

RESET. RESTART. REINVENT.

FUTURE PROOF YOUR BRAND IN
TIMES OF CRISIS - AND BEYOND



HEY!

The crisis is making us pause. It has become our top – if not only – priority to ensure health: of our families, ourselves, the economy. Home office is no longer the working mode we all aspire to implement; it has rather turned into the most dreaded one. Everything has changed.

But there will be a time after social distancing. After quarantine and self-isolation. A time when every Netflix series has been binge-watched and every craft sheet has been glued together. No matter how easily we adapt to video conferencing or cyber-cherishing our new heroes, at some point we will return to “normal”. We have to. We want to.

But “normal” will mean something different; it will no longer be what it was back in January. The presets to power up the engines again will have changed. The question that all market players must ask themselves is whether we are talking about a re-boot or a reset without backup. And if the Covid-19 diet that we’ve all been forced will become a long-term dietary change – or if we will return to old patterns and consumption habits.

Spoiler alert: unfortunately, we won’t be answering these questions on the following pages. If we had the answers, we would certainly not spend our time drawing up strategic management guidelines. We would be saving the world.

This paper aims at assisting you in preparing your brand for a time after the immediate crisis, regardless of how your customers or society might change.

Special thanks go my team, especially to Sara Moering, Aissu Diallo, Christine Walther, Pasquale Pretzsch and Lisa-Marie Freuken for turning a bunch of wild thoughts into a well researched, thought-through, structured and digestible piece of management inspiration.

Enjoy reading!

Stefan Rymar

Chief Crystal Ball Officer
Elbkind Reply



IT'S CRAZY OUT THERE



When claiming that the Western world has not seen a crisis as severe as the current Covid-19 outbreak since World War II, governments are not exaggerating. Considering the impact this crisis has already had, a transformation with substantial economic repercussions is inevitable. And, unfortunately, one thing is certain: it will get a lot worse before it gets better.

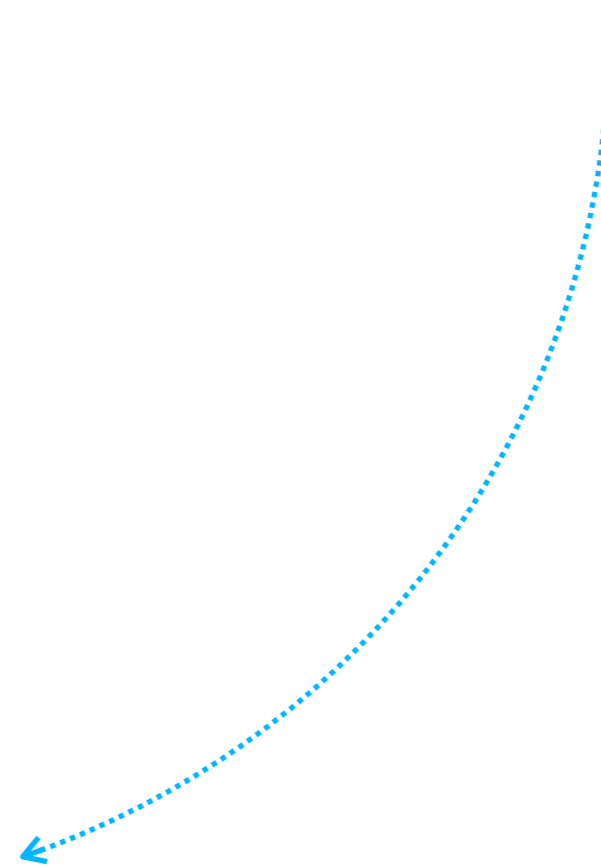
The situation has disrupted the customary way of doing marketing. Being in a field where planning far ahead is common sense, an entire industry is suddenly forced to deviate from what they know in the shortest amount of time possible.

We are looking at a “new normal”; both from an individual and from a brand perspective. However, while normal usually implies that something is in an expected state or condition, the Covid-19 outbreak is something that the modern marketing communication world has never seen before. We have only just started the journey of conforming to a standard. Therefore, it will most likely take a while before anything really feels normal again.

Not knowing what the future holds, for now, all we can do is prepare for everything to keep changing. The key to that is knowing how to communicate and adapt communication under any given circumstances, what to think about and what to disregard.

THIS PAPER AIMS TO HELP YOU DO EXACTLY THAT.

**IT WILL
GET A LOT
WORSE
BEFORE
IT GETS
BETTER.**



A TIME TO LISTEN



Despite a lot being in motion right now, the rules for brands have not changed.

IF ANYTHING, IT HAS BECOME EVEN MORE IMPORTANT TO FOLLOW THEM.

The Corona crisis puts the spotlight on some latent shortcomings. Rather than truly figuring out what is relevant to their customers in the long run, too many businesses have still been using quick fixes or talking about what only they themselves deem important. This all too often results in communication with little regard to target groups. And while there are already several brands basing their entire business model on digital communication and distribution, it is still new territory for many.

Under different circumstances brands would have been able to get away with sticking to the good old ways a little longer. But with the situation being as it is, we are all being involuntarily signed up for a crash course in customer centricity. The curriculum: understanding your customers, striking the right note, demonstrating tact in a time of hyper-sensitivity, reevaluating a brand's purpose and business model and adjusting it quickly, if needed.

The crisis has also truly amped up the speed in which companies are forced to learn how to manage their brands digitally. With a significant increase in mobile consumption, not being able to reach people via OOH advertising and dealing with significant budget cuts, marketers are turning to digital advertising. And all of a sudden, social ads have become something even the hesitant deem worth trying.

In this peculiar situation, we can easily identify which brands are able to act sustainably and which fail to do so. And even though there is no way to gloss this crisis over, there is an opportunity for brands to come out on top. But it comes with commitment.

Basically, it all comes down to this:

WHO IS ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS AND WHO IS ALSO ABLE TO ANSWER THEM?

Before moving on to the current brandscape, let's take a closer look at what is currently going on in the world.

