

Acquiring New Customers & Viewership During COVID - 19



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The coronavirus outbreak has revitalized Facebook's dominant position as a news powerhouse, which has increased the platform's overall consumption. This trend of increasing time on site and record engagement holds true for many social media platforms. But despite the rise in usage, many brands have greatly reduced their advertising in response to the impact COVID-19 has had on their overall business. With this reduction, many brands have resorted to only supporting the highest returning channels at a minimum level – typically only investing in Google and Facebook.

The increase in content consumption paired with reduced competitor brand presence has made auxiliary platforms such as Pinterest, YouTube, and Reddit ideal partners for brands looking to increase viewership, make connections, and acquire new customers during this time.

Social media usage is up across all channels while people in quarantine try to fill their time. Audience behavior is also changing across all platforms as people find new ways to connect with their friends, stay productive at work, teach their children, sew their own masks and more. Now, the way that brands interact with audiences on these platforms needs to evolve. And while consumption has increased at least 9%, content from brands has decreased by 5%, according to Shareablee.

Brands have an opportunity to grow their audiences by helping to support, inform, and entertain on platforms that are showing clear trends for certain types of content. At a high level, the following content trends are most popular across platforms:

Pinterest Content Trends: Indoor activities, Cooking, Organizing Tips, DIY Home Projects, Crafts and Educational Content for Kids, Self-care

YouTube Content Trends: WFH Essentials, Study with Me, Pantry Meals, Stress Reduction, In-Home Fitness

Reddit Content Trends: Gaming, TV, Technology and Computing, Family and Relationships, WFH, Online Learning, and Art and Design interests have all increased by at least 10% week over week since social distancing began earlier this year.

Get Creative with Pinterest

Amid the global COVID-19 lockdowns, Pinterest is experiencing all-time highs in user engagement. Searches have been up nearly 60% YoY with new signups, link click-throughs from Pins, and saves all up to ~30%, while video views have nearly tripled on the platform. Users are turning to Pinterest for inspiration on things to do indoors, such as cooking, organizing tips, crafts for kids, and more. The platform has always been a hub for inspiration, being just as much a search platform as it is a social networking platform, which has positioned it perfectly to thrive in the current climate.

As a result of this major increase in usage, Pinterest fast-tracked a new product feature called the [Today tab](#). The Today tab is a hub of curated expert information from the World Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control, as well as trending topics and timely posts such as DIY skin care remedies and exercise routines. Interestingly, this feature is currently brand agnostic with no brand buys or sponsorship opportunities available. However, if a brand's content aligns with the trends and topics being covered on this tab, users can land on branded content (either organic or paid) upon navigating to the Related Pins (More Like This) section.

Unlike news-first platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, Pinterest's feed provides a safe environment for brands, minimizing any concerns of being surrounded by sensitive or negative virus-related content. This brand safe environment, paired with the increased usage, makes Pinterest a prime platform for brands and advertisers to build connections and drive customer acquisition during this time.

As it relates to paid advertising, many advertisers are seeing strong ROAS and traffic improvements; this is aided by the increase of users to the site paired with a less competitive auction as many brands have halted spend. Strategies for advertising on Pinterest during COVID-19 include:

Ensure the content and creative is authentic and built for Pinterest

As people change daily habits and begin to adapt to the new normal, brands are increasingly playing an important role in providing reliable resources and content to consumers. Organically, content on Pinterest should be:

Visually Appealing

Leverage an eye-catching image, use video to teach people how to do something or inspire them to try something new, incorporate text overlays for added context, and include your logo.

Positive

Be cognizant of your message to ensure sensitivity.

Relevant

Find ways to connect your brand to relevant content from first to last touch. Make sure the landing page experience matches the ad messaging.

Invest in categories with unique and increasing consumer behavior

Given the current "stay-at-home" environment, there are spikes in engagement with unique content and product categories. These include recipes, lawn and garden ideas, parents as teachers, date night ideas, and athleisure wear. Align your brand's content with these categories in an effort to be both helpful and relatable.

Maximize bottom-line profits with Shopping Ads and Dynamic Retargeting

With a shift in the overall sales mix to online sales and the hit companies are taking from the drastic decline of no in-store sales, it's important to maximize media dollars to top-performing tactics that return at the highest rate. On Pinterest, these include Shopping Ads and Dynamic Retargeting.

