

EBOOK

# Top COVID-19 Experimentation Ideas

Learn how top experimenters are driving certainty in uncertain times

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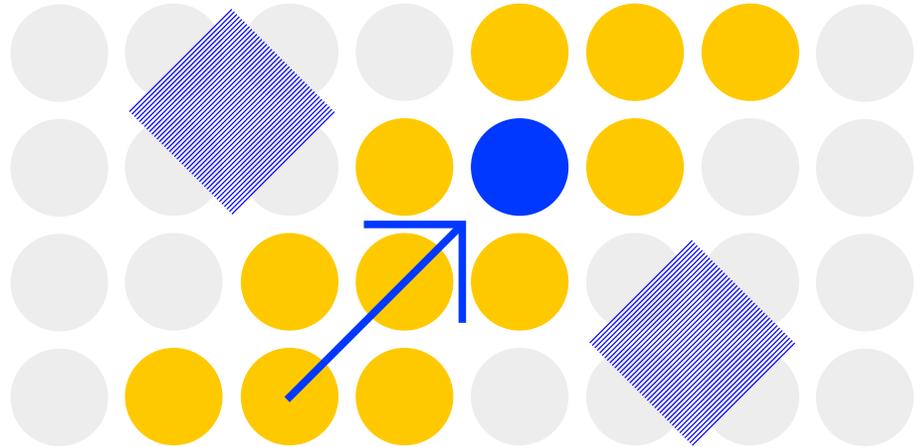
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# 01

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## Welcome to the *Top COVID-19 Experimentation Ideas* eBook



COVID-19 has transformed the world beyond what we could have imagined. Keeping ourselves and our loved ones healthy and safe is top of mind. Also top of mind is the economic impact of this pandemic and how adapt our business strategies in these uncertain times.

Many dynamics are changing:

- Online and offline purchasing activities have changed.
- Customer personas have changed.
- Buying behavior has changed.

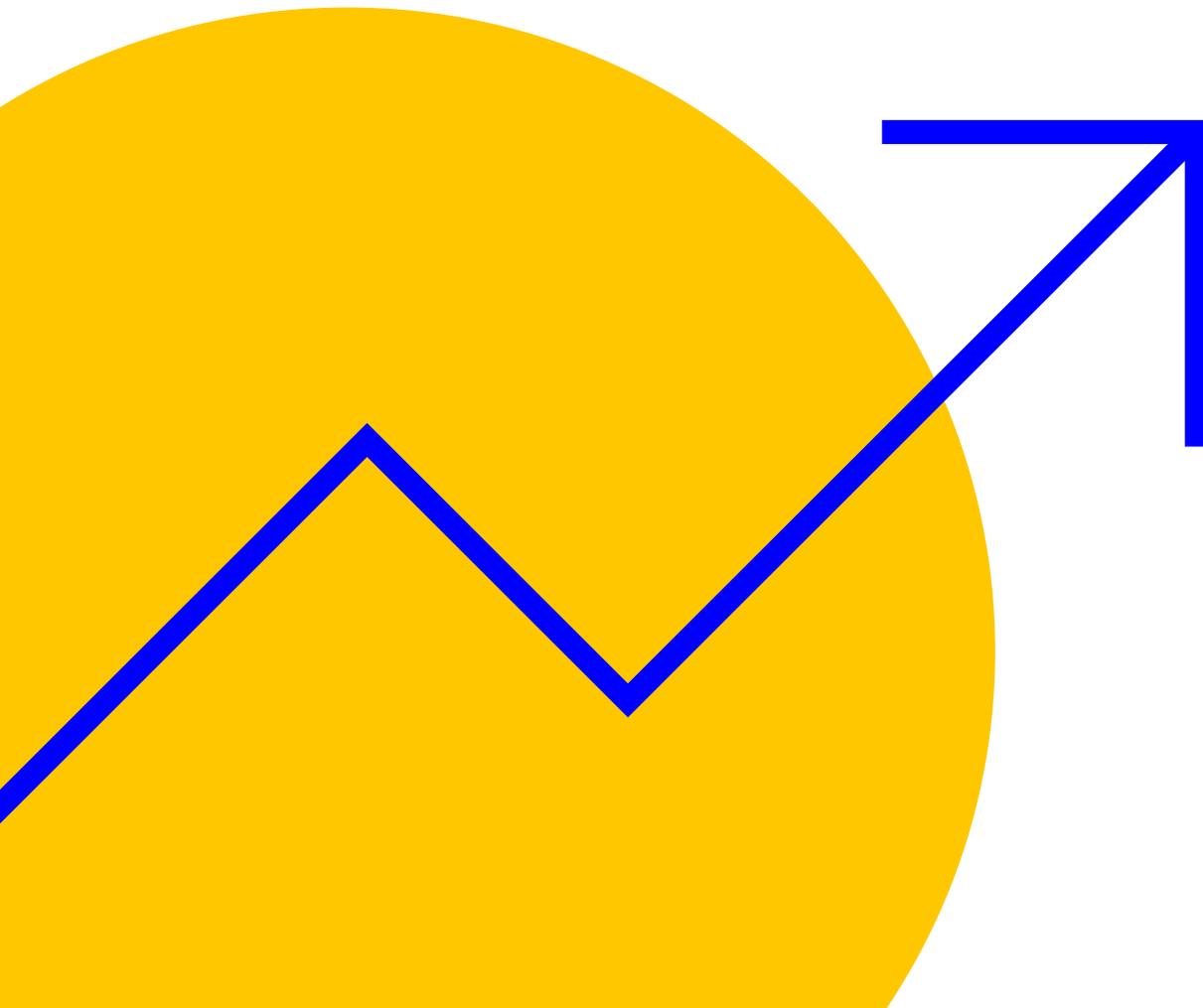
Yet change also means opportunity. The opportunity to attract new customers, to take advantage of new kinds of buying behavior - and to take the lead in the post-pandemic landscape.