SOCIETAL CHANGES



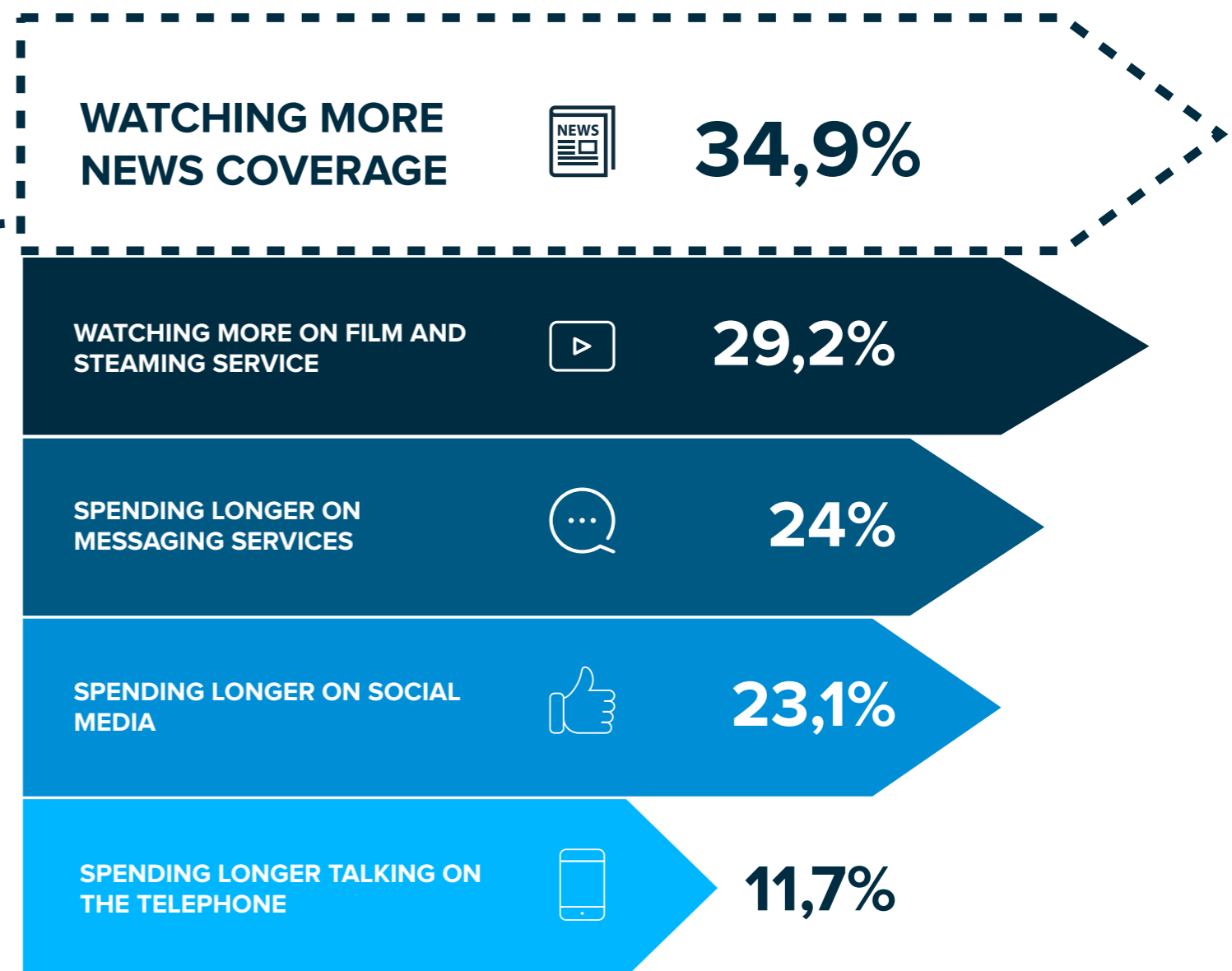
Ever since the Covid-19 outbreak, things around us have changed. But with the effects and prevention measures being as drastic as they are, people have changed as well. Not only has every single one of us been forced to adapt their behaviour in the shortest amount of time possible; being constantly concerned and stripped of the privileges we believed were untouchable, our hopes and fears have developed, diversified and intensified.

MEDIA CONSUMPTION SHIFTS TO MOBILE, STREAMING AND NEWS

It is no surprise that due to a significant increase in leisure time, people have altered their behaviour when it comes to consuming media, such as watching more shows and films on streaming services or spending more time on social media.

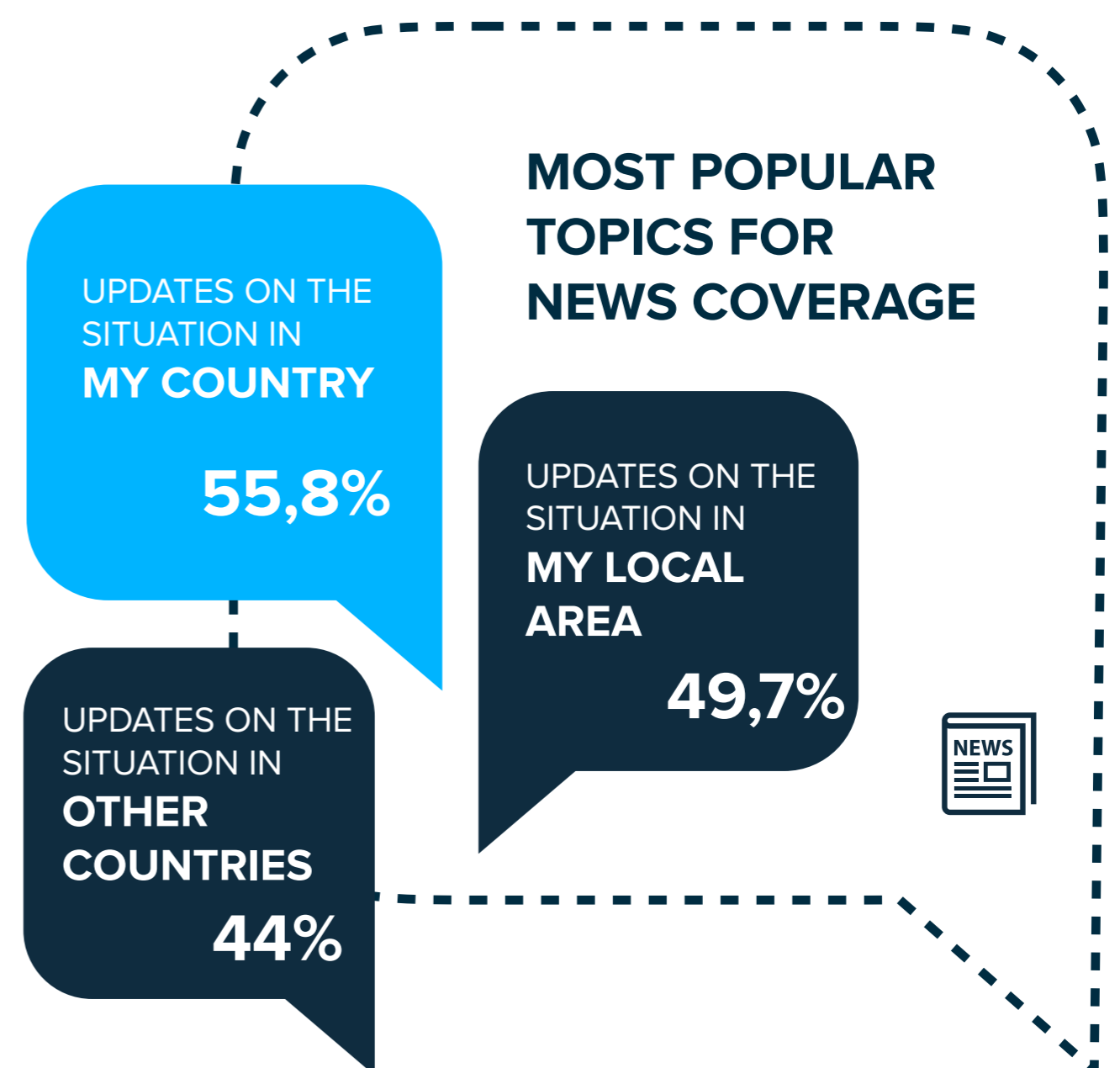
Another significant increase can be seen in everything that involves socializing over distance, such as using messenger apps and spending longer on the phone with others. So far, so good.