[Shopping Ads](#) are particularly effective for customer acquisition. This format uses Catalogs to generate product Pins in bulk and then leverages product data from your owned data source to show relevant products to interested Pinners who are searching on the platform. These ads are product-forward and automatically created with dynamic information directly from the product feed. Similarly, [Dynamic Retargeting](#) leverages product Pins and capitalizes on intent-based signals by retargeting exact or similar products from your data source to those users who have engaged on your website. This approach works well for engaging and retaining existing customers, or shoppers who are in the consideration phase with your brand.

Focus on video and carousels to capture brand awareness and engagement

Pinterest is an ideal place to build brand awareness because it's more likely to be an early marketing touchpoint than other platforms; people use the platform specifically to broaden their consideration set: [72% of Pinners](#) say they find new brands and services on Pinterest. Specifically, [Video Pins](#) are a great way to achieve brand awareness within the Pinterest feed.

The format itself is high-impact given that the majority of Pins are static, and advertisers can even take this a step further with max-width placements which take up more screen space. [Carousel Pins](#) are another great option to tell a story, show variety, and create an experience by utilizing up to five images instead of one, all within a single ad.

While content for these placements can incorporate a product focus, making slight adjustments to the message in order to align to Pinners' current mindset and environment will yield the best results (i.e., don't make the message just about selling).

Capture Attention on YouTube

Naturally, people are also turning to YouTube to help cope with social distancing and watch content of their choosing. All video streaming platforms have seen a rise in consumption, but more specifically, YouTube has seen a [15% increase](#) in traffic since the initial outbreak at the end of January – on par with Netflix's 16% jump. This user behavior only strengthens as consumers begin to realize that the current climate is a more long-term situation than initially anticipated. YouTube searches for things like “at-home workouts” and “homeschooling” have surged in the later part of March.

Now more than ever, audiences are on YouTube. With the right approach, the platform can be leveraged to drive customer acquisition along with driving brand awareness.

Drive direct acquisition with [TrueView for Action](#)

YouTube's lower funnel ad format and objective is an in-stream skippable video ad optimized to a website action. The ad consists of a customizable and prominent call-to-action button, headline text overlays, and an [end screen](#). Additionally, this ad type has the support of Google's robust bidding algorithms in place to ensure the video ad is in front of users who will more likely take action from a target CPA or maximize conversion bidding options.

Bring prospects through a planned customer journey with [Video Ad Sequencing](#)

Think of this like a series of steps you'd like a customer to watch to achieve an end result. One step, or video, cannot be skipped and must be followed one-by-one during this sequence. For instance, the first video can be a broad branding creative, and the next video (which the same user will then see) can be more of a product demo like a style how-to, and finally, the last video could be super product-focused, highlighting several features.

Not only does this sequencing educate a consumer along a path towards a brand she would like, but it's also a great way to ensure frequency and impact with a potential prospect. These videos can be conveniently organized into a playlist for a more organized user experience right from your YouTube profile page.

Be front and center with prospects using [CPM Mastheads](#)

A masthead is the first ad a viewer sees when opening the YouTube homepage. The CPM option is a cost efficient way to grab the attention of targeted users through the use of geofencing as well as [advanced audience solutions](#). Retailers, for example, can utilize this premium placement with layered geotargeting of locations that have lost foot traffic and in-store sales. In addition, advanced audience solutions allow brands to think lower in the funnel by utilizing the high-impact placement while reaching audiences based off who they are, their interests and habits, what they're actively researching, or how they have interacted with the business.

Maximize targeted reach using six-second [bumper ads](#)

Similar to the tactic of tapping into CPM mastheads through geofencing or advanced targeting, another way to guarantee focused reach with prospects that matter is by utilizing a six-second ad that viewers can't skip. Since this is also bought on CPM bid, the costs are efficiently lower than a standard TrueView In-Stream ad. Knowing large creative lifts and large productions are not something brands can easily do at this time, Google has provided a tool called [Bumper Machine](#), which allows advertisers to feed a long form video creative; the tool will automatically generate different, 6-second cuts of the original ad.

Take advantage of desktop usage with [bid-modifiers](#)

As on-the-go culture hibernates and consumers look for entertainment at home, users are turning away from their mobile devices. Website pages for YouTube, as well as Facebook and Netflix, have seen larger COVID-driven growth in comparison to its mobiles apps. Placing bid-modifiers on desktop viewers will help ensure brands reach consumers where they are currently more active.

