

# Run, Forrest, run!

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*Human behaviour naturally impacts sales. But what happens when the way consumers usually behave is completely disrupted by a global pandemic? **Candice Theron**, account director at [Carat](#), has some ideas.*



By definition, human behaviour is pretty simple. One source has described it as ‘an organism’s external reaction to its environment’. Funny thing is, don’t we all just feel like a bunch of organisms swimming around in our own petri dishes at the moment?

Our decisions and movements have been restricted, and our last taste of ‘freedom’ was gone with the wind in a matter of days due to the global pandemic.

So how do we as marketers make sense of the human behaviour of our audiences, when in the last four weeks our individual reactions to our personal and work lives have been so fundamentally altered?

We have to understand what ‘human’ means in this context, because right now there is no clearly defined behavioural pattern or trend.

As marketers, our first question should always be, ‘What is the human truth and how can my product complement it?’ This truth is based on two simple factors:

1. Our human needs; and
2. Our human wants.

## What do they need?

What has been brought to our attention is that the basic human needs – like food, water, warmth, rest, safety and security – have suddenly become more important than, say, achieving success or experiencing a sense of accomplishment. This pandemic has wreaked havoc on our economy and on consumers’ income. With many people focused on how to retain their jobs and provide for their families before their income runs out, the need for essentials has doubled.

We have seen this through the increased trust in online shopping over the last few weeks, driving South Africa’s e-commerce industry forward by many years. In an article published on *MyBroadband*, Rudolf Muller notes that both bricks-

and-mortar and online stores have upscaled their operations to produce innovative platforms to service this new environment. An example of this is Pick n Pay's Collect Direct email ordering service, which allows consumers to email their shopping lists to participating stores near them and then simply collect their groceries from the store.

This service not only accommodates our human need for necessities and essentials, it also delivers on convenience and has taken into account health precautions during this time. The overall takeaway here is that if a product forms part of the consumer's necessities, make the way that consumer acquires that product easier. A little positivity goes a long way – even in the little things like 'add to cart'.

What do they want?

In a recent *AdWeek* article, Jonathan Mildenhall points out how Covid-19 has neatly flipped Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs on its head. But the article fails to highlight something quite simple: people want to escape their petri dish. They want out. They crave the experiences and human connections that have been taken away by social distancing, lockdown and sheltering in place. Although we do not know what the 'new normal' will be, we do know that above and beyond anything else, people want to experience the things they love, with the people they love. And in a short time, the want to escape has become an undeniable need.

The need to be like Forrest Gump – to run because suddenly simply running – seemed more appealing. So how do we as marketers approach an environment where these experiences may be limited or restricted? How do we allow our audiences to run, metaphorically and physically?

## Solving for human

We need to facilitate these connections and experiences – moving from the petri dish into the phases of our current reality. Although the new normal may not include a Saturday morning park run, packed malls or restaurants, brands need to facilitate augmented experiences and connections in an innovative way – whether at home or outside.

A great example of this is good ol' Nike. To promote social distancing, 'Play Inside, Play for the World' was launched – bringing together communities of athletes, consumers, trainers and the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo, Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan. Beyond the feel-good campaign, the brand supported their communities by delivering a wealth of content to help people stay active – indoors. These include expert guidance, live-streamed workouts with Nike master trainers, coaching for your kids and competition through digital fitness challenges.

So, what's the key takeaway? This facilitation of connections or experiences does not require a timeline, it can be done during and post-lockdown. Connecting consumers seamlessly to a brand through virtual interactions keeps them connected and can be a key driver in post-lockdown brand loyalty – and, yes, sales.

Our reactions, and therefore our behaviours, have already fundamentally shifted to solve for humans, and by understanding what our audiences need and want, we are better able to solve for their behaviours with agility. By solving for the human first, sales will come naturally.

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