

Post Lockdown Marketing Tips



GOODBYE COVID! HELLO SUMMER.

Are you ready?



WELCOME

Here you will find ten ideas, considerations and strategies your hotel and group marketing teams should be considering, as you plan to reopen your hotel - whether that is on Friday 14th May or later.

These ideas are based on over 20 years of marketing experience including many years as a marketing director and consultant for several hotel groups and hotel management teams.

This advice covers brand and commercial marketing activities that are actionable. The approach is media-neutral, and the full marketing mix is considered including product, price, brand, promotion and distribution.

OVERVIEW

1 Safety first

Easy to do & easy to mess up!

2 Are you listening?

Social listening should be a priority.

3 Is this the time to focus on direct bookings?

You know the answer, but why now more than ever?!

4 Coming out of the dark

on Social Media

5 Is there a downside...

to digitising the customer journey in hotels?

6 Guest Reviews...

in the new world.

7 Google reporting suites...

are still your friend.

8 PPC

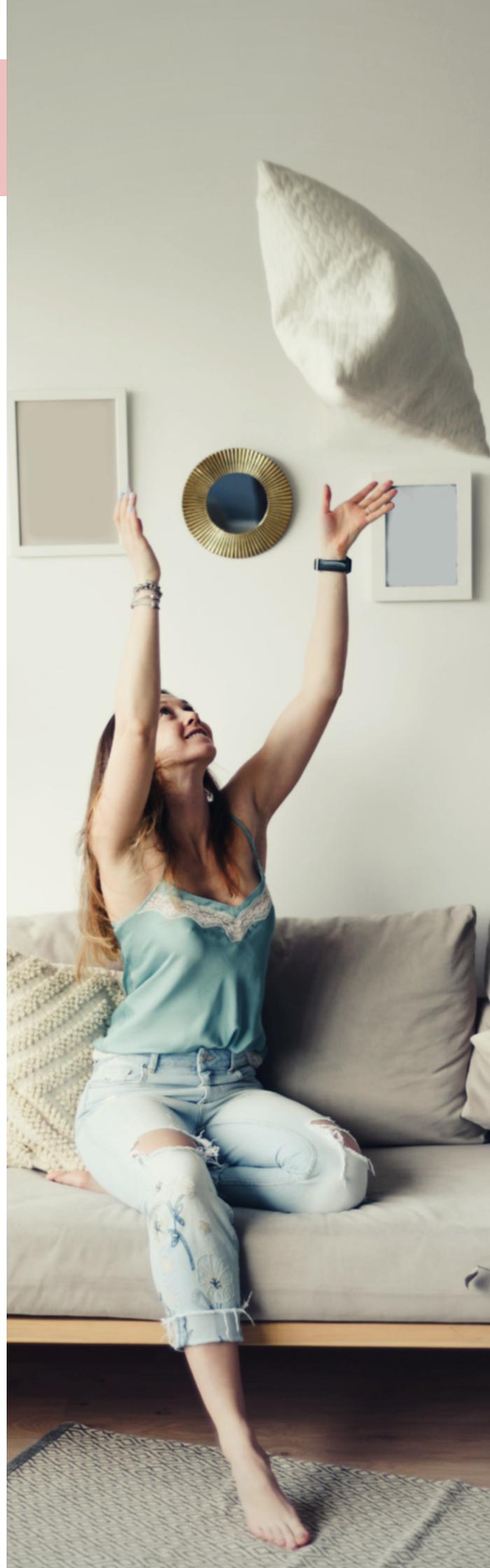
will make a come back!

9 Advertising

To spend or not to spend?

10 2021 planning

It will be harder!



1 Safety first

Easy to do & easy to mess up!

Share your safety measures with travellers. The information needs to be **easy to access and understand**. But if something is easy to do, it is often easy to mess up. You need to give it the respect it deserves, in terms of time and effort.