Provide flexibility to current video creative with [Director Mix](#)

The capabilities of Director Mix allows brands to start with a base video and then layer in and swap around text, images, or sound to customize creative for specific audiences. With shifts to the current climate happening daily, Director Mix is a quick and efficient way to remain nimble with video messaging, adapting to the most relevant and appropriate tone for the right audience.

Reddit

Reddit has seen double-digit growth over the last few weeks from users looking to be both entertained and informed. As users settle into homebound routines, increases in views have shifted to more entertainment and DIY-centric interests from news/finance focused subreddits. The top Interest Group growth categories in the beginning of March (Business & Finance, News & Education, Travel, and Sports) have stabilized in growth over the past week. Entertainment and DIY communities are now seeing strong gains in views as people discover new home activities: Gaming, TV, Technology & Computing, and Art & Design groups are all up over 10% week-over-week.

Overall, the native focus of communities on Reddit has provided users, both old and new, with a sense of belonging and helped provide an online solace during this time of isolation. This is seen especially with the growth of Reddit chat, which is up ~20% YTD. Strategies for advertising on Reddit during COVID-19 include:

Be mindful of your content

- Add value: Highlight ways your brand can support and enhance people's lives and communities in today's new normal. Provide tools to help consumers navigate their current circumstances, such as recipes, fitness routines, etc.
- Be authentic: Think of your messages during this time as establishing and maintaining Redditors' trust in your brand in the long term.
- Share relevant information: Communicate any applicable PSAs, updates in brand corporations, and provide expert perspectives that are reliable.
- Support the community: Provide options for people to use your offerings as a way to pay it forward to others, allowing people to help each other. For example, facilitating virtual experiences, discounting essential items and services, or finding ways to help and participate on a local level.

Connect with users authentically and candidly using Sponsored AMAs

An [AMA](#) (Ask Me Anything) is a scheduled question and answer session that takes place at a certain time on Reddit. A sponsored AMA allows brands to join the conversation to address what your company is doing to support communities and employees during this time, and showcase thought leadership as users seek to stay informed. It can also be leveraged as a way to provide entertainment and content to those who are seeking. Successful Sponsored AMAs should consider the following:

Having the right host

Feature executives within the company that can properly speak to how your company is responding and shifting operations to changing circumstances amidst COVID-19, or showcase specialists from your company.

Being candid

Reddit is a place of authenticity – it's important to ensure that Redditors are not misled. Responses should not be over edited and should be candid and transparent.

Being flexible and observant

Be prepared for anything. Review responses and formulate trends with responses for those trends. Roll with the punches and be flexible by following the flow of conversation.

Drive new customer acquisition using Promoted Posts

Scale your brand's reach using static or video-promoted posts to efficiently generate traffic to site, and ultimately bring new conversions through. Make sure to use [community targeting](#) as this is unique to Reddit; this feature allows a brand to serve content to users that subscribe or visit specific subreddits. When aligned to ones previously mentioned, this could result in visibility with new prospects and customers.

Maximize media impact and awareness with Reddit Takeovers

Reddit provides various opportunities to own 100% SOV on different pages throughout its site, giving a brand a direct and unique line of communication to a community and engage with an audience in a more relevant manner.

- **Front Page Takeovers** allow brands to own the front page for 24 hours, resulting in a high volume of impressions at efficient CPMs.
- **Trending Takeovers** are live in the second slot of the Trending Today module on Reddit's Popular feed, as well as within the Search tab. Reddit reports that the Popular feed reaches a third of its site visitors daily, and the Search tab reaches millions each day as well, making this placement ideal for capturing user attention.
- **Community Takeovers** offer a more focused approach, and allow you to align your brand with communities who are most likely to engage. This is a more controlled approach, but will result in more tailored, valuable impressions and site traffic.

Integrate and add value organically to Reddit communities

Brands can simply join the increased amount of subreddit conversations by publishing authentic content that matters to the audience. Redditors appreciate open and honest posts from brands. Below are a few ideas you could organically share on Reddit:

- DIY videos on items consumers can make at home for themselves or their community. Brands can share ways its products can be used to create new products, like making masks from bandanas, or how its products can be used for home entertainment during quarantine.
- Entertain, inform, and engage users who are learning to cope with their new stay-at-home lives and WFH schedules in [r/stayingathome](#) and [r/workonline](#).

Even in the most uncertain of times, brands have an opportunity to grow audiences by helping to support, inspire, and inform consumers. With the right strategy and by being mindful of how user behavior has changed (and continues to evolve), it is possible to connect and build your audience on these platforms. The connections made on these platforms will ultimately evolve into acquired, loyal customers.



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