

jarrang

**EMAIL MARKETING & COVID-19
COMMUNICATION IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

“Survival reminds us that if something is difficult then we have two choices; try harder or stop trying. Stopping trying doesn’t usually end well.”

**JOHN HUDSON,
MOD CHIEF SURVIVAL INSTRUCTOR**

Introduction

I've seen a lot of things in the 17 years I've been running my own business. There's been highs, there's been lows, there's been delight, there's been despair...but there's never been anything quite like the current situation we all find ourselves in.

Huge swathes of businesses have been left reeling by COVID-19 with never before seen numbers of the global population living in lockdown. At the time of writing this, there's still a huge degree of uncertainty about what happens next.

When will the lockdown end? Will the economy recover? When will consumers have the confidence to start spending again? They are unknowns with large question marks by them and, while it's hard not to worry about them, they are mostly out of our control.

That's why it's time to turn our collective energy to the things we can control. Already, we're seeing businesses pick themselves up off the canvas. They are diversifying, pivoting and helping their customers through these unprecedented challenges. They are fighting to survive in a time of crisis.

And, if you're one of these businesses, we want to help you.

Communication is one of the few things you can still control. And email is one of the best ways you can still be there for and help your customers. Email is immediate, it's effective, and it reaches people. Used well, it can be one of the most powerful tools at your disposal as we navigate our way through this tricky time. Equally, handled the wrong way, inappropriate or ill-thought out communication during this crisis has the potential to damage your brand.

So what should you be doing? Should you be carrying on with your email marketing strategy as normal? What should you be saying to your customers? Should you be tailoring your messaging around the current situation?

In this guide, we'll endeavour to answer these questions and more.

As a team, we want to help and support you through this time and lend you our expertise. We want to help protect your business and show you what you can be doing to nurture those relationships you've worked so hard to build with your customers.

We hope you find the following information useful and if you have further questions please visit jarrang.com to get in touch with us - we're here to help.