- **Map the customer journey.**
Use all available channels to ensure it's easy to find. Don't hide it on your COVID-19 webpage, reinforce the message at all touchpoints during the research, booking and pre-arrival stages. Don't forget website FAQs will need updating and use "trust badges" such as logos and devices to give confidence.
- **Update your listings** – Google My Business, TripAdvisor, Online Travel Agents (OTAs), destination websites, local listings etc. Here's a couple of specifics:
 - Google** - Remember over 50% of Google searches end without a click. Google is giving the answer to the searcher on Google territory, so make sure your hotel's details are up to date and reflect all the key information it allows.
 - TripAdvisor** - There is a new COVID-19 search filter. Hotels should add their safety measure checklist for visitors to view.
- Certain **safety measures will become expected** of hotels (quickly), Without an industry-wide government-led initiative every hotel will be saying the same thing but with a different header – Hilton Clean Stay; Marriott Cleanliness Council; Quality in Tourism's Safe, Clean and Legal accreditation.

Free accreditations include:

AA COVID Confident <https://www.ratedtrips.com/aa-covid-confident>

VisitBritain's "We're Good To Go" <https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/were-good-go-industry-standard>.

These are worth considering, especially by independent hotels, as these recognisable brands will give the consumer confidence to book directly.

1 Safety first

Easy to do & easy to mess up as well!

How will your BRAND say, "Welcome back, you're in safe hands?"

How are you going to say the same as every other hotel, but in a different way to be memorable? We now have an open date and already the noise from hotels to consumers has gone from near zero to saturated – be it social media, emails, display advertising, press releases, TravelZoo exclusive/flash sales etc.

At a macro level, we are all selling a similar experience to a similar audience. With the lack of international visitors and the expected delay in corporate travel, we're all swimming in a smaller domestic-leisure- travel biased pool. This is the time to say the same thing in a different way – make your creative/strategy director and copywriter work hard. They are your best friends to create the right type of standout from the crowd. Ensure it fits with your brand tone, and don't be bland.

It's worth noting that your audience don't know you're open unless you tell them. They won't know the details and will therefore assume for themselves. For example, they may not know your restaurant inside a hotel can open. They may not know that the grab and go breakfast concept can be shelved for a more desirable breakfast service (where your team can serve breakfast buffet – rather than self-service).

Who has done it well?

Moon Palace in Cancun. Great emotional return for the industry, but also for customers, especially past guests of the resort.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cfAwF8uBpU>

db Hotels + Resorts. In a video format they've shown the changes they've made to their hotel. <https://youtu.be/aOZRt70M41g>

2 Are you listening?

Social listening should be a priority.

We must listen to what people are saying. Not only your own guests and your competitors' guests but people too. What they're looking for, what they're frustrated with, what their problems are – they will be different now to before.

We all know social media has increased significantly over lockdown. Rightly or wrongly, social media platforms have been the go-to source for information and to voice thoughts, questions, and opinions. Start here, don't start sending out questionnaires to your database, the responses will differ week to week. The chances are it won't be reliable.

Depending upon your set up, it is highly unlikely it can be done well manually - so use technology or an agency solution to do this Social Listening for you.

It is the responsibility of your marketing team to feed these insights into all areas of the business. These insights should be used to help shape your products and services. Even if it's only for the short term.

A good example of Social Listening led to hoteliers offering bedrooms as temporary office space for individuals and businesses during the lockdown.

<https://www.hospitalitynet.org/news/4100694.html>

Co-Working: How Hotels Are Reinventing Themselves

Accor's brands and hotels are adapting to new ways of working in a post-COVID world by reimagining their spaces and services.

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3

Is this the time to focus on direct bookings?

You know the answer!

It's well known that a booker will visit your hotel website after seeing it on an OTA website. We also know that mostly they will be checking the price and look for more images.

Prospective bookers have 3 more reasons...

1. To gain **confidence** in your approach to COVID-19.
2. To **see what is and isn't open/available** e.g. what does breakfast service look like?
3. **Trust** and ease of flexible booking rates and cancelling processes.