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**In the middle of all this uncertainty, let's also remember that there are still certainties around which we can reshape our digital strategies.**

For example, many of these changes represent the beginning of long term trends. And so the nature of your digital customer experiences will become more valuable than ever, which makes digital experimentation more relevant than ever.

This guide looks at these changes in more detail, how experimentation can help you navigate your way to the new normal, and best practices based on our work with thousands of real-world customers.



# 02

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## The State of Play

If we thought we lived in a digital world at the beginning of 2020, there's no doubting that fact now. Lockdown measures have driven more people online, not only to research and buy but also to meet and socialize. Online has become a fundamental aspect of everyday life.

We're not only seeing a greater focus on digital transformation, but also a rapid shift in the digital landscape with new user demographics, purchase behavior and device usage.

### The 6 Drivers of Change



#### Forced digital processes

Companies required to work and operate digitally.



#### Societal behavior is rapidly shifting

Survival depends on faster iteration.



#### Shifts in channels and monetization

Many revenue streams affected.



#### Rising digital needs

Digital experience increasingly critical to compete.



#### Changing digital patterns

Browsing habits and device usage evolving.



#### Shifting online demographics

Digital literacy expanding to new segments.



“Customer experience is a key factor in determining which companies will generate value and weather this crisis.”

McKinsey & Company

## Good customer experiences are imperative. Fact.

McKinsey & Company recently released the results of their analysis of the last recession and it made for some very interesting reading.

Tracking the performance of companies throughout the recession of 2008, they found that customer experience leaders faced only half the drop in business compared to customer experience laggards. Their time to recovery was actually two years faster. **And leaders saw 3x higher returns for shareholders returns versus laggards.**

*Source: Forrester Customer Experience Performance Index (2007-09); press research. Comparison of total returns to shareholders for publicly traded companies ranking in the top 10 or bottom 10 of Forrester's Customer Experience Performance Index in 2007-09.*

## What does it all come down to?

Now is the time to put your customers at the heart of your product development and delivery process, and adapt digital experiences to changing behavior and demographics. The evidence shows this is how you recover faster and take pole position as the world starts turning again. Experimentation is the key to making it happen.