**STAFFORD SUMNER,
FOUNDER & MANAGING DIRECTOR**



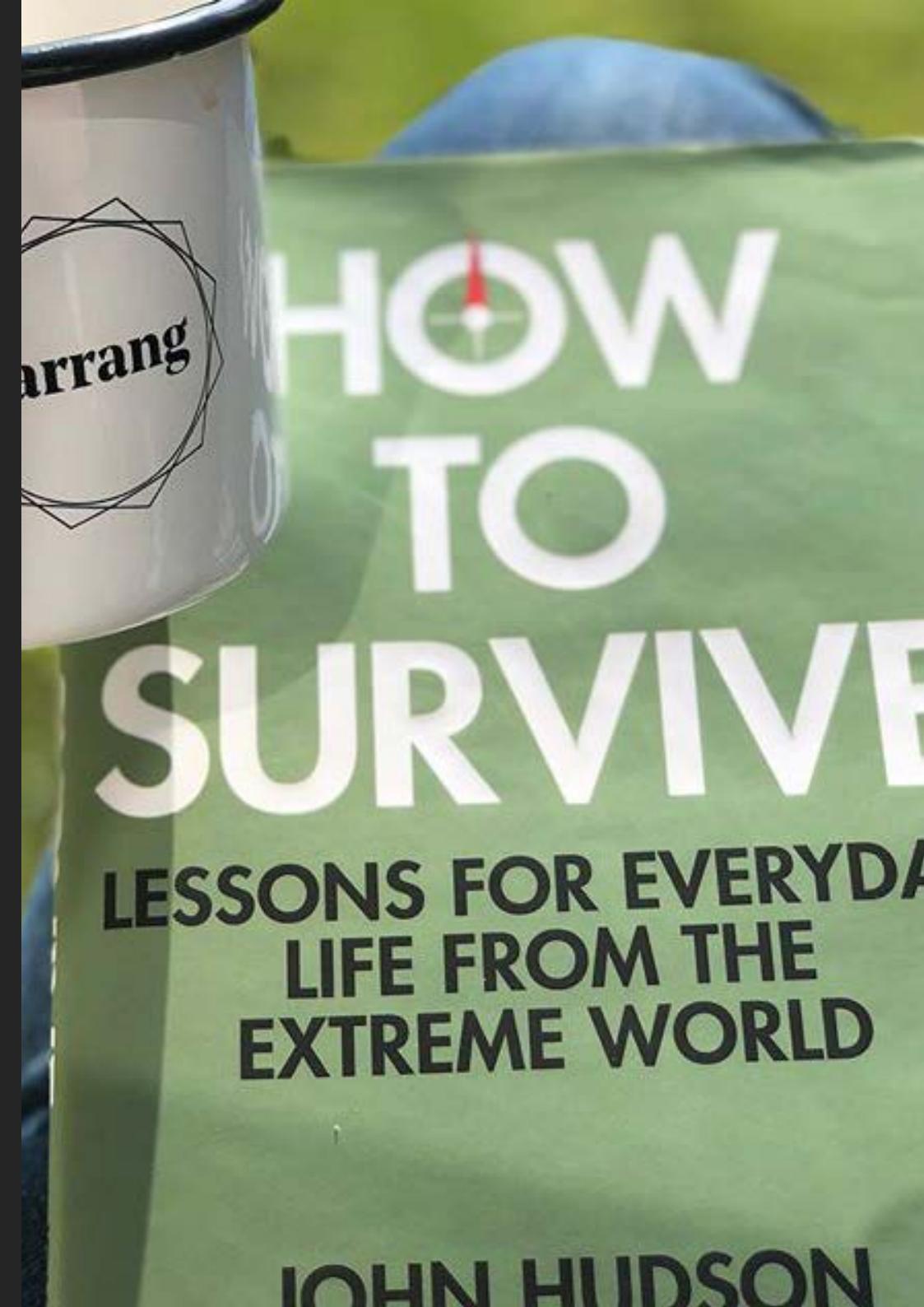
Email marketing during COVID-19

BROADLY SPEAKING, THERE HAVE BEEN THREE MAIN APPROACHES TO EMAIL MARKETING SINCE THE OUTBREAK SENT THE WORLD INTO LOCKDOWN.

Businesses have either:

- 1. Stopped all email marketing** (some have stopped all marketing whatsoever)
- 2. Carried on sending as normal as if nothing different is happening**
- 3. Tailored their communication to the current situation**

Every business is different and there's no magic bullet, so let's take a look at each approach (with insight from our team) and help you figure out which is best for you.



Stop all email marketing?

A NUMBER OF BUSINESSES HAVE STOPPED ALL THEIR EMAIL MARKETING.

The biggest reasons behind this we've seen are they are wary and scared about what to say (and worried about saying the wrong thing), they are waiting to see what other

businesses similar to them do, or they've had to stop because of circumstances beyond their control, often financial.

But is this the right approach? Will cutting costs now come back and hurt you in the long run?

Here's what our team have to say:

HANNAH VAUGHAN, CLIENT SUCCESS MANAGER

In a time where we have to keep socially distant, it doesn't mean we have to stay emotionally distant.

At the moment it feels like we're living a war time narrative, with people making the most of tinned food and life becoming stripped back to the basics. Never has the sense of community been more poignant.

Now is a unique opportunity to reach out to your audience to check in with them, keep them informed, or give them some light-hearted relief from the current situation. The businesses that do this will be the ones that people remember for reaching out during this war against COVID-19

Although returning back to normal life feels like a very distant future, when the time does come to go back, business is going to be extremely busy.

Restaurants will be fully booked, suitcases will be packed and there'll be queues at the petrol stations. People will be leaving their houses.

With competition for business shooting back up, the clamour for attention will be less hard work if you've been communicating with your audience throughout the COVID-19 crisis. It's important to remain present in the public's consciousness so when the time does come for people to book some leisure time/spend their money/make investments in their businesses, you're right at the top of their list of places to send an enquiry.

Yes, you may not see the monetary investment right now, but the long term investment you'll gain from keeping the lines of communication with your audience going, will be significant.



Stop all email marketing?



BEN HOCKING, CLIENT SUCCESS EXECUTIVE

Crisis and risk aversion go hand-in-hand. In ‘normal’ times, businesses feel more confident to be bold and take risks. In times of crisis, particularly in times of unprecedented crisis, that confidence can disappear as the fear of getting it wrong takes over.

It’s important to remember no one understands your subscribers better than you, and it’s equally important to utilise this.

Maintaining regular contact with your customers is the best course of action, not only will they hear from a familiar name in an unfamiliar time, it can help settle your own nerves and remind yourself that there are people who care passionately about what you do and that passion will drive them back when it is right to do so.