However, when being asked about activities they have spent significantly more time on, the most popular answer by far was watching more news coverage. And when doing so, the type of information people are looking for the most right now are **updates on the situation in their own country**, their local area and other countries.



In-Home and Media Consumption Significant Increases

Source: GlobalWebIndex 2020 /// Base: Internet Users Aged 16-64.



Information Types Wanted

Source: GlobalWebIndex 2020 /// Base: Internet Users Aged 16-64.

The high interest in their own countries and local areas clearly shows that people have understood that the Corona virus is no longer the problem of foreign countries: most people are painfully aware of being affected nationally. And with an increase in knowledge and understanding inevitably comes an increase in concern.

GROWING INCREASINGLY WORRIED

Asking about how concerned people were about the situation in their own country a month ago vs. now, the percentage of people who are very concerned or extremely concerned increased by more than 13 percentage points.

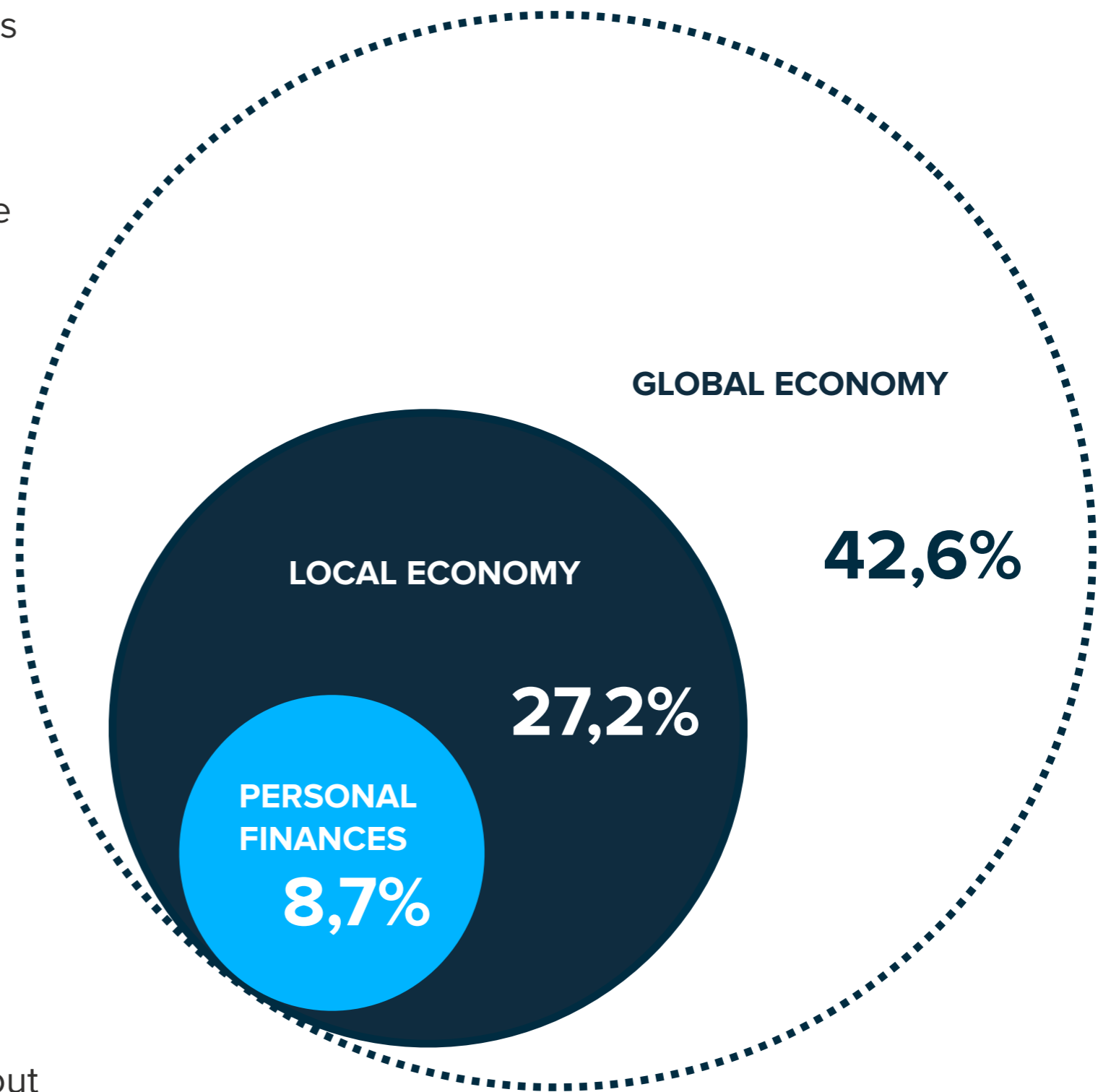
And even amongst those who are not too worried about how their country is dealing with the virus, concerns about repercussions related to Corona are omnipresent.

In Germany, for example, only 3% indicated that they currently don't have any specific concerns considering the Corona virus outbreak. The most popular answer by far was being concerned about the risk of infection of family and friends (50%) followed by mass panic (40%). The third most popular answer was long-term impacts on the economy.

(Source: Appinio Corona Dashboard 2020 /// Base: German Internet Users Aged 16-65)

Interestingly enough, more than half of the people asked claim to expect the impact on their personal or household finances to be small or non-existent. However, the vast majority believes the impact on their countries' economy to be big (50.9%) or dramatic (27.2%).

When looking at their expectancies for the global economy, the numbers are even higher.



Economic Concerns

Source: GlobalWebIndex 2020 /// Base: Internet Users Aged 16-64.

