI for 2021 should be: did I do the right thing?

Consumers' perceptions of how companies supported them and their communities during the 2008 recession still impact brand sentiment today. While it is crucial to optimize marketing efforts, brands should consider their KPIs through a different lens – one that can effectively balance performance-based marketing and focuses on the long game:

- How did I build a connection?
- Did I offer a tangible solution?
- Did I support ways to give back?

Answer these questions as you rebuild your funnel strategy for 2021. KPIs aligned with these key questions will drive the ultimate goal for marketers: retention, advocacy and customer lifetime value.



Whereas 2020's TV spots offered support, 2021's should foster hope for what's to come.

Bank of America motivates graduates and offers inspiration for a brighter future in a top-of-funnel national TV spot.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (05/01/20-08/20/20), as of 08/20/20

Source: Comperemedia Omni (05/01/20-08/20/20), as of 08/20/20

Engage existing customers and prospects with the next rewards pivot

Travel when it matters. Pay later.

JetBlue and MarcusPay incentivized travel with a new buy now, pay later model. Travel & entertainment cards rose to the occasion during COVID-19, with many shifting benefits to align with categories consumers would still shop (grocery, technology) during social distancing. The key for 2021 will be to think ahead to the next rewards pivot - whether an incentive to open a new checking account, invest more strategically, or motivate card use among co-brand cardholders.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (07/01/20-08/19/20) as of 08/20/20

Use first-party data and DMA targeting to engage with customers' local communities

Engagement: 0.012%

Citi and Mastercard support ways to give back in #Allforsmall campaign. Fostering connection with the local community using DMA targeting is an effective way to connect with customers.

We're #AllForSmall! For every purchase w/ a select Citi® Mastercard® at an eligible small biz in July, @Citibank & Mastercard will together donate 5 cents, up to $1MM, to @start_small to help under-resourced entrepreneurs thrive. Learn more/See terms.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (07/01/20-08/19/20) as of 08/20/20

PRODUCT OR CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES

Product and campaign launches can still be viable with the right contingency planning

While most U.S. consumers said they feel positive or unworried about finances, wild economic swings and the unpredictably of the virus make it a precarious year for a product or campaign launch.

That said, product and campaign launches can and should still happen in 2021 if:

- The targeting model is strong
- Media is plotted on a test & learn approach before mass buys come into play (even for channels where one would typically launch mass first)
- Creative is fresh, either acknowledging the current climate or affording the audience escapism

Audiences are hungry for products that will help them weather the storm, and fresh creative that will pull them out of the sea of recuts and corporate social responsibility brand plays.

Base: *2,000 internet users aged 18+*

Source: *Lightspeed/Mintel via Mintel's COVID-19 tracker, US - July 28-Aug 4, 2020*

People are ready to laugh—especially about their current stressors

Digital workflow firm ServiceNow built humor and ambiguity into their new reopening campaign.

Source: *Comperemedia Omni (08/01/20-08/17/20), as of 08/17/20*

Magical realism makes social distancing moot

Credit One's new campaign for Platinum show the cash back god bestowing mortals with rewards.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (05/01/20-08/10/20), as of 08/10/20