While many businesses are taking this opportunity to enhance their relationships with their database, there are, inevitably, going to be certain instances where a lack of communication is unavoidable.

Even in circumstances where hibernation is necessary, a degree of transparency can go a long way. The exclusion of an explanation

can be damaging and even if the reason is a genuine one, no confirmation could lead to your subscribers incorrectly filling in the gaps, i.e. they can’t be bothered, they don’t care about us.

In what is such a difficult time for a lot of businesses, it’s instinctive to focus on cutting costs but, as is always the case, those who have a sensible long-term plan in place will be the ones to prosper.

A penny saved might be a penny earned but without any form of communication, there will be no customers to spend that penny on later down the line. Think to yourself, as a customer, which business is more likely to secure long-term brand loyalty? The one that went quiet as soon as there was nothing they could sell you? Or the one that remained prevalent, even with no immediate prospect of custom?

In a business sense or a personal sense, there is no shame in being scared in the current climate. Practically no one is familiar with the way the world is right now and it’s a great unknown as to when a sense of normality will return.

There is little that can be done in terms of changing the climate but there is so much that can be done regarding how to combat it. A lack of communication will not help the sense of fear, it will only enhance it.

Stop all email marketing?

To summarise, we understand businesses are looking to save costs, but at what price? This sometimes myopic focus on overheads is guaranteed to have an impact on long term revenues once we reach the recovery phase.

There is a happy medium whereby costs can be reduced and content plans changed, with less focus on short term revenues, and more focus placed on long term brand building.

[Emails like this](#) are going down a storm with punters and it's the businesses that earn the trust and loyalty of their guests, which will be reflected in bookings and social media amplification.



SHORT ON INSPIRATION?

HERE ARE OUR TOP TIPS FOR CONTENT THAT ADD GENUINE VALUE TO YOUR AUDIENCE AND AVOIDS THE HARD-SELL:

Travel, Hospitality and Tourism

- History of the property / area
- Tour of the property / local area
- Department case study, i.e. Get to know the Spa or How we got our Conde Nast Award
- Meet the team
- Recipes from our head chef
- Online gift vouchers

Retail

- Focus on being open for online sales during COVID-19 lockdown
- Free delivery, or information on your delivery protocol
- Online gift vouchers
- Updates from your blog
- Projects you can do at home
- Our top three activities for at home entertainment

B2B

- Business updates
- Tips on the best ways to work from home
- Industry insights
- Internal company updates
- “Good news” / positive stories to keep people motivated



Good examples of crisis content

The Willow & Stone website features a "BLOG" section with a sub-section titled "Articles and Features". A prominent image shows a yellow notebook, a small potted plant, and a book on a patterned surface. Below the image is a heading: "5 things that can bring you joy whilst being at home (self isolating)". A sub-section titled "TAKE STOCK AND SMELL THE ROSES" follows, with a note from the author: "By Ellie." The text discusses the impact of self-isolation on social lives and work routines, encouraging readers to stay positive. Another section, "What limiting beliefs are holding me back?", includes a quote: "I'm afraid I'm contagious, so in their desire to protect me they've isolated me from my family and friends. I'm not alone though, we're all in this together." The page ends with a note about the future: "I hope that once this is over, we'll have more time to reflect on what's important in our lives and how we can live more intentionally."

Willow & Stone

5 THINGS THAT CAN BRING YOU JOY
WHILST BEING AT HOME

The Seasalt Clothing website has a "BLOG" section with a post titled "HOW TO MAKE OUR FABRIC FISH". The post features a photograph of a colorful fabric fish made from sailboat-patterned fabric, resting on a textured sofa. The text explains that the post is from window artists and print makers, sharing ideas for bringing joy at home. It includes a "will need" list:

- 2 different fabrics (felt is best for the head, fins and tail, and cotton for the body)
- Scissors
- Pinking shears (optional)
- Fabric glue (optional)
- Needle and thread
- Sewing machine (optional)
- 2 buttons
- Fabric stuffing
- Fish template – print and cut ours [here](#)

At the bottom of the post, there are links to "Seasalt Cornwall: How To Make A Fabric Fish" and social media icons.