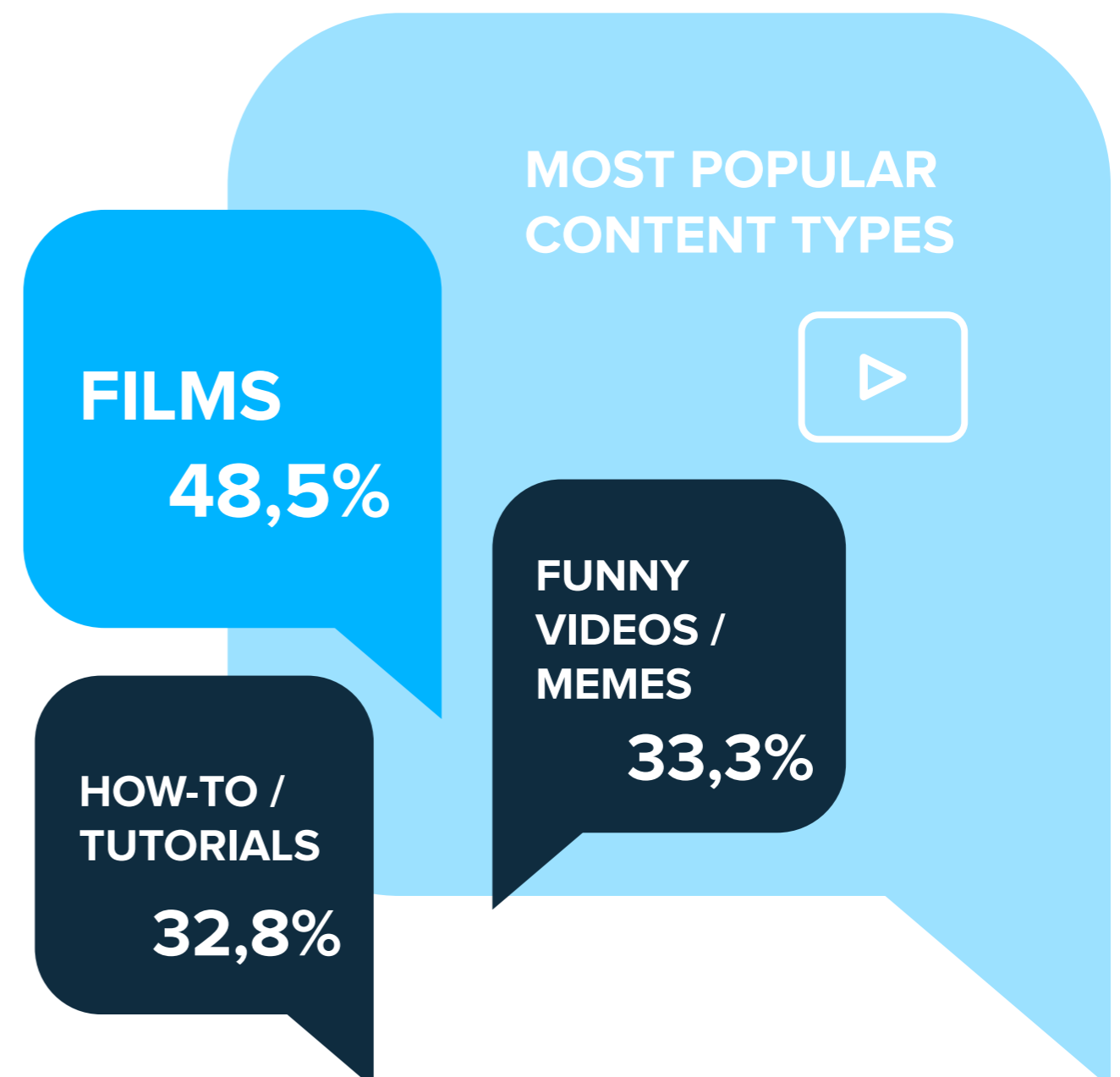
TORN BETWEEN STRIVING FOR CONTROL AND TRYING TO ESCAPE

What does all of this mean?

Well, first of all, people are unsettled. Understandably so. And they are repressing that several of them will personally be affected. In order to make sense of an unfamiliar situation, they are striving for control by keeping informed.

Most people who watch the news have grasped the severity of the Covid-19 outbreak. And as a result, they are following the rules, which means leaving the house less, avoiding public transport and not attending social gatherings. We call our parents to make sure they are staying inside and convert our living rooms into playgrounds without further ado.

But as a strong opposite to staying informed about current developments of the crisis, people are also looking for anything capable of giving them a break from thinking about the growing doom that is Corona. Films (1), funny videos/memes (2) and tutorials (3) are the top three content types that people would like to see right now.



Wanted Content Type

Source: GlobalWebIndex 2020 /// Base: Internet Users Aged 16-64.

SO, HOW DO CONSTANT EXISTENTIAL CONCERNS GO ALONG WITH MEMES OF TIGER KING AND LOVE IS BLIND?

For the majority of people in the Western world, an immediate threat to the lives of people they care about or even to their own lives is a completely new experience. They are in a state of shock and dealing with anxiety and uncertainty. In order to stay sane, they are looking for information and escape at the same time. This might seem paradox, but it's the way we humans cope.

THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING INCONSISTENT DOES NOT APPLY TO BRANDS

As a brand, however, you do not have the privilege of being inconsistent. And more than ever people seem to have very specific expectations for brands: you either provide useful information and help them cope with the situation or you help them escape the madness for a while. There is not a lot in between. Beware: These expectations will also change over time as things are unfolding. And don't think that you are the one who gets to choose which part you want to play. More than ever, it is crucial to base your communication strategy on empathizing with your customers.

Me: Running out of things to keep me entertained in quarantine.

Netflix:



when he follows you back and likes 3 of your pictures



GETTING ON TRACK

When looking into digital platforms and social networks, we are currently witnessing everything from glorious repositioning and living up to brand values to spectacular failure in maintaining coherent communication and brand health.

Brands are not able to hide their weaknesses anymore. Every misstep is exposed without mercy and those responsible for these missteps will find it hard to regain the trust of customers once the crisis is over. From your TV spots to your email marketing, all has come under intense scrutiny.