It has been well documented that cancelling, amending bookings and getting refunds via OTAs have been harder for some travellers to understand. Your marketing team should be capitalising on this.

Here are a few recommendations:

- **Make sure the booking journey is easy** – If you use an off-the-shelf Internet Booking Engine (IBE), the opportunity to add functionality may be limited. If so, then look to give your website some TLC.

A Conversion Rate Optimisation (CRO) programme run by people that know how to do it well is great, but in the absence of a budget, there are best practice strategies that can be adopted. One of these is to use trust badges such as logos and devices to give confidence and encourage bookers to book direct. Another is to apply code to deliver notifications such as exit-intent messages, use a price comparison tool such as TripTease and consider using a chatbot to answer FAQ.

- **Make it clear which rates are fully flexible and/or refundable.** And until what date this is available e.g. end of 2021. Use people-friendly words to show how easy it is to do business with you – including how to cancel. Make it (seem) easier than with the OTAs.
- **Make sure the number of promotions is limited.** Avoid confusion on your offer page and offer value over discounting. Make sure the promotions reflect the needs of the customer. Think reunion packages. Think differently. And importantly think about people-friendly names for those promo rates.

3 Is this the time to focus on direct bookings?

You know the answer!

Did you see the unique offer from Nordic Choice Hotels? Pay 2500EUR for two people (B&B) to stay at as much as they want for two months at any hotel (max 5 consecutive nights at one hotel) <https://www.nordicchoicehotels.com/unlimited-nights/>

If you aren't able to differentiate, be distinctive or spend on advertising to get your Share of Voice (SoV), you may need to revert to discounting to generate demand to fill gaps. Take a steer from Village Hotels, they launched a new membership programme "Booking Revolution". To book a room in their £25/£35 bedroom sale, you must become a member. All members receive £25 worth of free extras when booking direct. Through this mechanic, they got the data of those that don't buy in the sale and encourages prospects to book direct when they're ready to buy. <https://www.village-hotels.co.uk/revolution/>

- **Display customer reviews about your safety measures on your site.** It's worth reiterating that positive safety experiences are likely to aid your conversion rate. It's certainly worth testing. Below is a great example from [edyn](#).



- **Offer an immediate albeit small discount if they sign up to your newsletter.** Not everyone is ready to buy. Considering a 15% conversion rate on your website is good, and therefore 85% don't book, trying to capture data to convert later is a no brainer.
- **Look to implement retargeting ads to get those that are TOF** (top of the funnel) and not quite ready to make the decision to book.

If you'd like more ideas around your book direct strategy, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

4 Coming out of the dark on Social Media

Many hotels and hotel groups have gone dark over the last few months. Some hotels didn't know what to say. Others didn't have anyone to manage it.

It's time to switch it back on with a new outlook. Don't ignore what has happened. Share. Be real. People buy from people. People trust people.

Now more than any other time, do not leave social media management to the most junior person in the marketing team. The influence of your content and media spend should be positive, but it could easily be negative.

Here are 7 actionable social media strategies and ideas for your team.

1. Your **social media strategy** will need to be constantly checked and tweaked over the coming weeks and months. It will need regular reviews to make sure the tone of voice is fitting and the content is relevant. As the UK Government (and others) make announcements your team should be quick to respond.
2. **Content** doesn't need to be complicated. Show how you are welcoming your teams back, as well as your guests. Use images and videos of your hotel back in action. Show-off your new-look services. For example, it is likely that breakfast will be served, rather than self-service. Show how it is even more of a treat and good value.
3. #throwbackthursday and other generic **hashtags** need to be very relevant to even consider using. Ask your audience questions and encourage participation. Ask them to share stories, images and videos. User Generated Content (UGC) is always valuable, but as you begin to reopen, this type of "independent" content will give much needed confidence for others to book.
4. Make sure you reiterate your hotels commitment to safety, but more importantly, show the essence of your **UNIQUE BRAND** and **LOCATION**. Your audience on social media platforms are rarely ready to buy so look to inspire them to travel again.