Seasalt Clothing

HOW TO MAKE OUR FABRIC FISH

The National Trust website has a "Things to do" section. It features a large image of a child in a yellow shirt looking down at a green bucket filled with soil. The text encourages readers to find inspiration for activities at home or in the garden. A "Coronavirus update" box states: "From end of Tuesday 24 March, we closed all our car parks to further restrict the spread of coronavirus. This followed the decision to close our parks and gardens. In addition to our houses, shops and cafés, we urge people to stay local and observe social distancing. Thank you for your understanding." Another section, "The monumental building", includes a small image of a person working on a garden project.

National Trust

THINGS TO DO AT HOME OR IN THE
GARDEN THIS SPRING

Carrying on sending as normal?

For some of you out there, it might be a case of business as usual or even huge spikes in demand. Carrying on sending as normal is a perfectly sound approach and good for business continuity. However, it needs to strike the right tone and, when not done well, can potentially come across as insensitive and lacking in empathy.

If yours is a business where customers can't immediately access your product or service, focus your efforts less on short term ROI and more towards the long term benefits of customer loyalty.

Build the relationship with your audience. This shows you have empathy and understanding of the current situation and you're not being seen to be pushing irrelevant sales messages like nothing has changed.

Carrying on as normal certainly has an appeal to it. After all, it's providing a sense of normality at a time where there isn't a lot of it.

Having said this, avoiding the topic of COVID-19 has the potential to do more harm than good. There might be a worry the message you send is insensitive but a



failure to address the subject can be just as insensitive, if not more so. Trust your communicative ability and trust the knowledge you have of your database.

While many businesses are likely to be hit hard, there are a few that will remain relatively unaffected by current conditions and even some that will find business increases.

If you find yourself in either of the last two categories, it's still important to strike the correct tone in what you are saying. While you might be in a good position, there are many who you will be speaking to who won't share in this. A wider acknowledgement and understanding is crucial to avoid saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

Carrying on sending as normal?

To summarise, trying to act normal when everything around you is anything but normal can be a risky approach.

Firstly, if you are planning on carrying on your email marketing sends as normal, we'd recommend, as a point of urgency, to check all your automated emails and make sure they strike the right tone.

For example, are your pre and post stay emails active for your hotel and will your email system have pulled through the cancellations?

Secondly, we'd recommend tailoring your communication to show you understand the situation many of your customers and subscribers find themselves in.

Which brings us to our third approach...



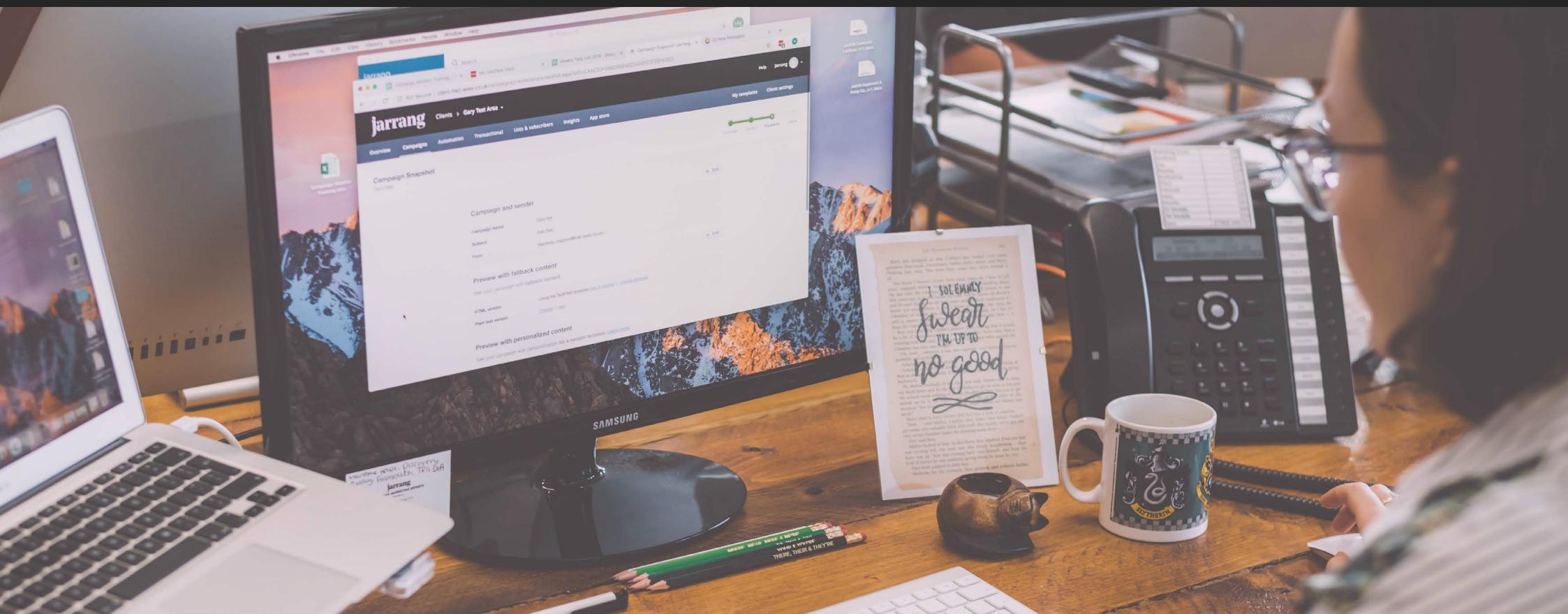
Tailoring communications to the situation?