BRANDS NEED TO SELL – BUT USERS DON'T WANT TO BUY

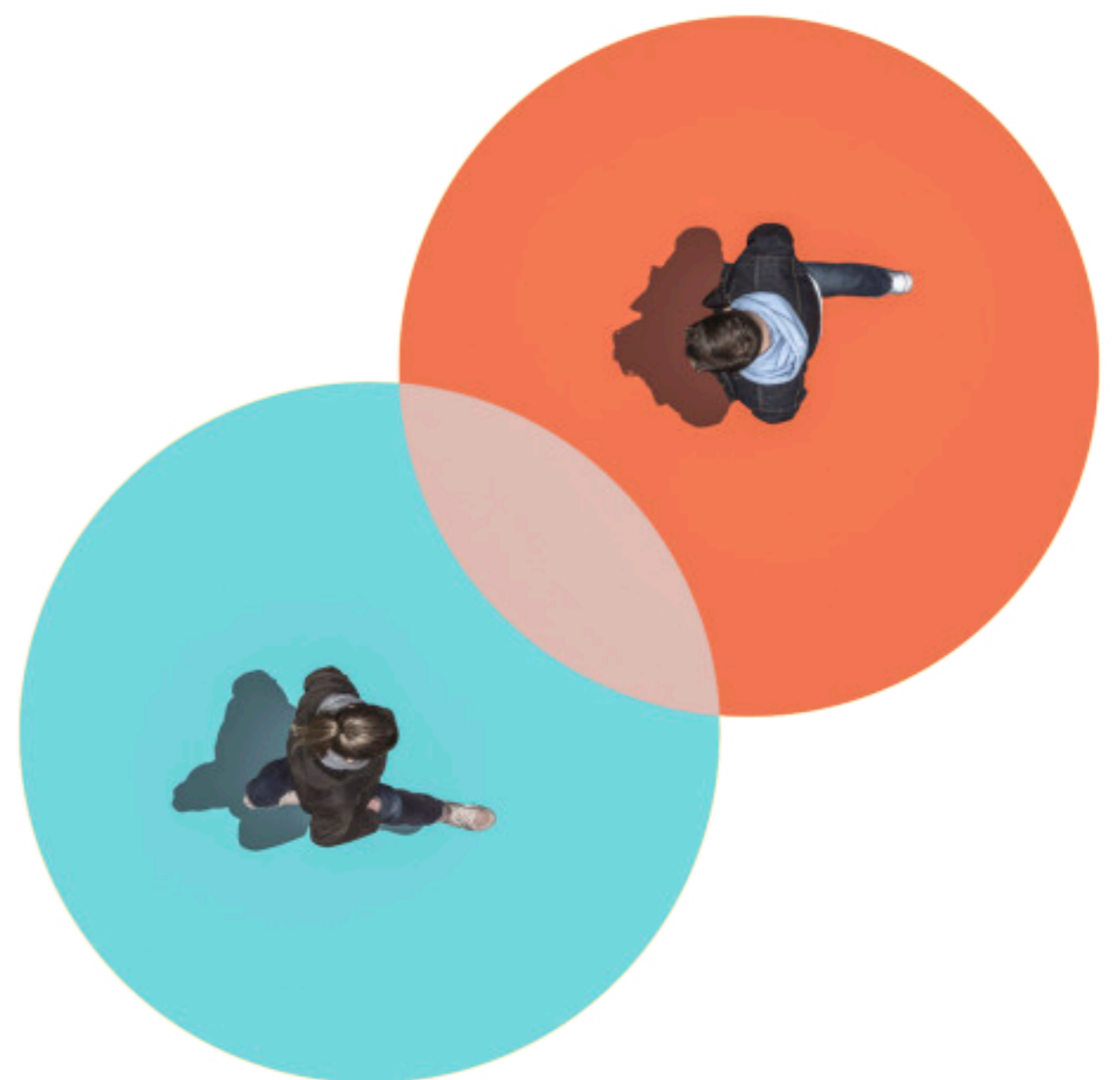


@behindyourback

One lesson I'm learning from this pandemic is that way too many brands have my email

Due to the temporary shutdown of stationary retail, many brands have been looking for alternative ways to sell their goods. As a result, people's inboxes are flooded with newsletters promoting the latest sale. And while it is more than understandable that retail is fighting for survival, being constantly told to buy something while just having been laid off is most likely going to make someone unsubscribe from a mailing list. And there goes a customer that might have invested in your brand once the crisis is over.

But rather than explaining which ideas might not be the best right now, we would like to focus on timeless rules on how to succeed. We will look at brands which have done a remarkable job navigating through the crisis so far and questions you should ask yourself right now to become – and stay – as remarkable.



RULE #1 MAKE SURE YOUR COMMUNICATION PLAN IS ALWAYS REAL-TIME READY

Expediency

In turbulent times, messages can change overnight. But even when we have arranged ourselves with any new or old normal, events occur that cannot be planned ahead. This applies to everything from a shitstorm to pop cultural trends. In short: trigger events. In order to react to those events, you need to uncover and evaluate them early.

Agility

Overengineering and infinite approval processes make it impossible to be spontaneous. In order to be truly agile, you need to shorten your chain of approval and empower your employees to act independently. In case your communication is done externally, make sure to have service providers in place that you trust.

Thought Starter

Do we have processes and monitorings in place that let us discover trigger events fast enough? Are there ways we could improve those processes to speed up our discovery time?

Are we able to discern what event leads to a one-off stunt compared to what helps us strengthen our brand personality in the long run?

Do we monitor and react to brand/product complaints and praises just as quickly as to external events?

Do I prepare and empower my employees to react independently? Are there guidelines in place for them?

Do I have a reduced chain of approval in place for communication based on trigger events?

Do I trust my service providers to consult me in hectic and difficult times or are they mere executioners?



INTEL

As part of their business continuity plan, **Intel** has a pandemic leadership team. Everything is based on five key principles: Assess, Prepare, Test, Improve, and Communicate.

<https://www.intel.com/content/dam/www/public/us/en/documents/corporate-information/policy-business-continuity-practices.pdf>



VALENTINO

Valentino's chief designer, Pier Paolo Piccioli, shared a heartfelt message on his personal Instagram page. Understanding the customer's mindset, he didn't talk about the brand or even Corona at all but instead cheered his fashion-conscious followers up.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B9mvAFvqDO3/>



RULE #2 SHOW EMPATHY FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS

Comprehension

Everybody can never be your primary communication target group. Check your data and find out who you are talking to. Look at social buzz, Google search queries etc. and cross reference findings with your internal data and have a monitoring in place.

Immersion

Dive into your customers' culture. Don't only look at socio-demographics but strive to understand pain points, opinions and what's popular among them at any given moment.

Implementation

Your communication needs to serve your customers. Adapt to different channels and different groups. Don't just say what you want to say. And if you have nothing to add, then don't say anything at all.

Thought Starter

Are the assumptions I currently have about my target group based on data or just gut feeling?

Do I have the data necessary to define my target group? What data do I need additionally, and do I have the tools for collecting it?

Do I have employees or service providers that can make sense of all the data?

How do I make sure that I am always up to date on my customers and potential customers?

What do my customers need and desire? What is popular among them right now?

What do I have to steer clear of?

Am I really communicating something that will entertain, delight, or cheer up my customers or do I make the situation about me and my products?

Do I have a task force that I can run my communication by to check whether my content is appropriate for this situation?

Do I have a plan in case my communication backfires?



MERCEDES-BENZ

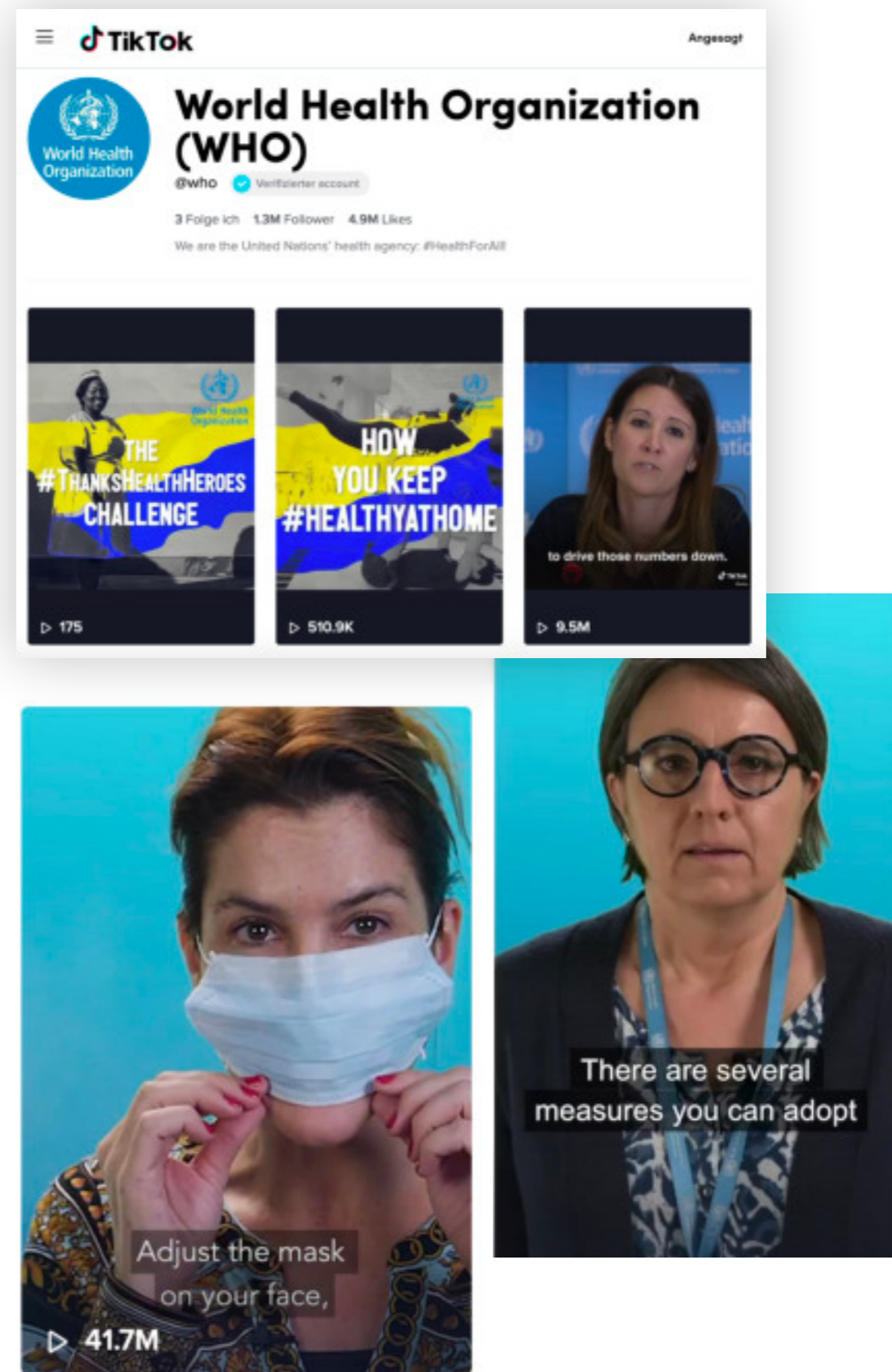
Mercedes-Benz offers colouring templates on LinkedIn in order to make entertaining your kids while working from home a little easier, addressing a pain point many parents have right now.

