

December 2020

8 WAYS TO BOOST YOUR BUSINESS DURING THE PANDEMIC

By Sue Horner

Connecting with peers is an invaluable benefit of PIC, and never more so than as we all hunker down during the pandemic. At the roundtable discussion on November 18, members shared how we're dealing with business upheaval and finding new opportunities. Here's some of the advice:

1

USE DOWNTIME CREATIVELY

- **Judy Irwin**, ABC, lost a major client, and while waiting out the "chaos and anxiety," she **took some University of Toronto courses**, including one with recent speaker Alison Garwood-Jones on social media management. She's also pursuing training as a school board educational assistant as "an interesting side thing."
- **Priya Bates**, ABC, MC, SCMP, IABC Fellow, found her business screeched to a halt. She accepted offers from companies like Bananatag that work with the internal communication community to provide **free comms advice**. That led to stronger partnerships as well as paid opportunities.

2

LOOK TO U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

- **Cyrus Mavalwala**, ABC, MC, lost a chunk of business when projects with the municipalities he works with shut down. "Luckily, we have robust business with American clients. **Companies in the U.S.** are typically more aggressive with their marketing and their pace of implementation hasn't slowed down much despite COVID-19."
- **Priya** also found U.S. and European business picked up this year.



3

THINK ABOUT HOW TO DIVERSIFY

- **Cyrus** has been "laser focused" over the past few years on **digital communication, including video and strategic social media**. This is an area where companies see value and want to be more effective.
- **Sharon McMillan** says leaders and spokespeople may need **coaching**. Is that a side business you can offer or an area where you could train?

4

FIND WAYS TO HELP

- **Annette Martell**, ABC, MC, IABC Fellow, **began partnering with community leaders** navigating COVID-19's complicated path. She's been thoroughly impressed by their "tireless and inspiring leadership. In a fluid situation like COVID-19, strength comes from understanding your organizational culture and key stakeholders, quickly responding to changing conditions and innovating."
- **Vanessa Holding** has been practicing what she preaches, providing weekly **self-produced videos** using just a ring light and smartphone. Being helpful has boosted her own online presence on LinkedIn and has led to paying opportunities.
- **Janet Wile**, ABC, APR, MC, has taken free webinars, noticing that some speakers struggle with **presenting virtually**. Can you help speakers create content that's succinct, thoughtful, to the point?

5

FOLLOW INDUSTRIES THAT ARE BOOMING

- **Sharon** points out that some 80% of meetings in government and education have been focused on **technology for virtual presentations**. Is there a way you can help firms virtually communicate with employees? Can you help companies better use Zoom?
- **Sharon** also pointed out a company that gave out material based on U.S. information. Can you help companies translate existing content into **Canadian versions**?
- **Janet** suggests looking at the **companies doing well** because people are staying home during the pandemic (bike manufacturers, craft suppliers, grocers). Do those companies have money for promotional activity? Can you help with public awareness campaigns?

6

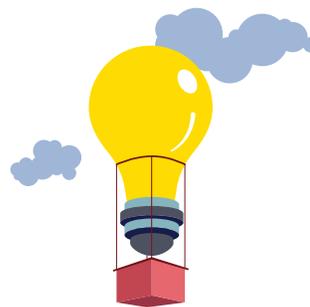
REFLECT SPOTLIGHTED ISSUES LIKE DIVERSITY

- **Priya** used her downtime to launch a passion project and new business adventure, **A Leader Like Me**. This subscription service helps **women of colour** build confidence and progress further in their career as a leader. With the pandemic and new attention to Black Lives Matter, it's been even more successful than expected.
- **Cyrus** points out that companies often aim to have a certain percentage of "supplier spend" go to Indigenous or other **minority suppliers**. If you have a minority-owned business, that may be your entry to pitch such businesses. See the [Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council](#).

7

FOLLOW UP WITH PAST CLIENTS

- **Cyrus** says with the end of the year approaching, **companies may still have a budget to spend** or they will lose it. "Phone every client you ever worked for and ask if, or show them how, you can help. If they have a budget, they may need to spend it now."



8

BE PART OF THE "NEW NORMAL"

- **Janet** says that as companies return to a more normal state, they may need help with **planning**. "Where there are problems, there are opportunities."
- **Tihmily Li** reports that companies that bring employees back to their offices may be creating their own return-to-work guides with content mostly copied and pasted from Ministry guidelines. "It's up to professionals like us to make communications more readable and digestible."

Thanks to everyone for an interesting discussion, and to Sharon McMillan for acting as moderator. Give these ideas a try and let us know what works for you. If you have other ideas to share, please post them to our [Facebook](#) or [LinkedIn](#) groups.



Sue is a writer, principal of [Get It Write](#) and director of social media for PIC. The roundtable inspired her to follow up with a client who sometimes has end-of-year budget to spend; unfortunately, not this year.



PIC members sharing ideas at the roundtable discussion.