WE'RE SEEING SOARING ENGAGEMENT LEVELS - WITH SOME OPEN RATES UP BY 20% - FOR BUSINESSES WHO ARE TAKING THIS APPROACH WHICH MARKS A BETTER, MORE POWERFUL, AND MORE COMMUNICATIVE STYLE OF MARKETING.

From cinemas hosting online Netflix 'watch parties' to McDonald's serving up their recipe for homemade egg McMuffins, businesses are

pivoting, diversifying, and reacting to what's unfolding around them.

And they are using email to let their customers know what they are doing. Some are doing it so well that their customers are responding by thanking them and telling them how good it is to hear from them. You can't get much better than that for brand engagement...



Tailoring communications to the situation?

Some people are using email more and more during the current climate as a way to communicate, entertain, and escape.

From some of our clients we're seeing their best ever open rates at the moment and across the board engagement rates are up. This goes to show that people's engagement with email at the moment is at a peak and is a ripe channel for boosting brand loyalty.

Adaptation is one of the most important skills a business can have, it not only allows for success in the short term but also for longevity and survival in the long term.

Businesses have two options:

1. Stand still and take the hit or...
2. Use this as an opportunity to better themselves, to improve their processes, to diversify, to take that leap of faith into the unknown and do something that would have been considered crazy just a few months ago. How the next few months are approached will likely dictate success for much longer.

IN SUMMARY, PEOPLE WILL REMEMBER WHO WAS THERE DURING THE CRISIS AND ASKED: “HOW ARE YOU, HOW CAN WE HELP?”

The key is to find a balance. If people can't experience your product right now (e.g. travel and hospitality) then focus on brand. Be honest, open and transparent - keep the conversation going.

If they can experience the product, either as normal, or in a different way to normal, then crack on! We're seeing online retail do really well at the moment. With bricks and mortar stores closed, the online store has become king for many.

And then there's the businesses that have had to pivot - for example the garden centres now doing click and collect; or the farm stores now doing home delivery veg boxes. Examples are everywhere and the key to success is communication. Pretending there isn't a pandemic will just come across negatively.

COVID-19 & Email Marketing FAQs

WHAT ARE WE BEING ASKED?

WHAT'S THE BEST APPROACH RIGHT NOW?

Continuing to communicate with your audience by sending emails that are less sales focussed and aimed more towards content that will genuinely benefit them. It's all about brand if the public can't use the product or service right now.