https://www.facebook.com/pg/MercedesBenz/photos/?tab=album&album_id=10158092551306670

WHO

The WHO shares their insights and actionable tips on TikTok with the younger crowd – with much success.

<https://www.tiktok.com/@who>



RULE #3 BE READY AND WILLING TO ADJUST YOUR BUSINESS MODEL

Humility

With times changing, your products and services might not be relevant anymore. Don't let your ego get in the way and be willing to question yourself. It doesn't only show humility and courage but might actually save your business.

Testing

Don't aim for perfection. In order to find out what works best with your target group, you have to test it and learn from the results. Especially on social media, testing is very easy and effective and thus should be part of your research and development process.

Thought Starter

What are my competitors doing? Are there any new ones that I should keep an eye on?

Do I see a decline in demand or market share? What has changed?

Do either the market or our target group show fundamentally new demands? How can I best pivot to still make use of my core offerings?

Am I evaluating which areas to improve on a regular basis when it comes to communication and offerings?

How can I foster an environment of innovation? Am I willing to let my employees fail from time to time?

Do I know how to best set up the right experiments that give me the answers I need?

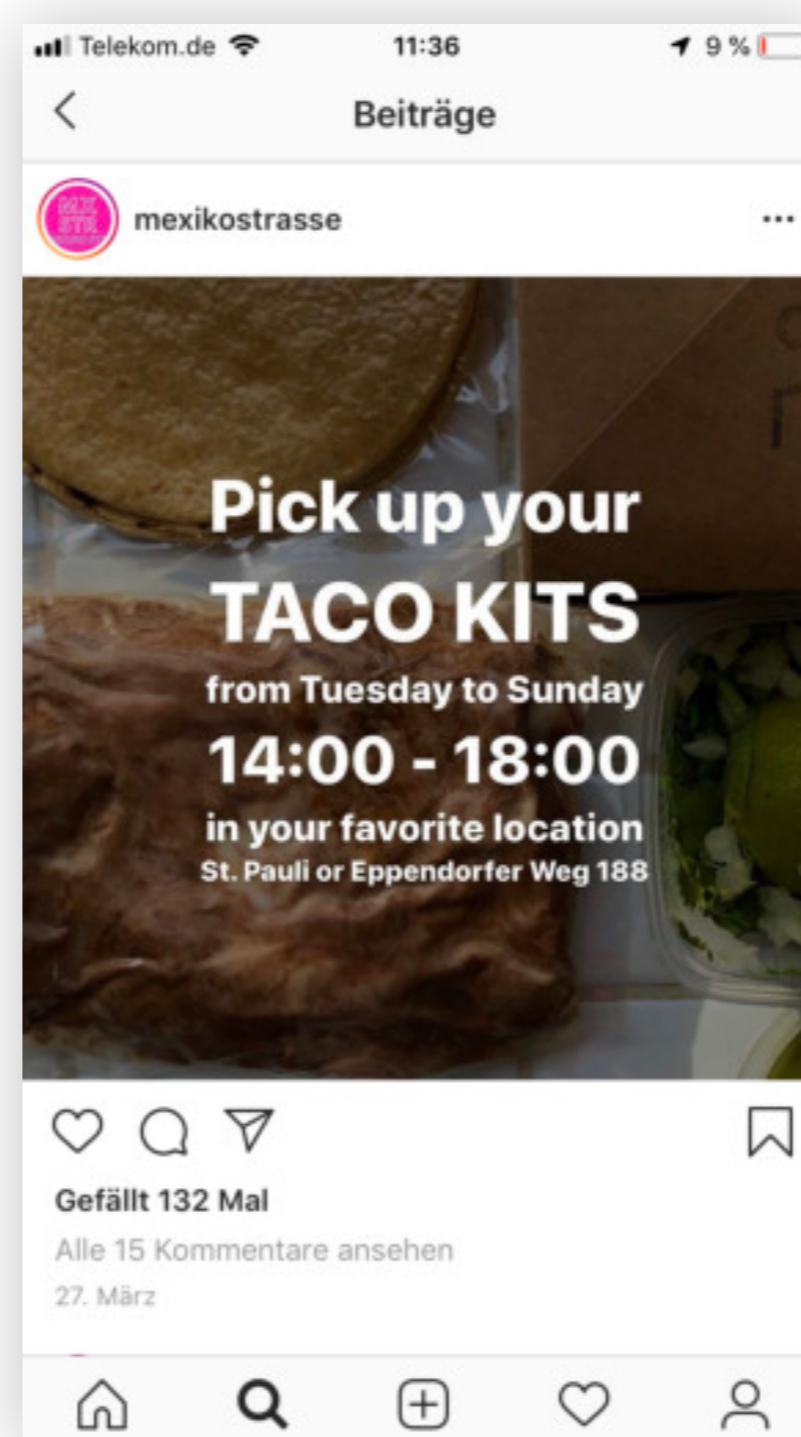
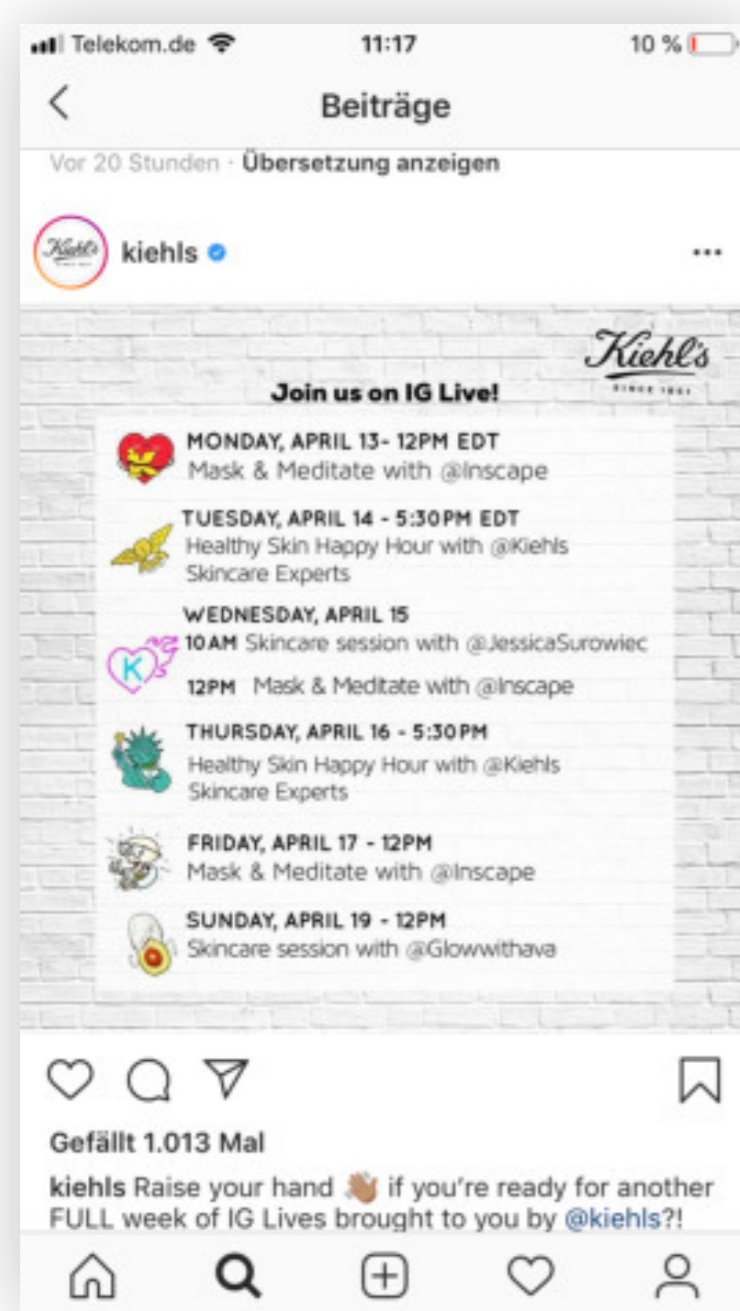