Test & learn in digital channels before flighting costly mass media buys

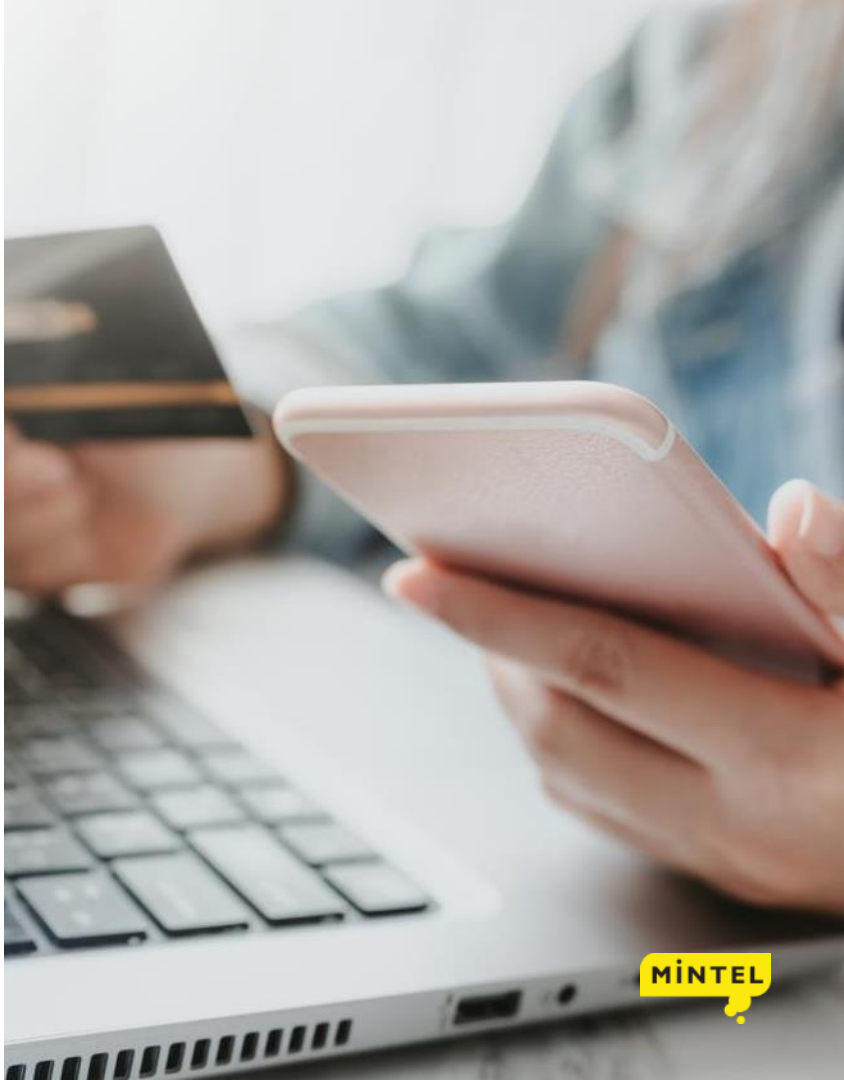
Experian's test & learn approach with Hulu's ad interaction features ensured an expansion to national TV with non-COVID friendly creative would be viewed favorably.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (05/01/20-08/10/20), as of 08/10/20

TARGETING STRATEGY

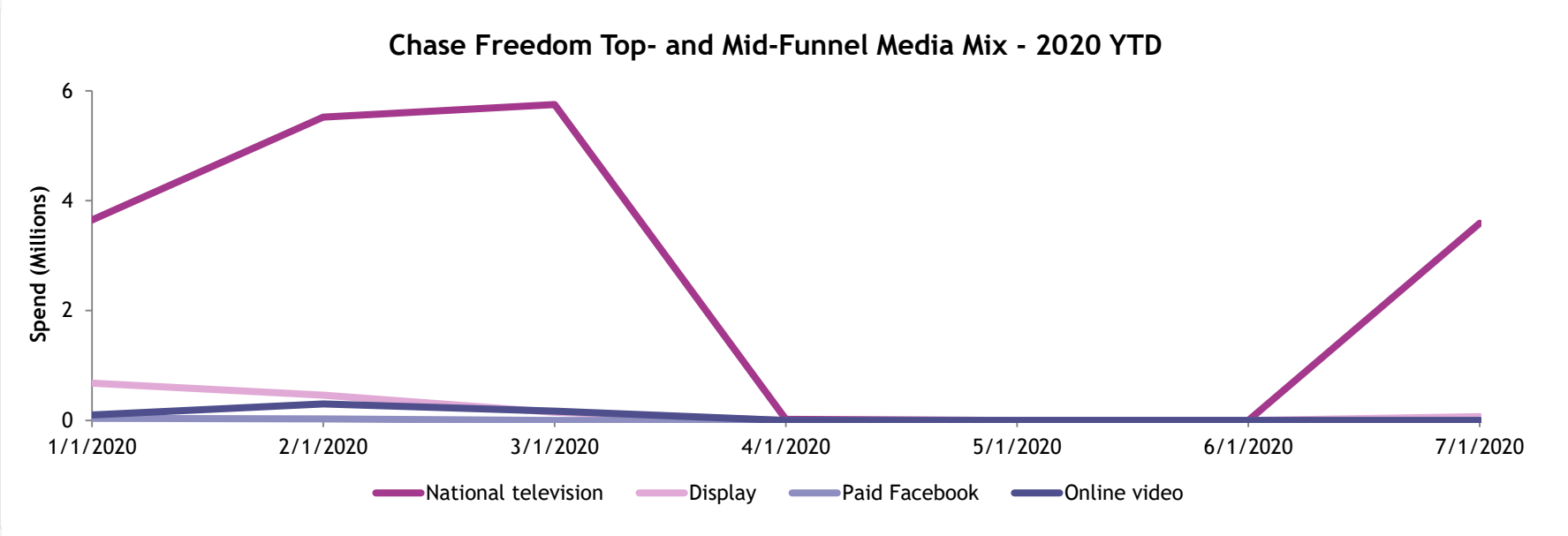
Keep bottom-of-funnel targeting tight, and top-of-funnel awareness fresh