4 Coming out of the dark on Social Media

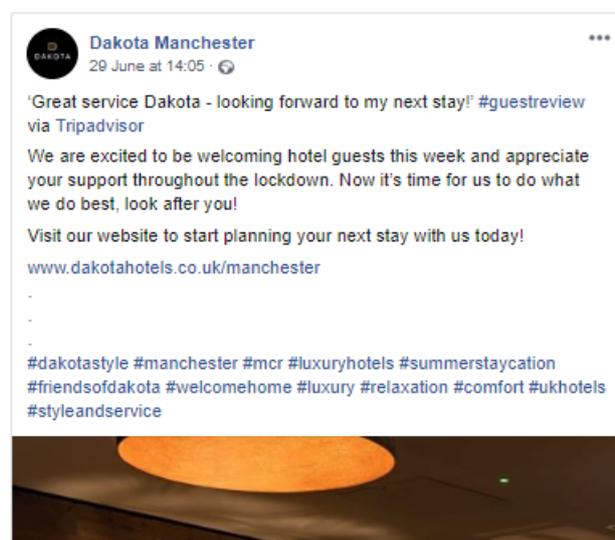
5. You need to **ensure you are visible**. This can be achieved through media buying/ advertising. If you have budget, push your content to your target audience - be selective. Consider using competitions to collect data to build your B2C audiences – we were seeing circa 19p CPC for our apart-hotel clients, but the cost is rising and last week it was 34p.

6. Remember to **“speak” to your local community**. Spas, pools and gyms aren't yet open and your members and customers are waiting patiently. Invite them to try your F&B offering. You'll need to encourage and inspire people to visit, and not only for a break. Be very aware of what the community has been through.

Say thank you to the NHS and key workers but be relevant and sincere. Be specific with who you thank and in what way you can demonstrate your appreciation.

7. Finally, remember the **normal rules still apply**. Choose the right message on the right channel for your customers and guests; Be consistent and frequent with your content, and make sure your customer service teams are very responsive to followers and fans that wish to communicate.

If you need any support with your social media, be it strategy or training for your team, then please get in touch. We'd be happy to help and point you in the right direction to get the support you need. Below are a few inspiring posts from around the UK, pre-opening.



5

Is there a downside

to digitising the customer journey in hotels?

Without a doubt digitising the customer journey has been accelerated and it is expected that guests will embrace the change when they return.

The choice to be able to check-in, access your bedroom, order room service and check-out through an app or online, without having to speak to anyone will become expected, and this isn't just expected of the big players. Some smaller groups are responding well, for example, Village Hotels have been consistently rolling out tech pre-COVID19, and they are expected to be ahead of the curve as hotels open.

But, this digitising and reduced chance of face to face interaction means **your CRM programme needs to work extra hard** – and this isn't just about an email welcome programme to incentivise guests to re-book! This is about using all available comms to engage with the customer, as they choose. They want personal interactions to be emotionally engaged with the brand, and people. Doing this will increase the chances of not only re-books but also peer-to-peer recommendations.

Take a close look at your marketing team's skills.

To be able **to do CRM well** you need to have a good data person in your marketing team. They need to be able to facilitate quality **Data Collection**, ensure the **Data Infrastructure** and **Data Integration** from multiple sources is watertight. With these in place **Data Insights** can be available at the touch of a button (sort of!).

It is the ability to interpret these insights into meaningful solutions that will enable good decision making around your CRM programme, as well as wider marketing and operational activities.

A great hotel CRM system and programme are most impactful when they drive high value repeat business.

Through deep understanding of customer needs (insights) using a variety of sources (infrastructure and integration) the resulting strategies to maximise the chance of repeat business are more likely to be successful.

There are a plethora of hotel CRM systems available, and we've worked with quite a few! If you'd like independent advice with choosing a provider that is right for your business, please get in touch.