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## View from the consultancies

### Bain & Company

“Companies must jump years in a matter of months to provide digital experiences that are easy, intuitive and reliable.”

“The greatest potential sales lie with existing customers, so it pays to pursue an aggressive test-and-learn campaign with personalized, easy-to-buy offers.”

### McKinsey & Company

“Adopting a ‘test and learn’ mentality. The final lesson: Being ready to recognize what isn’t working and changing it fast. Leadership teams that continuously learn, actively identify best practices, and rapidly set up mechanisms to share ideas across the organization tend to be most successful in the long run.”

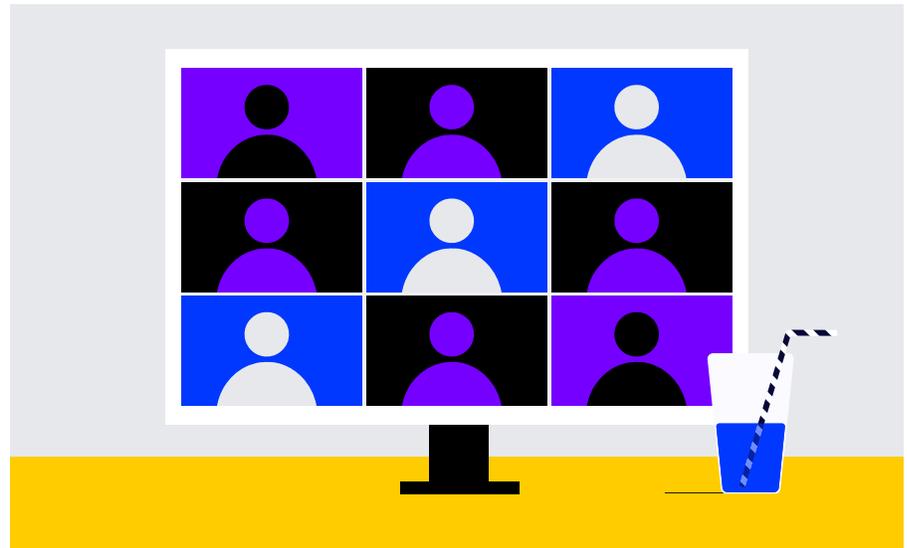
### Accenture

“Adoption of digital by those yet to do so will be accelerated and a reduction of the obstacles to going virtual for any sort of experience will be required. Winners will be those who test and explore all of the associated creative possibilities. Anything that can be done virtually will be.”

# 03

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## The Importance of Experimentation



The last few months haven't been easy for anyone. Trying to complete a major presentation in between Zoom calls while taking care of the children is no mean feat. On the flip side, this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for us all to experiment.

After all, we're seeing a huge step change in society. People are really beginning to reinvent their behaviors and adopt a variety of new habits. And organizations are finding themselves at the forefront of digital adoption innovation because it's suddenly become critical to survival.

**Let's take a closer look at the kind of changes we're seeing – and the role digital experimentation plays in transforming them into compelling new opportunities.**

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## 1. New types of users

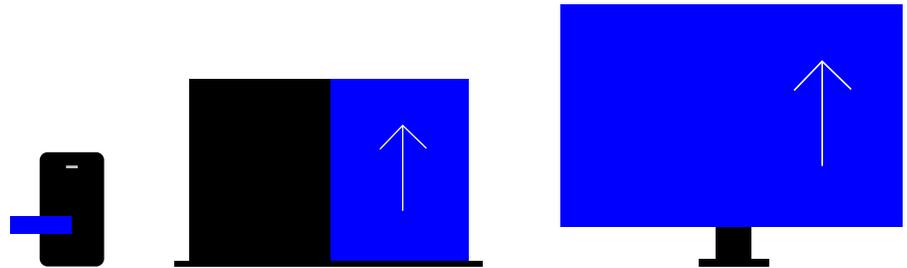
When physical stores closed, users across all ages, regions, and demographics switched to digital for grocery shopping, remote learning, and banking. For some, this was their first interaction with online brands. Others have changed their go-to brand. Since historic user data can't provide insight into these new users, testing becomes an essential way to understand who they are and what they like.