In Q2, financial services brands focused on cross-selling products to existing customers in order to solidify relationships. As economic conditions remain uncertain financial services brands will bet on their more credit-worthy customers for direct marketing. But, brands will use top-of-funnel outreach to prime interest and engagement for when stability returns.



Use mass media to spark intent to apply before a direct mail drop

Freedom's return to its mainstay channel, national television, indicates we could see more from the brand in Q3 2020.



Source: Comperemedia Omni (01/01/20-08/19/20), 08/19/20

Mine first-party data to assess the creditworthiness of existing customers

Quicksilver is deploying acquisition offers via email for existing Capital One customers.

It's official! We're emailing you about earning a $150 cash bonus.

You've been a great Capital One® customer, so we're inviting you to apply for our Quicksilver® Mastercard® from Capital One.

Once approved, you'll enjoy

- A **0% intro APR for the first 15 months** on all purchases, 15.49%–25.49% variable APR after that
- **Unlimited 1.5% cash back** on every purchase, every day
- A **$150 one-time cash bonus** when you spend $500 on purchases within 3 months of account opening*
- **No annual fee**
- **No foreign transaction fees**

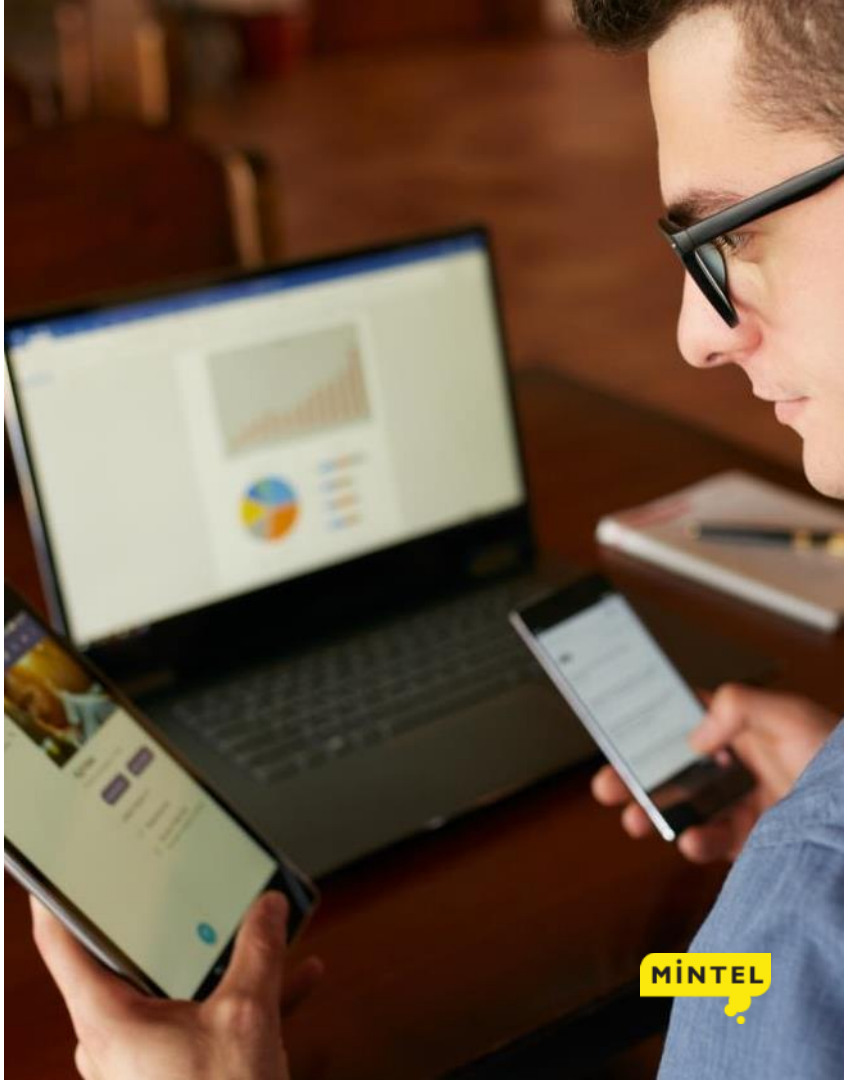
Volume: 146,600

Source: Comperemedia Omni (07/01/20-08/19/20), as of 08/19/20

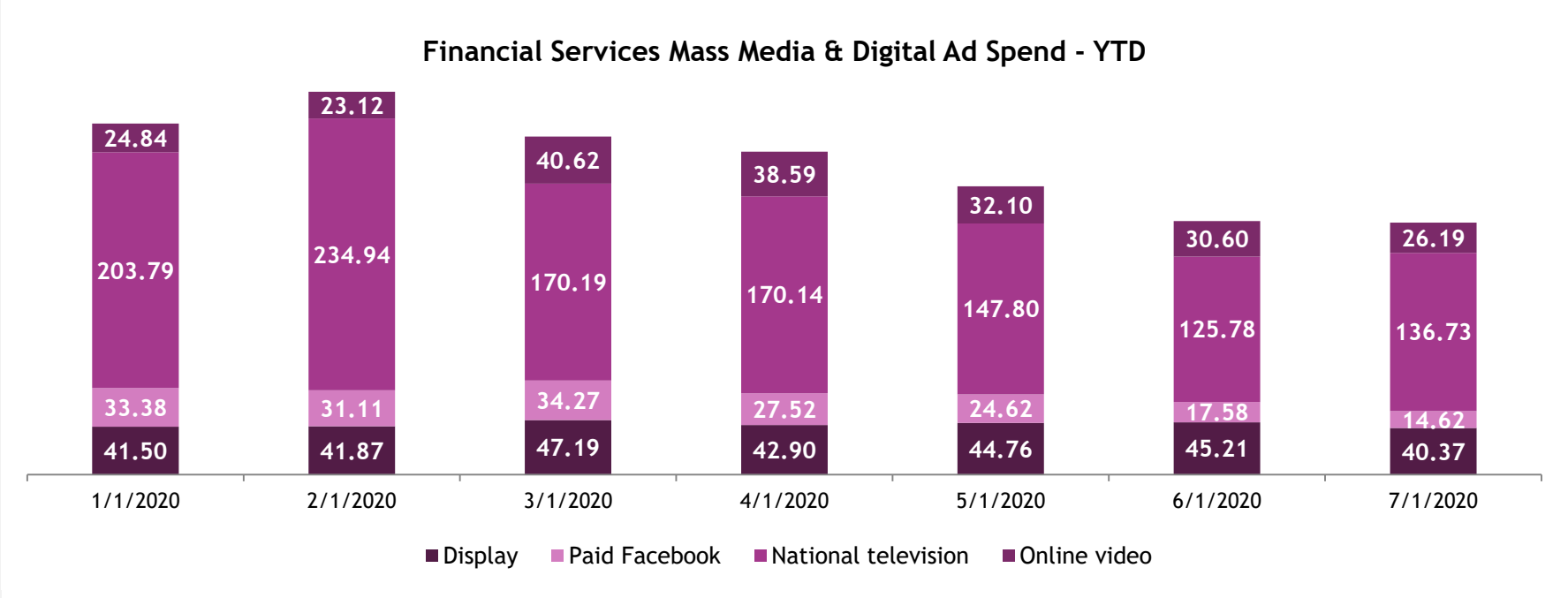
CHANNEL MIX

Prioritize cross-device campaigns and channel strengths over an integrated omnichannel approach

Now is the time to consider how each channel can work its hardest to support KPIs and acquisition rather than fine-tuning a perfectly synchronized omnichannel effort. Consider which channels consumers spend the most time with during shelter-in-place, and which support returns to in-person interaction.



Online video advertising is a must for 2021 thanks to spikes in viewership, low CPMs, and targeting capabilities



Source: Comperemedia Omni (01/01/20-08/10/20), as of 08/10/20

Use DMA targeting capabilities on paid social to localize in-person vs. virtual messaging

Visit Safely
Alert customers of reopened branches alongside any acquisition offers.