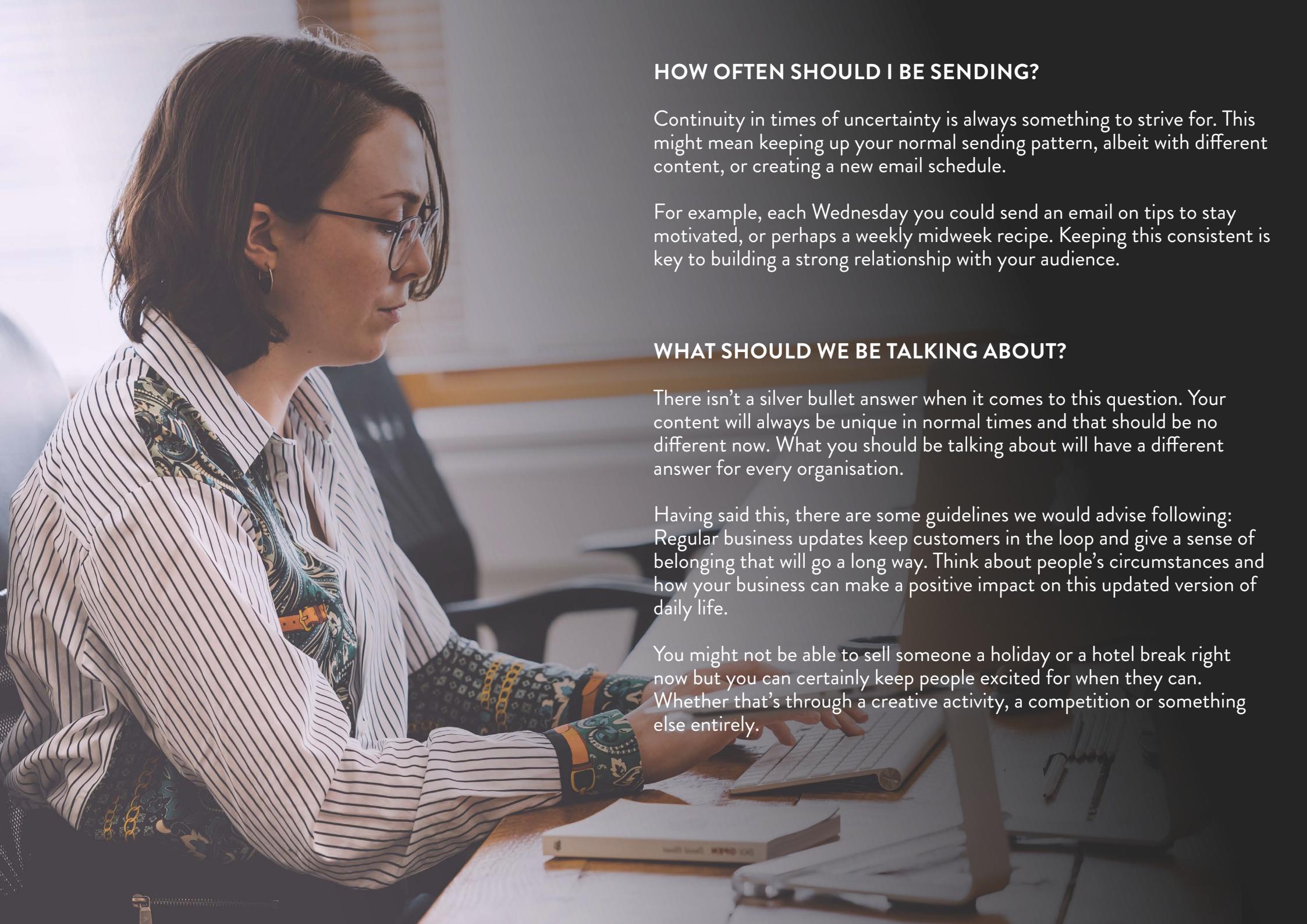
Promotions might be fine for some brands, but showing how you can add value is key e.g. by doing home delivery, or if you are unaffected, by cheering people up and demonstrating the human side of your brand.

WHAT'S EVERYONE ELSE DOING?

Many businesses are continuing to send out email marketing campaigns, albeit with some significant changes to their content plans, which got ripped up weeks ago!

Across the board these have received incredibly high open rates (with some up over 20% on average) and messages of goodwill from their recipients.





HOW OFTEN SHOULD I BE SENDING?

Continuity in times of uncertainty is always something to strive for. This might mean keeping up your normal sending pattern, albeit with different content, or creating a new email schedule.

For example, each Wednesday you could send an email on tips to stay motivated, or perhaps a weekly midweek recipe. Keeping this consistent is key to building a strong relationship with your audience.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE TALKING ABOUT?

There isn't a silver bullet answer when it comes to this question. Your content will always be unique in normal times and that should be no different now. What you should be talking about will have a different answer for every organisation.

Having said this, there are some guidelines we would advise following: Regular business updates keep customers in the loop and give a sense of belonging that will go a long way. Think about people's circumstances and how your business can make a positive impact on this updated version of daily life.

You might not be able to sell someone a holiday or a hotel break right now but you can certainly keep people excited for when they can. Whether that's through a creative activity, a competition or something else entirely.

SHOULD I STOP SENDING?

In some cases it might be out of your control and not feasible for you to carry on sending. However, if you can, we recommend you do keep up email communications, even if it's in the format of a pared down message once per month.