→ **Get to know your new types of user**

Beyond existing, brand-loyal customers and personas, we are seeing a big increase in online activity spanning all ages and regions, including many first-timers such as older users or small-town inhabitants turning to online shopping.

This shift isn't limited to demographics and purchasing behavior. Device usage is also changing. As the New York Times put it, the pandemic has "changed the way we internet".

No longer always on the move, users are going back to larger screens rather than phones and so we see increased traffic to desktop websites. After years of prioritizing optimization for mobile, experimentation is playing a crucial role crucial in optimizing your desktop and cross-device experiences.



## 2. New types of purchases

Customer needs continue to evolve and purchasing behavior is following suit. How do you stay on top of the changing popularity of different items and adjust supply chains and marketing strategies accordingly? Experimentation and progressive delivery allows you to test out UX and messaging on all types of devices to display newly popular and in-stock products.

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### 3. New behaviors set to continue long-term

You may have experienced a surge in traffic, page views, and purchases – but how certain can you be that this is set to last, or for how long? Is it a new normal or just a short-term phenomenon? Consumers have indicated that many of their new online behaviors will continue post-crisis. Instead of adopting a wait-and-see approach, it's incredibly important to start gaining insights into these users right now.

Our partner ContentSquare has noted that online traffic, page views, and purchases have increased dramatically since shelter-in-place orders began – not only compared to an average week in Jan-Feb 2020, but also with strong growth each week in online demand.

eCommerce Behavior	Current Week vs. Reference	Current Week vs. Prior Week
 Traffic	<b>+22.7%</b>	<b>+6.8%</b>
 Pageviews	<b>+32.3%</b>	<b>+9.8%</b>
 Time per Session	<b>+3.0%</b>	<b>+3.3%</b>
 Transactions	<b>+45.2%</b>	<b>+11.0%</b>
 Conversion Rate	<b>+19.1%</b>	<b>+4.0%</b>

Source: ContentSquare, COVID-19 eCommerce Data Impact Hub, 22 April 2020 (week of April 13-19)

# 04

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## Experimentation in Action

We've now seen why your digital customer experiences will be the ultimate differentiators in the new world order. Testing new digital experiences and learning rapidly is essential if you want to emerge as a leader in the new normal.

Let's move onto a few practical examples of the kind of experiments you could be looking at in times like these - all based on what we have actually seen working with thousands of our customers.

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### Experiment Idea #1

#### **Make the most out of higher traffic**

Many sites are experiencing higher traffic than ever, especially as physical stores remain closed or are only slowly returning to normal. With experiments more likely to reach statistical significance, this opens up all kinds of testing opportunities. Take advantage by experimenting on low traffic sections or running smaller tests, where the higher traffic will highlight less noticeable impacts.

It's also worth bearing in mind that most users are spending far more time at home and looking for distractions to fight boredom. Encourage them to spend more time on your site by increasing the use of your recommendation feature. 'You might also like' and 'Popular items' will be getting more traction, so play around with placement, the pages you display them, and design aspects such as copy and title. And why not explore the impact of pushing different types of content that allow users to browse the site and explore new products?

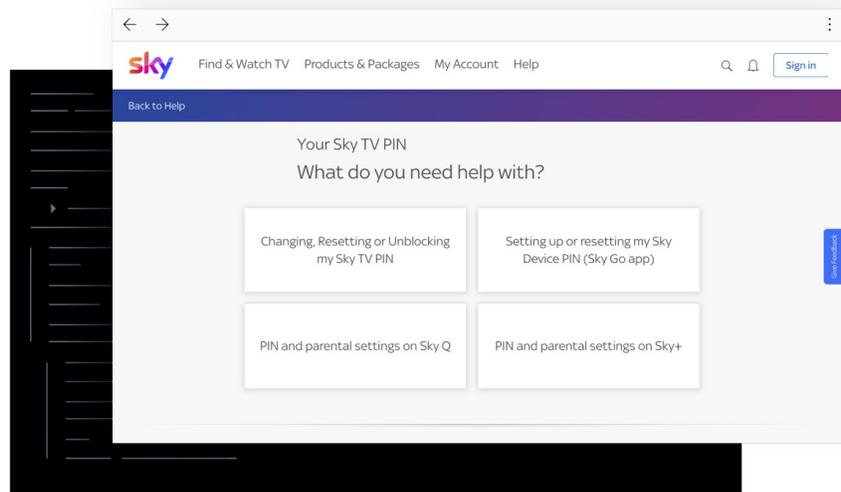
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## Experiment Idea #2