KIEHL'S

Kiehl's is currently working on training their staff to be online consultants so that all employees can continue to work.

MEXIKOSTRASSE

The Hamburg based restaurant **Taqueria Mexikostrasse** now sells taco kits for pick up and is currently working on a possibility to deliver – a practice widely and quickly adopted by other small restaurants as well.



RULE #4 BE GENEROUS WITH WHAT YOU HAVE

Competencies

In times of need you must focus on what you do best and identify how you can help by using your core competencies. Don't suddenly try to do something that others can do much better.

Synergies

Especially as a larger company you might have considerable reach in social media. Use this fact to help raise awareness for important things, help smaller businesses, etc. If you're a smaller brand, check if you have something to add for larger brands as well. Of course, you always need to check for compatibility with your brand strategy.

Thought Starter

What are my core competencies? How can I utilise those competencies to be truly helpful?

Am I encouraging lateral thinking or am I unwilling to challenge my current practices?

What are specific ways in which I can offer my products or services in new ways to grant additional benefits?

How can I utilise my reach in order to be helpful to my clients?

Can I create synergies with other brands while still adding value for my customers?

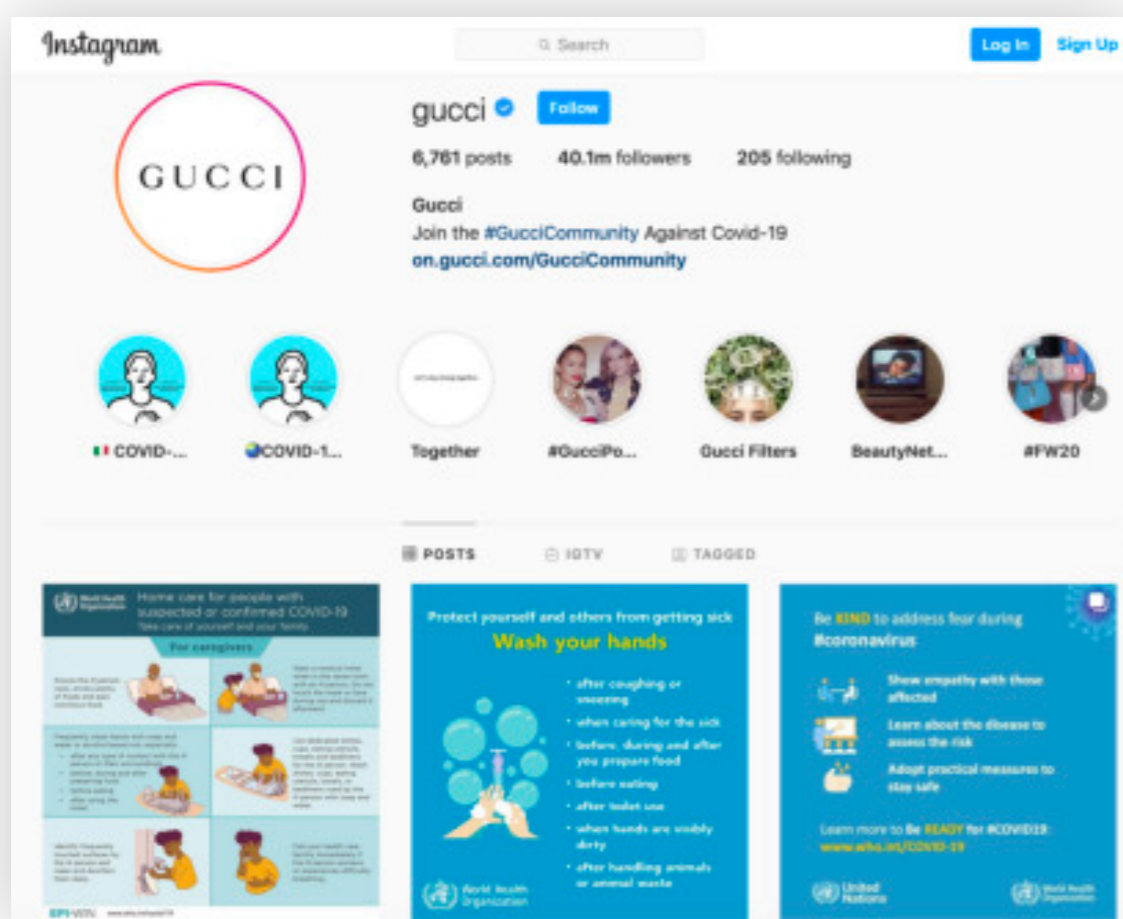
Are there any long-term cooperations I should commit to?



GUCCI

Gucci is using its 40M Instagram channel for a WHO takeover to share official information.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-xFTUzCyBs/>



CODEACADEMY

CodeAcademy, Skillshare, Duolingo, and other learning platforms are teaming up and helping students and learners through the crisis with additional offers like scholarships and free premium access.

learnfromhome.club/



RULE #5 DON'T COMPROMISE YOUR VALUES AND PURPOSE

Values

Even though the situation might feel more like a sprint right now, brand building is still a marathon. Having a purpose is nice. Now it's time to demonstrate that you stand by it. And don't sacrifice your human side nor your long-term value for the bottom line.