PIC and IABC/Toronto stand firmly against racism. In our online and in-person activities, we aim to provide an inclusive space that is welcoming to all and fully representative of the diversity in Toronto. We see you, we hear you, and we are with you. We also welcome your comments and suggestions on how we can do better. Please email our chair, **Nkiru Asika**, at toronto-sig@iabc.to.

A BYTE OF FORESIGHT

MORE HUMAN-CENTRED MARKETING IN 2021

By Nancy Miller

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that the future is unpredictable. The best we can ever do is draw a map of possible tomorrows with today's insights and instruments. **But even the most carefully delineated map never represents the territory, let alone the journey across it, with 100% accuracy.**

One word in French for "the future," *l'avenir*, contains the word *venir*, "to come." Jacques Derrida suggests **the "real future" is never "predicted, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable."** It knocks like an unexpected visitor with little or no warning. We think: "But I'm still in my bathrobe. The house is a mess!" We open the door with COVID-hair, roots showing and all.

But the pandemic has taught us too that COVID-hair is not the worst thing. Besides, people now prefer we forsake appearances in favour of what's behind them. **In a crisis, no one expects us to look like we've jumped off the cover of *Vogue*.** When it comes to marketing in 2021, that couldn't be more true.

Responsive brands in the pandemic have focused on **authenticity**, like Ben & Jerry's raw response to racism in the wake of the death of George Floyd. Some brands have demonstrated **selflessness**, like Scholastic's modernization of story time for stay-at-home kids by inviting celebrities to read to them online. And other brands have shown **agility**, like Dove's use of essential workers and real people in their digitally untouched film "Courage is Beautiful."

As an independent, how can you market in ways that align more deeply with the times?

One way is to **focus on human experience (HX) instead of user experience (UX)**. Another is to **build trust by grounding your actions in your values**. A third is to **stay agile in your response to whatever is arising**.

1. FOCUS ON HUMAN EXPERIENCE, NOT USER EXPERIENCE.

The term "user experience" has never sat well with me. That's especially true in 2020, the year we've all relied on digital technology to make human connections. So if your business is not running as efficiently or performing as highly as it was last year at this time, consider the impact you can make in 2021 by connecting on a more human level with your audience. Increase your HX over your UX. How can you develop a greater sense of community? **What ways can you involve the human experiences of real people in your marketing strategy?** Increasing attention to the human experience might not turn a profit overnight, but it pays off in the long run.

2. BUILD TRUST BY GROUNDING YOUR ACTIONS IN YOUR VALUES.

Trust underlies the human experience. According to Deloitte Insights in their recent report "2021 Global Marketing Trends," the trend towards building trust by making a positive impact on society (especially when it comes to income inequality, diversity and the environment) is on the rise.

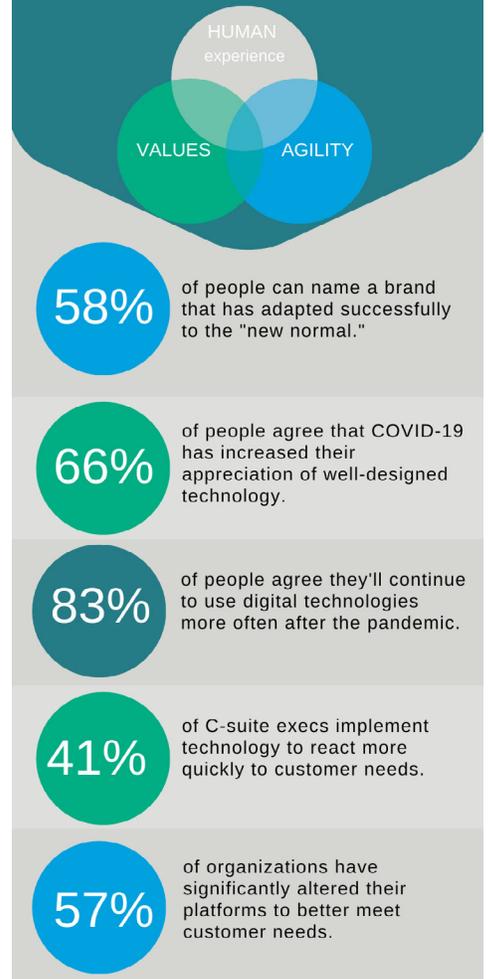
Make a list of your core values and how those align with the work you do. What are the values of your clients, customers and collaborators? **In what ways can you communicate shared values, not just through mission statements and messaging, but through the actions you take?**



MARKETING IN A PANDEMIC

A few stats to inform your 2021 plan

Source: Deloitte Insights, "2021 Global Marketing Trends"



3. STAY AGILE IN YOUR RESPONSE.

In the past nine months, human behaviour globally has changed. Everything from how we shop to how we date to how we exercise is now accommodating the wellbeing of society. To stay responsive to those changes means tracking new behaviours as they happen. **Use customer feedback to prototype new offers.** Explore how other businesses are responding to the crisis and glean inspiration from their approach. Serve new geographical areas, new demographics. Invest in social listening to understand how and why people are changing, and use that information to take your next steps.