### Draw upon the experiences of customer support teams

Experimentation is all about learning how user expectations change and quickly adapting to them. And very often, nobody is better placed to understand these changes than your customer support staff.

At Sky, the experimentation team regularly visits contact centers around the UK to chat with the people taking calls from customers day in, day out. Agents on the ground provide a rich source of ideas on improving the customer experience, allowing the team to run experiments on real-time issues that represent true customer needs.



One great example we learnt from Sky is the way they dealt with the issue of resetting personalized PIN numbers.

The idea was to encourage customers to find the guidance they needed to reset their PINs online. Beyond simply eliminating the need for calling customer services, the initiative also focused on creating a positive and personalized customer journey. To date, the project has produced millions and millions of pounds in savings.

→ **“We got so much customer feedback saying, “why can’t I reset my PIN online?” What was really frustrating about that was we had a pin-reset journey on the site. We figured out where the journey was and really promoted it. We put it front-and-center. We boosted engagement with that entire journey... by about 40%. And we went from literally talking about it on a Monday to it being live on Friday.”**

Simon Ellsworth, Optimization Manager, SKY

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## Experiment Idea #3

### Mitigate the challenge of low traffic

On the other hand, if the traffic to your site has fallen and statistical significance has stalled there are plenty of ways to mitigate the challenges.

- **01 Test High-Impact Changes.** Make up for lower traffic by running bigger experiments that are more likely to have a more noticeable impact. For example, testing big changes on the areas of your site visitors consider important are likely to have a more significant impact on conversion rates than testing small modifications on niche pages.
- **02 Focus on Micro-Conversions.** Test the more plentiful micro conversions such as page engagement, clicking an 'add to cart button', viewing a certain number of pages, or clicking through to product information pages.
- **03 Test Pages Directly.** Measure changes that take place directly on the page where the experiment is running, rather than the final conversions that take place several clicks away. For example, say you want to A/B test your product pages but don't have enough conversions to make setting up an order confirmation goal worthwhile. Instead, you can test the product pages with the goal of directing more relevant traffic to the next step of the process.

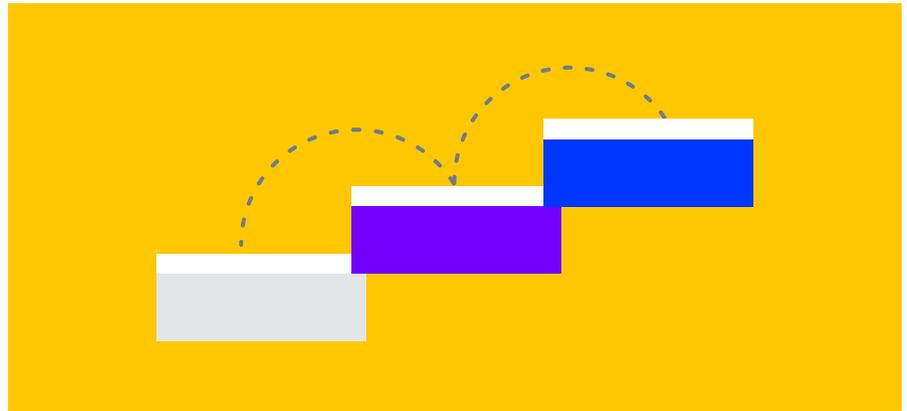
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## Experiment Idea #4: Customer Support

### Manage the exponential growth in demand

In the face of an overwhelming increase in call volumes, physical call centers have been forced to close and staff make the transition to working from home. Experimentation can play an essential role in relieving the burden on overloaded teams by helping customers find the information they need without having to call.