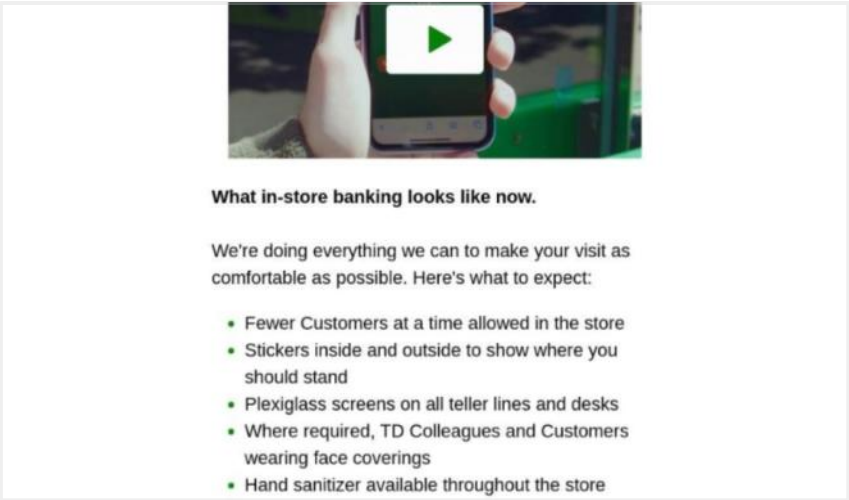
Encourage Social Distancing
Use Facebook or Instagram's video ad type to share a quick animation of mobile account how-tos.

Budget-Friendly Strategy
Brands large and small can use social media to promote locally on paid media.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (05/01/20-08/10/20), as of 08/10/20

Mix digital and branch marketing to deliver a seamless retail experience

With COVID-19 stress high among consumers, TD Bank brings levity and convenience to customers waiting to enter a branch or use the ATM vestibule.



SL: We're open and ready when you are
Vol: 1M

Source: Comperemedia Omni (07/01/20-07/29/20), as of 07/29/20, TD Bank Branch, 122 Greenwich Avenue, New York, NY

There's opportunity to own share of voice in direct mail...

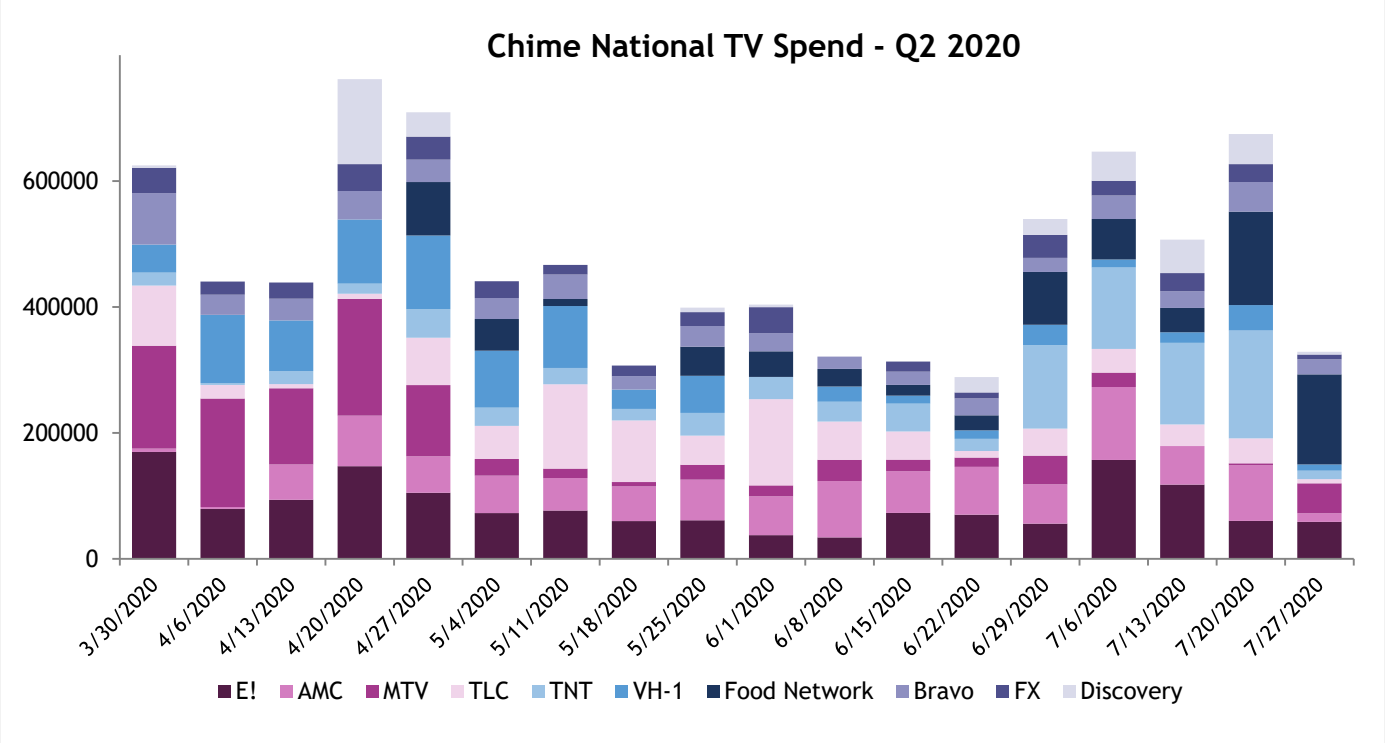
Director of Insights, Telecom Emily Groch noted that direct mail cuts helped Charter Communications win more customers.