SHOULD I STOP MY EXTERNAL MARKETING SPEND OR NOT?

As per above - it's all about balance. There's not one size fits all for every sector or business as we're all being affected in different ways. Stopping sending, or pretending that everything is "normal" is not a good approach. Use the tools available, have fun with them and make them count.

WHAT'S THE BEST TIME TO SEND AND HAS THIS CHANGED BECAUSE PEOPLE AREN'T WORKING?

People's lifestyles have changed dramatically during this time, with a lot of people being furloughed, working from home, or looking after cooped up children. This has affected the times that people are opening emails.

There isn't enough evidence to support when the "best" times to send during this pandemic are yet, but one thing is certain: more people are opening. Now is a good time to run split tests on the send time and the day of send to see which generates the most engagement. And, with there definitely being more engagement at the moment, it's even more important to choose your words carefully.



What's coming next, and how do we get ready?

This is tough to approach because there are still so many unknowns.

We're going to take a leap of faith and say we won't be in lockdown forever which means we can turn our attention and efforts to what comes next.

Inevitably, there will be a rush for the start line, with businesses from all sectors clamouring to make up for lost time. That's why it's vitally important you stay in people's minds now, so when a sense of normality returns, yours is the first business they think of.

AT JARRANG, THIS IS WHAT WE'RE DOING:

- Reviewed all expenditure - not just for COVID-19, but for the time beyond. We're asking: Is it necessary? Could we get a better deal?
- Taking the time to pick up the phone and call each and every client to find out how they are - no agenda. Believe it or not, people have more time to talk than usual and appreciate the gesture. Even though it wasn't the intention, we've even picked up more business as a result because usually busy marketing managers are currently able to think about their long term projects without the usual distractions
- Getting our house in order. Reviewing our reporting suite and process for sharing with clients; reviewing our technology stack and taking the opportunity of a lull in proceedings to improve efficiencies.
- Peeled back on promotional spend to focus our marketing comms on helpful, thought leadership information sharing.

WHAT ARE WE EXPECTING NEXT?

During the pandemic we have seen good and bad decisions being made. Some sectors are naturally stronger than others. While our activity with the travel industry has reduced by 75%, other sectors, such as financial services and online retail have doubled.

We have clients who have needed to reduce their call centre teams and move their communications to email; and brokers who are actively trading on the volatility of the market using email to communicate buying signals to their clients in a timely manner.

We expect a gradual lifting of the lockdown over the coming weeks, with some people returning to work and although social distancing will be in place for a long time to come, we're sure, it's inevitable that we'll adapt to 'the new normal' and businesses who have adapted due to the pandemic will continue with the new service offerings beyond.

It's also likely that hospitality will be one of the last sectors to recover, but when it does, we expect the UK domestic market will recover faster, and ahead of the international travel market. Families who have been "locked up" for the last few months will be keen for a change of scenery and people are likely to have more confidence in travel within the UK than hopping on a plane to foreign climes.

With significant reservation cancellations across the board, when the green light is given for reopening, we expect high demands from our hoteliers to speak with their previous guests to generate short term bookings and get the hotels filled as soon as possible (and to refill the depleted coffers).

Obviously this will be a lot easier for those hoteliers and travel companies who have continued to talk to their valued guests over the last couple of months.

The early bird catches the worm....

Summary

Without a doubt, this is one of the strangest times any of us have known. We've been forced to adapt, change, and take on new ways of living and working.