Have you considered streamlining your FAQ pages to allow more self-service? What about anticipating the kind of information visitors are looking for, say changing a flight or getting a refund, then making sure the information they need is clearly signposted? You could also test different responses on your chatbot to increase adoption of the feature.



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## Experiment Idea #5

### Use Optimizely extensions to quickly add and test new functionality

In normal circumstances, Optimizely isn't intended as a Content Management System (CMS). But the way things are right now, we see a true benefit. For example, you can use Optimizely Extensions to add a banner that provides regular updates on business hours, closed services, or other information.

You can run a banner as an experiment on 100% of your traffic on that one variation, meaning everyone will see that change. The banner can be updated easily, without code and without a deploy. We have already created a COVID-19 Extension, available on Github when using Optimizely as a temporary CMS.

You can also deploy Extensions as CMS for a whole range of other use cases during the pandemic:

- **Display policies and other relevant information on your homepage.**
- **Provide information or links to official websites.**
- **Keep users up to date on newly closed destinations.**
- **Capture emails for dedicated COVID-19 communications.**
- **Communicate temporary benefits and discounts that offer relief to those who are impacted or affected.**



## Experimentation in Action #1

A popular meal kit delivery company

### 01 Issue

Unable to offer tools or pantry products due to COVID-19 fulfillment challenges.

### 02 Answer

Rolled out a banner communicating this fact and focused hero slideshow on their wine options, boosting wine sales.

### 03 Learning

Focus on what you can do for or sell to the visitor. Communicate clearly, especially in this time of confusion.



## Experimentation in Action #2

A wellness industry scheduling platform and app

### 01 Issue

Core class scheduling feature rendered obsolete during shelter-in-place.

### 02 Answer

Launched a feature to enable a carousel for virtual workout classes, allowing them to quickly pivot to a virtual delivery world.

### 03 Learning

Focus on what you can do for your clients and their clients. The feature became newsworthy and was featured in numerous “How to find virtual workouts” articles.

## → Focus On Retail

With physical stores only just starting to reopen, digital will remain a vital lifeline for many consumers still wary of venturing out too far, too often. In this reshaped economic marketplace, the many new users and their new behaviors offer challenges and opportunities for your experimentation programs.

### 01 Make the most of your new users

Many traditional offline shoppers have made the switch to online across the board, especially for groceries. These new users represent an important audience for experimentation as they have no previous knowledge of your online experience.

-  Provide more guidance throughout the funnel, such as guiding CTAs in the checkout funnel.
-  Optimize the display, positioning and content of your USPs.
-  Reduce uncertainty by showcasing return policies, payment methods, and reviews.
-  Employ urgency metrics such as stock levels or the number of users viewing a product.

### → 02 Make the most of higher traffic

The rise in traffic experienced by many retailers offers a great opportunity to test because experiments are now more likely to reach statistical significance.

-  Run experiments on low traffic areas.
-  Run smaller impact tests.

### → 03 Communicate delivery expectations

An influx of new traffic and conversions has got to be good, but a lack of available staff at your logistics provider can mean longer delivery times.

-  Try out different ways of communicating that delivery times may take longer than usual.
-  Emphasize your more lenient return policies through banners or pop-ups.

## → Focus On Food Delivery

People are home, they need food delivered, and there has never been more options for getting groceries, meal kits or hot dinners dropped off at your door. Consumers face a paradox of choice – do I want to cook tonight or take out? On the business side, traditional models are blurring as demand surges. In fact, supermarkets have seen a 189% increase in online traffic, and an 80% increase in online transactions, over the past few months.

To stand out in this crowded field, restaurants, supermarkets and delivery services need to evolve to retain and engage customers. Product and engineering teams can build the right products, and build their product right, by adopting the latest best practices in progressive delivery and experimentation. With the right approach, users will get the best possible experience and return to your service over and over again.

## → Here are the new features and offerings currently being tested in the food delivery sector, all based on what we have actually seen working with our customers.



Subscription models that remove delivery fees.



Group ordering: Multiple people can add to a cart and pay separately.