Whatever changes you adopt to your marketing plan in 2021, remember to go in with your real self, your human experience, COVID-hair and all.



Nancy is the director of [InsightEd](#), a research, marketing and coaching service that bridges technology and innovation ventures to the education sector and helps people lead their business and lives more mindfully and creatively. She is the director of communications for PIC.

MEMBER NEWS

Ellen Gardner, ABC, has added podcasting and coaching to her somewhat eclectic communications career. The podcast, called [Healthcare Change Makers](#), is built around personal conversations with Canadian healthcare leaders, where Ellen finds out their challenges and what motivates them. She also works with a company called [CareerCycles](#), helping people in career transition craft concise and compelling resumes and LinkedIn profiles. She is certified through CareerCycles as a Holistic Narrative Career Professional (HNCP). "I am still attached to my life as a writer and communications professional but enjoy enhancing my skills and adding new gigs along the way," she says.



Annette Martell, ABC, MC, IABC Fellow, just finished an educational sabbatical. Responding to client needs, she took a deep dive and completed Royal Roads University's post-grad leadership coaching program. She is now globally certified as an executive coach with the International Coach Federation. Annette says her practice emphasizes organizational change management, which relates to her term as chair of the IABC International Board when they navigated the dramatic global effects of SARS.

Lessons from my dog: How to do business better in a pandemic *By Nancy Miller*



- 1. Survey the landscape.
- 2. Prioritize wellbeing.
- 3. Be resourceful!
- 4. Build trust.

PIC Presents:

Attract Clients with DIY Video for LinkedIn

PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATORS

Hands-on session with corporate video producer Vanessa Holding

When: Tuesday, January 19, 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Where: Zoom videoconferencing platform.

✓

REGISTRATION
IABC MEMBERS

✓

REGISTRATION
NON-MEMBERS

See you on social media

Build and strengthen your connections with other PIC members, advance your communications business, discuss business issues and network with PIC on social media: on Twitter at [@pictoronto](#); LinkedIn, [IABC Toronto Professional Independent Communicators](#); and Facebook, [Professional Independent Communicators \(PIC\)](#), part of [IABC/Toronto](#). Recent posts include **how to get referrals, 20 must-read books, setting boundaries with clients and more.**

Wednesday, December 9
5 to 6 p.m. EDT, Zoom

PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATORS

PIC's Holly Jolly Holiday Social

✓

REGISTER NOW

THE INDEPENDENT VIEW

WHAT A YEAR

By Nkiru Asika

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair."

Events of the past 12 months bring to mind these powerful opening lines from *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which Charles Dickens describes the disruptive forces that led to the French Revolution.

2020 has been similarly disruptive and paradoxical.

This year has been an aberration. This year has been a correction. It's been a year of tragedy and strife. But also victory and hope.

We've seen terrible loss of life from a pandemic that has brought the world to its knees. But also a type of renewal — as wildlife reclaimed their natural habitats, families reconnected with each other and many of us reset our priorities and reimagined how we work.

A caught-on-camera killing, born of

400 years of hate, sparked unprecedented protests around the world and forced new conversations about race, equality and power that may lead to lasting change.

Today more than ever, there is a recognition of those voices who haven't always been heard. Those who have been marginalized because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability or gender.

It's a difficult time to be a communicator. It's an exciting time to be a communicator.

This has been a tough year to do business as we heard at last month's PIC roundtable. But the grit, optimism and agility of PIC members shine through.

For some of you, this year may prove transformative.

This is our last *Buzz* of 2020, and I want to thank the incredible executive team here at PIC, who despite their own personal and business challenges, have remained fully committed, always supportive and endlessly creative. The dedication, enthusiasm and talent of this team is truly inspiring.

To our wonderful PIC members, I raise a

virtual glass of the finest champagne to say thank you for making this group what it is.

Have a safe, happy and restful holiday season.

As always, if you have any ideas for professional development topics, possible speakers (including yourself) or any questions, concerns or ideas about PIC, please don't hesitate to reach me at toronto-sig@iabc.toronto.

Onwards and upwards,

Nkiru Asika

Chair, PIC;
VP, Special Interest Groups,
IABC/Toronto



Nkiru is a [marketing strategist](#) with a background as a TV producer and award-winning journalist. She coaches, speaks, trains and delivers online marketing services to help entrepreneurs build their business and authority.

[Professional Independent Communicators](#) (PIC) is a special interest group of [IABC/Toronto](#). PIC's mission is to support independent IABC/Toronto communicators through professional development, networking and marketing. [IABC](#) connects communicators from around the world with the insights, resources and people they need to drive their careers and the profession forward.

THE BUZZ *The Buzz* informs members about upcoming events, shares professional development tips from past meetings and keeps us connected. Editor this issue: [Nancy Miller](#) | Design: [Ilan Sivapathasundaram](#)

Want to contribute to *The Buzz*? Contact [Nancy Miller](#).

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PIC executive

Contact any of us with questions, comments and ideas for speakers or topics:

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