6 Guest Reviews in the new world

The importance of customer feedback for your operation teams is second none for brands that want to improve and grow, and the insights should be treated like gold dust by the marketing team. We have read the stats and understand the impact Net Promoter Score (NPS) has on the bottom line.

A guest review given pre-COVID19 will have some influence on buyer behaviour, but it will be limited. Positive or negative comments post reopening will have a profound influence.

Unfortunately, influencing the customer to provide a positive review or prevent a potentially negative review will be harder in person, especially as online check-out becomes more readily available and used.

It is time to consider how to mitigate these risks and ensure you get the type of feedback your future customers are looking for. Here's some specific ideas to consider:

- Amend your post stay questionnaire to ask guests about their "safety experience". Having great reviews about safety will naturally mitigate some of the worry felt by prospective bookers.
- Traditionally feedback survey emails are sent post check-out. If you don't already, consider delivering the feedback email post check-in i.e. during their stay. Amend the content to reference the timings and give them the option to call reception (or use an app) to contact customer services. Don't forget to send reminders post check-out for those that haven't completed the survey.
- Train and incentivise your FOH team to behave as hosts rather than a traditional reception team behind the desk during check-out (this is resource dependent of course). Consider using a system to highlight guests' propensity for face-to-face engagement.

Using coloured wrist bands to show contact preference was set up for employees. But this could easily be done for guests. For simplicity, you may choose to have only one coloured band to indicate their preference to keep their distance.



Ensure positive reviews around experience and safety are used in marketing comms. Make sure these messages are updated frequently so they're not out of date.

7 Google reporting suites are still your friend

Google Analytics

The dashboards and reports will look nothing like before for a while. Past trends are no longer reliable, or comparable to today/tomorrow. New trends will appear, and you need to be looking to spot them. You need to adapt your digital marketing to complement a different guest mind-set. For example, if as expected, booking lead-times are shorter the last year, affiliate activity and re-targeting set ups will need to be amended.

Don't only stick with what you know. Consider different metrics to measure and base decisions upon. For example, understand what visitors are consuming on your webpages.

Has time on the page increased as they're reading your FAQs and COVID-19 information? What is the geographic location of visitors to your website? This is all valuable information when it comes to understanding your local, national and international demand and what strategies and tactics should be served.

Google Trends

This is a great tool to keep an eye on what is happening in terms of search; it shows keywords that are growing in popularity, or not. You can use it to keep an eye on search volumes for the OTA's, competitors and search terms that are relevant to your location whilst things are so unpredictable.

How: When you do a search it ranks each week's volume of searches between 0-100. 100 is when it was most popular. 0 when there are no searches.

"Booking.com" - has been hovering about 48 - 50 for a few weeks, in the UK, which is still below average. In February it reached between 25 - 30.

"London Hotel book" - has been hovering about 25 since mid-February. In March it reached 100!

Think a little differently too, look for other sources of data and insights – reach out to your competitors. The chances are if you're willing to share, they will be too!

If you'd like to discuss and compare insights, drop us a line its good to talk!



PPC

will make a come back!

The cost per click (CPC) in travel has been as cheap as chips. But it won't stay that way for long. If you stopped your PPC campaigns, **it's probably time to restart**. But, don't throw away good money.

Make sure your Brand campaigns are only live if the OTAs and others are bidding on your terms. There is no point being the only ad showing and your website first in the organic listings and on the map pack - this is happening a lot!

With regards to your Generic campaigns, double check your targeting is still relevant. For example, if you didn't use geo-targeting before, its now time to get smart with it. We know in the short-term staycation breaks will be important. We know public transport will be avoided. Use this information in your audience selection.

A/B test content – Be prepared to reduce the time it takes to collect the data and run your tests. This will sit quite uncomfortably with your agency however, these are unusual times and waiting 6-weeks or more may mean you miss big opportunities. Make sure your agency knows what you need and offers you a solution that works for your business. You need to be able to react quickly.

Thoroughly review your site extensions. Using one of the links for COVID-19 may work, as it provides confidence during the research phase, but I'd also make sure your welcome back packages are prominent too.