Cloud kitchens: Deliveroo and others using ghost restaurants to offer delivery-only and expand their delivery radius.



Centralized learnings: Spread learning and bring consistency across cities and markets.



Autonomous delivery: Testing robotics and driverless cars to accelerate the delivery experience.

## CONCLUSION

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## Now it's your turn

In the midst of uncertainty, one thing is for sure: there will be no quick return to the way things were for most industries. In fact, initial research indicates that the new online behaviors of many consumers are set to continue in the long-term.

We also know that the customer experiences you offer really can make the difference between leading and lagging. With more people than ever not only using the internet but relying on it, those experiences are happening online.

### **Experimentation can be the compass that guides you through these changing times.**

Experimentation and progressive delivery allow you to really understand how your customers are shifting their behaviors and what resonates with them. It gives you the capability to put your customers first by validating new features, carefully testing their engagement, then rolling them out gradually to remove risk of failure.



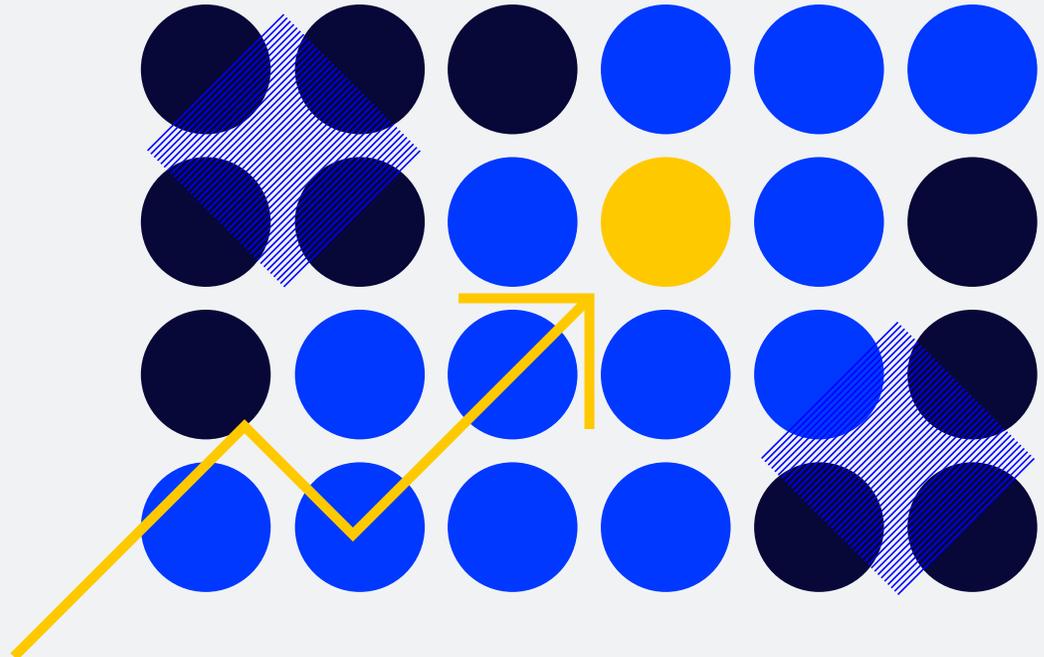
**“The things that worked before COVID probably aren't the things that are going to work now, so you need to have a rapid test-results approach that has a much wider range of things to test to figure out what will actually work rapidly and go with that, rather than your gut.**

**This is the time to be more agile, this is the time to move faster, this is the time to test what works and what doesn't.”**

Bain & Company

## CONCLUSION

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**Optimizely is the leader in experimentation. As the world's largest digital laboratory, with over 2M experiments run Optimizely's platform, we know how to help you succeed.**

We help you release software quickly, then test and learn in production before rolling out to all users. Optimizely helps you understand what customers want, build the experiences they love, and drive growth. Fast.

Over the last few months, this has become more valuable than ever.

→ Want some more information on digital experimentation and progressive delivery? [Talk to us today](#) to find out how we can help you move faster, build quality experiments and drive substantial growth for your business.

Optimizely is here to help you at every step of the way. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

The Optimizely Team.