What to do if launch is deemed "non-essential"

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We recognize the tough decision many brand managers are facing today regarding what to launch vs what not to launch. So, what do you do when your product or campaign launch gets put on hold indefinitely due to a pandemic? Due to the rapidly changing landscape surrounding COVID-19, the Evoke Centers of Excellence are publishing guidance on how marketers can best navigate this pandemic in a series we are calling **"Overcoming COVID-19."**

On March 16th, our first client brand team instructed us to halt all work related to a disease awareness launch campaign. The campaign was nearly ready: the photo shoot was completed and almost all campaign assets had been developed, including a website and a robust CRM program with many moving parts and third-party partners involved. Our launch was set for early April and the campaign was shaping up to be a potential gamechanger.

While we were all disappointed to have been stopped in our tracks after so much work, none of us were thinking of ourselves. Or our jobs. We were concerned about the customers—real people who needed real support. And we immediately shifted our focus to support our client in helping this community in the absence of the original campaign rollout.

To galvanize these efforts, we rallied around a guiding principle that provided a leadership stance by putting customers first:

Help those we serve with no hidden agenda.

Every launch and brand circumstance is unique, but we recommend considering what resources would be helpful to your constituents in this unique time, regardless of whether they fit within the original campaign umbrella. Three key considerations to start with include:

" Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."

-Mr. Rogers

1. Know when to have your own unique voice vs championing the voices of others.

In most circumstances, experts are available. Instead of speaking on their behalf, take a humble leadership stance by elevating a platform for experts to share their perspectives. This becomes especially crucial when trying to communicate with consumers facing conditions that may require hospitalization or professionals grappling with acute treatment intervention.

2. Ask people what they need and respond accordingly.

Instead of reiterating basic information, such as "washing your hands for 20 seconds," ask if each potential message or offering makes logical or credible sense coming from the brand. Think about what content would be most appropriate to provide as brand stewards and pharmaceutical companies, and what would be of most value for your customers. This can be a great time to connect with advocacy groups, patient communities, and tele-health companies to collaborate on providing the support resources that people need most, whether it's enabling virtual conversations with specialists or no-touch medication delivery.

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3. Consider the bigger picture and address the inevitable behavior changes.

Either in direct response to COVID-19 or as a consequence of cultural and socio-economic changes, behaviors will continue to evolve. For example, while IQVIA data shows **patients are filling chronic medications at a faster pace, preventative and acute care are taking a hit** (see chart[1]). Public health experts are also warning against "a second pandemic of mental health problems."[2] Support around specific conditions should consider the impact of social distancing, as well as the decreased access to in-person care in both the short- and long-term, especially as the unemployment rate continues to rise. Show leadership—and empathy—by elevating valuable resources for both patients and healthcare professionals.

Chronic vs Acute TRx Daily Index vs Baseline

CHRONIC +11% — Chronic Rx accelerating but may decrease as access to prescribers and doctor visits drop

Daily widening between top 20 chronic vs. acute vs. pre-COVID baseline expectations

ACUTE -8% — Acute therapies dropping along with decreasing doctor visits

— ACUTE TRx 7-day rolling avg — CHRONIC TRx 7-day rolling avg
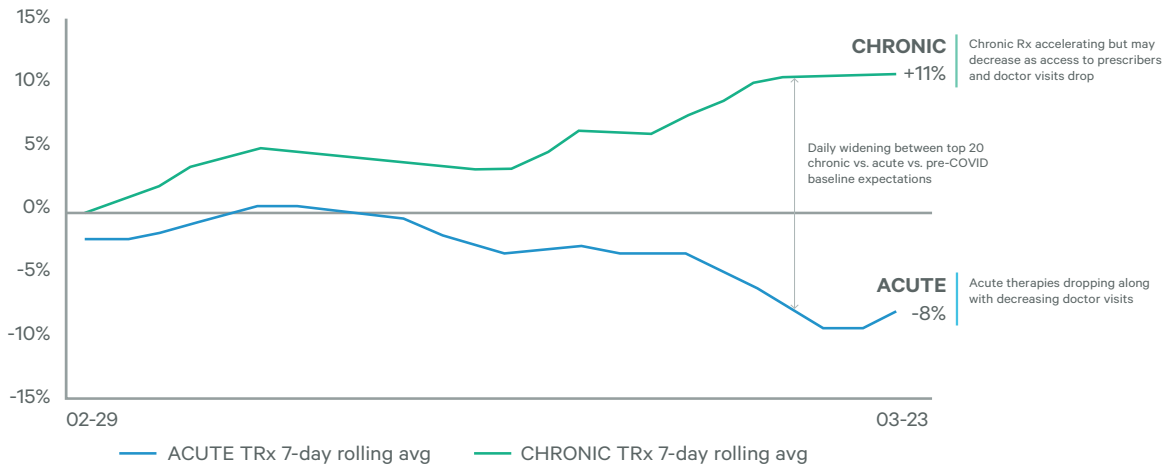
Index computed as rolling 7-week period divided over average daily market basket volumes from baseline period 1/1/20-2/28/20; "Chronic" medication basket = Top 20 medications dispensed for chronic conditions as defined by IQVIA clinical resources "Acute" medication basket = Top 20 medications dispensed for acute conditions as defined by IQVIA clinical resources

Accomplishing these objectives might sound like a tall order, but in the absence of typical launch promotion, there is an opportunity to help the customers you serve in a meaningful way and build stronger partnerships while you're at it. On a macro level, companies like Novartis are partnering with non-profit entities such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to expand R&D efforts.

On a micro level, even a small effort like Comcast's email affirming their commitment to help keep customers connected,[3] including access for low-income and affected families, can make all the difference.[4] This type of response—in place of a product launch push—can garner longer-lasting resonance, and ultimately, greater brand loyalty.

If your launch is delayed or campaign efforts have been put on hold, work with your agency partners to find other ways to build a brand or company platform that elevates and reinforces the distinctive, valued qualities people will remember. A company that lends a helping hand to those who need it most, will be recognized and remembered when it comes time to launch again.
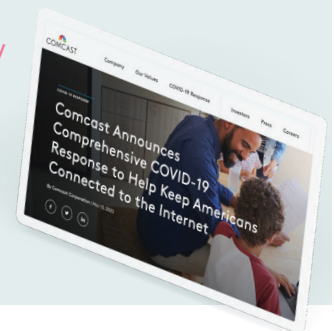
Macro opportunity

NOVARTIS | BILL & MELINDA GATES foundation

- $20M global fund for impacted communities
- Committed to price stability for essential medicines
- Garnered top-tier media and social attention
- Stock price increased on announcement

Micro opportunity

1. IQVIA: Daily Prescription Data (January 1, 2020 - March 23, 2020); data used are unprojected COVID-19 Market Impact - w/e March 13, 2020
2. https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/03/how-will-coronavirus-end/608719/
3. https://www.forbes.com/sites/blakemorgan/2020/03/17/50-ways-companies-are-giving-back-during-the-corona-pandemic/#2227bad47238
4. https://builtin.com/marketing/digital-marketing-coronavirus

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