SEO – TIP: On page content is much easier and quicker to implement that outreach. Switch back on as soon as you can. Ask your agency to research keywords that are now relevant. For example search volume for "Staycation" throughout May 2020 increased two-fold. And "UK holiday" has steadily climbed the last 3 weeks.

It is really important to get the right balance of SEO and PPC. This balance will fluctuate over time, but to maximise ROI AND to deliver increasing rewards your agency (or in house team) must have an overarching search strategy.

If you're not sure you have the right search strategy, please get in touch. We have worked with numerous brands (global and independent hotels), directing their agency support to get the best results.



Advertising

To spend or not to spend?

For some hotels and groups cutting advertising spend (and other expenses) has been a necessary to survive the lockdown. This is often a hard pill to swallow for marketing teams.

There are plenty of reports that provide "evidence" that the businesses that continue to spend during a downturn, do better than those that don't. However, these reports are often criticised as the provider of the research has an invested interest e.g. media companies!

A more respected and independent MSI report shows that businesses that increased advertising spend during a recession, do slightly better than those who increased advertising spend during other times. We are not in a recession. But within our world of hospitality, it certainly feels like it.

What we do know is that Share of Voice (SoV) is important, regardless of timings. If your competitors have cut their ad spend, then it does give those with a budget an opportunity to increase their SoV substantially. Here are a few considerations to help with your decisions:

- Lower media costs are everywhere, so if you have the budget, then you should be able to negotiate a better rate than before and the many auction style CPCs are lower, due to lesser demand.
- Your competition isn't advertising, so your Share of Voice (SoV) will be greater for lesser spend.
- Improve the effectiveness of your advertising. Halve the budget but double the effectiveness.
- Review the channels and targeting - where does it need to work harder? For example, where are your conversions the lowest / greatest? What has the greatest reach? Is booking.com and the other OTAs bidding on your brand terms anymore?
- It is expected that expensive holiday travel will take time to bounce back so, smaller luxuries can do well such as staycations. Therefore, people may be ready to buy with a gentle push.

The important question is: "How will you make an impact if no one sees your content?" Your own customer base have an invested interest in your brand and will respond to email, social media and traditional DM. But this activity will not increase your Share of Voice significantly, and you won't be able to attract new customers.

Macdonald Hotels may have a similar view as they launched a 30 sec TV campaign (29th July) showcasing their family, country and outdoor breaks with a 30% OFF promotion call to action <https://vimeo.com/433539564>.

10 2021 planning. It will be harder!

The trends and booking patterns for 2021 will be different to any other year. The shape of 2021 won't "look" like 2019. Even if social distancing becomes a thing of the past.



There will be a lot of business displaced into 2021 from 2020. Consider the weddings and corporate banqueting events that have been moved or placed on hold. And think of the charities that have suffered, they will need 2021 fundraising events to help them bounce back.

This means the Business On the Books (BOB) from an event perspective may look very strong, But does the bottom line look equally as strong?

In 2021 the gaps will not be predictable for bedrooms or events. From a rooms perspective Tours and Groups aren't expected to return strongly until 2022, so you'll need to fill those rooms from another segment.

As a matter of course, **Marketers need to be best friends with the Revenue team.**

Through this team effort Revenue can give Marketing notice of when demand needs to be generated, to plug the gaps with the right type of business. This will help shape the strategy and budget for comms and product/service development.

Without a doubt your marketing comms schedules are going look a lot different to previous years.

If you need a helping hand planning for 2021 and beyond - please give us a call, We promise The Afro Marketer can bring value to your hotel.



THANK YOU FOR REACHING THE LAST PAGE!

There will be more than 10 considerations on your marketing teams list - there is always more! I suggest you put safety communication first, but how you prioritise the rest, is down to your individual business.

Hospitality will survive, even if it looks a little different for a while.

If you need a helping hand, lets organise a quick video call at a time that best suits you.

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Best Wishes & Good Luck with your reopening!

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