As brands across industries were pulling out of mail, Charter kept sending its steady volume of bundle mail. ***It likely benefited from the fact that there was less noise in the mailbox to compete against overall.***

Finally, we saw Charter shift its type of acquisition mail in Q2, sending less pure prospect mail and shifting some of that investment over to cross-sell mail. Charter may have had greater success upgrading its existing internet subscribers to a TV/internet bundle, rather than driving video sign-ups from brand new prospects.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (06/01/20-07/31/20), as of 08/10/20

...and national TV



With large players notably absent from the airwaves, challenger brands like Chime are seizing the opportunity to air spots across a broad array of networks.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (04/01/20-08/10/20), as of 08/10/20

CREATIVE STRATEGY

Make room for uncertainty in copy and comfort in visuals

In July 2020, U.S. consumer worry and comfort in public oscillate as infection rates shift rapidly.

"Worry over lifestyle impact has reached the same level as recorded at the end of April when many areas of the US were in some form of lockdown. Uncertainty over another stimulus bill and back-to-school plans are two factors likely driving this increase."

-Melissa Gilbert, Associate Director, US Reports - Health and Wellness

Source: Source: *Lightspeed/Mintel; Mintel's Global COVID-19 Tracker (07/15/20-07/22/20), as of 07/30/20*

It's ok to say you don't know, because nobody does

Office Depot kept things open-ended on Twitter, with copy like *"whatever for wherever they'll be."*

Marketers should take a red pen to paid and owned ad copy with an eye for flexibility, choice, and uncertainty. Positioning products and services in "either/or" context can insulate the brand and build camaraderie with consumers.

Many retail brands adopted this strategy for back to school, with much uncertain as to where class will be held or if that will last.

Source: Mintel analysis of Pathmatics data (07/01/20-08/10/20), as of 08/10/20

Earned media campaigns can promote in-person comfort and safety over products

Marketers across industries quickly pivoted messaging to online access as shelter-in-place requirements set in. The next phase will be striking the right balance between online access education and assuring customers and prospects that it is safe to visit a local bank branch, airplane, or restaurant soon.

The New York Times reported Nordstrom, with other retailers soon to follow, will embark on large influencer campaigns that show the safety measures in place at open locations.

Thanks to the agility of earned media and highly negotiable CPMs, influencers can help solve this problem for marketers. Consider partnering with local influencers to show either in-person or virtual interaction with your brand. The campaign can flex and evolve as safety requirements change.

@**wendyslookbook** partnership with Nordstrom

Source: The New York Times

Help consumers plan, and dream, of the future

Hilton Honors marketed 5x everyday rewards that can be put towards future travel. Aspiration in acquisition marketing will motivate consumers to apply.

Source: Comperemedia Omni (07/01/20-08/10/20), as of 08/10/20

ANNUAL PLANNING CHECKLIST

Make 2021 annual planning an opportunity rather than an obstacle

- Expand success measures for KPIs.
- Product and campaign launches can still be viable with the right contingency planning.
- Keep bottom-of-funnel targeting tight, and top-of-funnel awareness fresh.
- Prioritize cross-device campaigns and channel strengths over an integrated omnichannel approach.
- Make room for uncertainty in copy and comfort in visuals.

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Meet the Expert

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The world's leading market intelligence agency

Our expert analysis of the highest quality data and market research will help you grow your business.

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Experts in what consumers want and why