



What not to do:

- Stay away from the overused “here’s how we’re responding to coronavirus” emails/posts/etc. It’s great that you’re being proactive in protecting your staff, closing your doors to protect guests and staff, and so on, but right now consumers really don’t care about how you’re cleaning your business or washing your hands a little extra. Plus, they’re getting that message from so many places, it’s overdone and consumers don’t want to keep hearing it.
- This is also not necessarily the time to push “Buy! Buy! Buy!” messaging. People are scared. People are worried about how they’re going to pay their rent or mortgage. They’re worried about their vulnerable family and friends. Even though they may want to support small, local businesses, it’s not necessarily a priority. However, if you have to sell product to keep your lights on... do it. Just remember to do it tastefully, with a bit of sanity-keeping humor, or something else to keep it fun.
- Don’t feed into the hype or politics. Enough said I hope.
- DON’T, under ANY circumstance, attempt to profit on the situation.

So, what do consumers need/want instead?

- Offer a distraction. Something to do, something to look forward to, anything to break up the monotony of bad news and worry. Give your followers/consumers/customers/guests a sense of normalcy in a world that feels unfamiliar and unpredictable.
 - Show beautiful imagery on your social channels.
 - Talk about the things you’re looking forward to doing when this is over.
 - Mention the things you’re working on right now that your customers will enjoy when things are back to normal.
 - Nostalgia resonates in a big way in times of crisis. Tell the story of your business over several days on social. Or share historic tidbits in your emails. Bonus points for black and white or old photos. Trust me, people love this stuff!
 - Be real and be honest. While “Thanks for sticking with us during these challenging times” sounds nice enough. It is pretty trite at this point. You must have more to say than that, say it in a way that is true, heartfelt, and on-brand... and you’ll never go wrong.
- A personal touch. Instead of the emails (that we’ve all received already) about “these challenging times” or “we thought we’d let you know how we’re handling the coronavirus” (insert eye roll here) – how about a personal touch? Ask how they’re doing, offer up some points of contact so that they can easily reach you with a question or want to chat. If you have folks on any kind of VIP program or loyalty club with your business, give them a little extra TLC right now.
- Think outside the box. Many people are focused on the basics right now: food, shelter, money. Buying luxury items (like wine, vacations, etc.) may not be high on their list. So, instead of focusing on products, focus on other things... like sharing recipes, offering up virtual Q&A sessions, or behind the scenes tours of your facility.
 - If you’re a restaurant, why not do a live video showing how to make one of your favorite dishes?
 - If you’re a winery, offer mix and match “mystery cases” at a great price. Or go behind the scenes in the cellar to provide your followers with an update on what’s happening with their favorite wines.
 - If you’re a park/outdoor destination, why not go live on social or film some favorite spots to post later? If people can’t physically be here, let them live vicariously through social media.

- If you own a cleaning service, how about sharing some of your favorite disinfecting tips or cleaning hacks – on video?

Finally...

- While it can be incredibly challenging to be innovative and creative during stressful times, if you can, use this time to regroup. Don't forget that eventually, this *will* be over and your business needs to be ready. When the time comes, you should have a plan in place. How are you going to reemerge from this challenge? Better, stronger? I hope so! The same as before? Say what?! No! We need to find new ways of doing things, and now is our chance.

About Brittany:

Brittany Gibson has 15 years of experience in marketing, public relations, and communications. She began her career as the Advertising Director at a local winery, and later served as the Tourism and Marketing Manager at the Watkins Glen Area Chamber of Commerce, before being named the Executive Director of the Seneca Lake Wine Trail in November 2018. Her passion is strategy – using data and measurable outcomes, paired with instinct and creativity to carry out successful campaigns, driving visitation and sales at Seneca Lake Wine Trail wineries. Brittany is also an avid volunteer and she believes that giving back is a responsibility. She's the vice president of her local school board and the coordinator of her family's charity, Team Charlie.