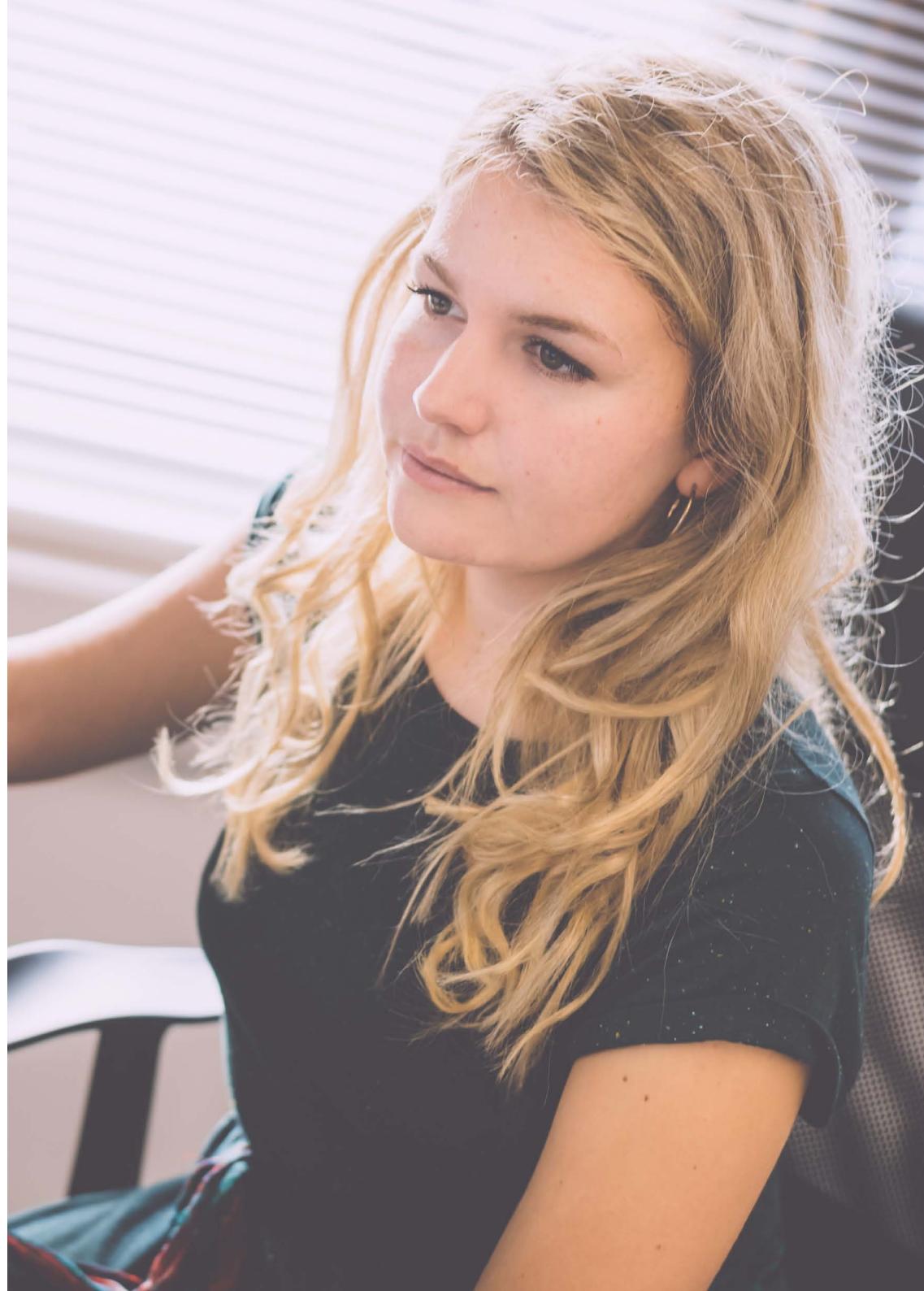
We've been amazed by the resilience we've seen. Yes, there have been selfish people out there who make it their priority to only look out for themselves. But there's also been kindness, hope, and people doing their level best to hold things together and to find positives in what has become the biggest global crisis many of us have witnessed in our lifetime.

There are things you can still control. And while learning a new language, becoming a master baker, and perfecting your violin playing skills while at the same time juggling the stress of a global pandemic are beyond many of us, there are useful, practical things you can be doing.

Maybe now is the time to take a look at your database and think about segmentation for the future. How could those segments and a comms plan directed at them help to increase conversions rates when the time is right?

In our final words: stay cool, be kind, don't panic.

COVID-19 aside, we'll all live to see another day. We're in a fight at the moment, we're going to get bruised, we're going to get tired, but we're going to make it. We can do it. So buckle up, dig deep, and focus on what you can control. The rest will take care of itself. We'll be ready to go, Will you?



About Jarrang

**WE TURN YOUR DATA INTO SALES WITH
HAND-CRAFTED, INDUSTRY-LEADING
EMAIL MARKETING PROGRAMMES
DESIGNED TO INSPIRE YOUR CUSTOMERS
AND HELP YOU ACHIEVE YOUR
BUSINESS GOALS.**

Corporate member



Want to take your email marketing up a level?

**IF YOU'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT HOW YOUR EMAIL
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