Consistency

It is very likely that during a crisis you have to adapt and deviate from regular communication. Still, you can be in line with your brand identity in everything you do. Make sure your customers know what they get when they turn to you and are able to relate.

Thought Starter

Do we have a brand vision? Mission? Purpose? Are we living them day in and day out?

Does my communication align with my purpose?

Do we make sure to still focus on our brand values when times get tough?

Is the communication on brand while considering the context or the situation?

Would my customers expect this communication from my brand? Will they be able to relate?

Does it make sense when considering the big picture?



LUFTHANSA

Lufthansa shifts from travel inspiration to aviation content and puts their employees in the spotlight.

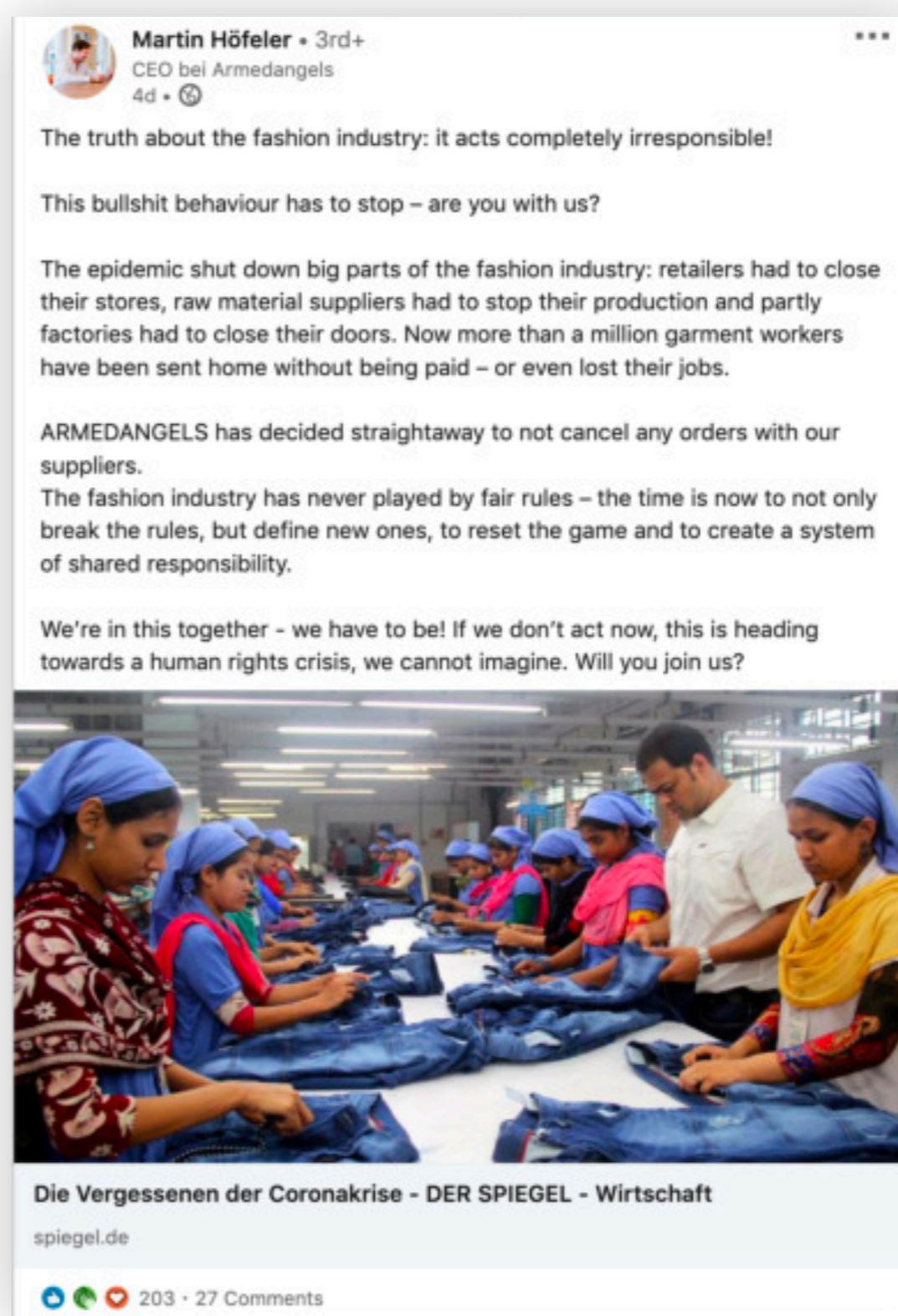
<https://www.instagram.com/p/B-KHvGhiAM3/>



ARMEDANGELS

Armedangels adhere to their convictions and promise not to cancel any orders – unlike some big names in the fashion industry that already let their suppliers down.

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6653973112352194560/>



CHECKLISTE

RULES TO STAY ON TRACK

Short-Term

○ Expediency

Do we have processes and monitorings in place that let us discover trigger events fast enough? Are there ways we could improve those processes to speed up our discovery time?

Are we able to discern what event leads to a one-off stunt compared to what helps us strengthen our brand personality in the long run?

Do we monitor and react to brand/product complaints and praises just as quickly as to external events?

○ Agility

Do I prepare and empower my employees to react independently? Are there guidelines in place for them?

Do I have a reduced chain of approval in place for communication based on trigger events?

Do I trust my service providers to consult me in hectic and difficult times or are they mere executioners?

○ Comprehension

Are the assumptions I currently have about my target group based on data or just gut feeling?

Do I have the data necessary to define my target group? What data do I need additionally, and do I have the tools for collecting it?

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○ Immersion

How do I make sure that I am always up to date on my customers and potential customers?

What do my customers need and desire? What is popular among them right now?

What do I have to steer clear of?

○ Implementation

Am I really communicating something that will entertain, delight, or cheer up my customers or do I make the situation about me and my products?

Do I have a task force that I can run my communication by to check whether my content is appropriate for this situation?

Do I have a plan in case my communication backfires?

Mid-Term

○ Humility

What are my competitors doing? Are there any new ones that I should keep an eye on?

Do I see a decline in demand or market share? What has changed?

Do either the market or our target group show fundamentally new demands? How can I best pivot to still make use of my core offerings?

○ Testing

Am I evaluating which areas to improve on a regular basis when it comes to communication and offerings?

How can I foster an environment of innovation? Am I willing to let my employees fail from time to time?

Do I know how to best set up the right experiments that give me the answers I need?

○ Competencies

What are my core competencies? How can I utilise those competencies to be truly helpful?

Am I encouraging lateral thinking or am I unwilling to challenge my current practices?

What are specific ways in which I can offer my products or services in new ways to grant additional benefits?

○ Synergies

How can I utilise my reach in order to be helpful to my clients?

Can I create synergies with other brands while still adding value for my customers?

Are there any long-term cooperations I should commit to?

Long-Term

○ Values

Do we have a brand vision? Mission? Purpose? Are we living them day in and day out?

Does my communication align with my purpose?

Do we make sure to still focus on our brand values when times get tough?

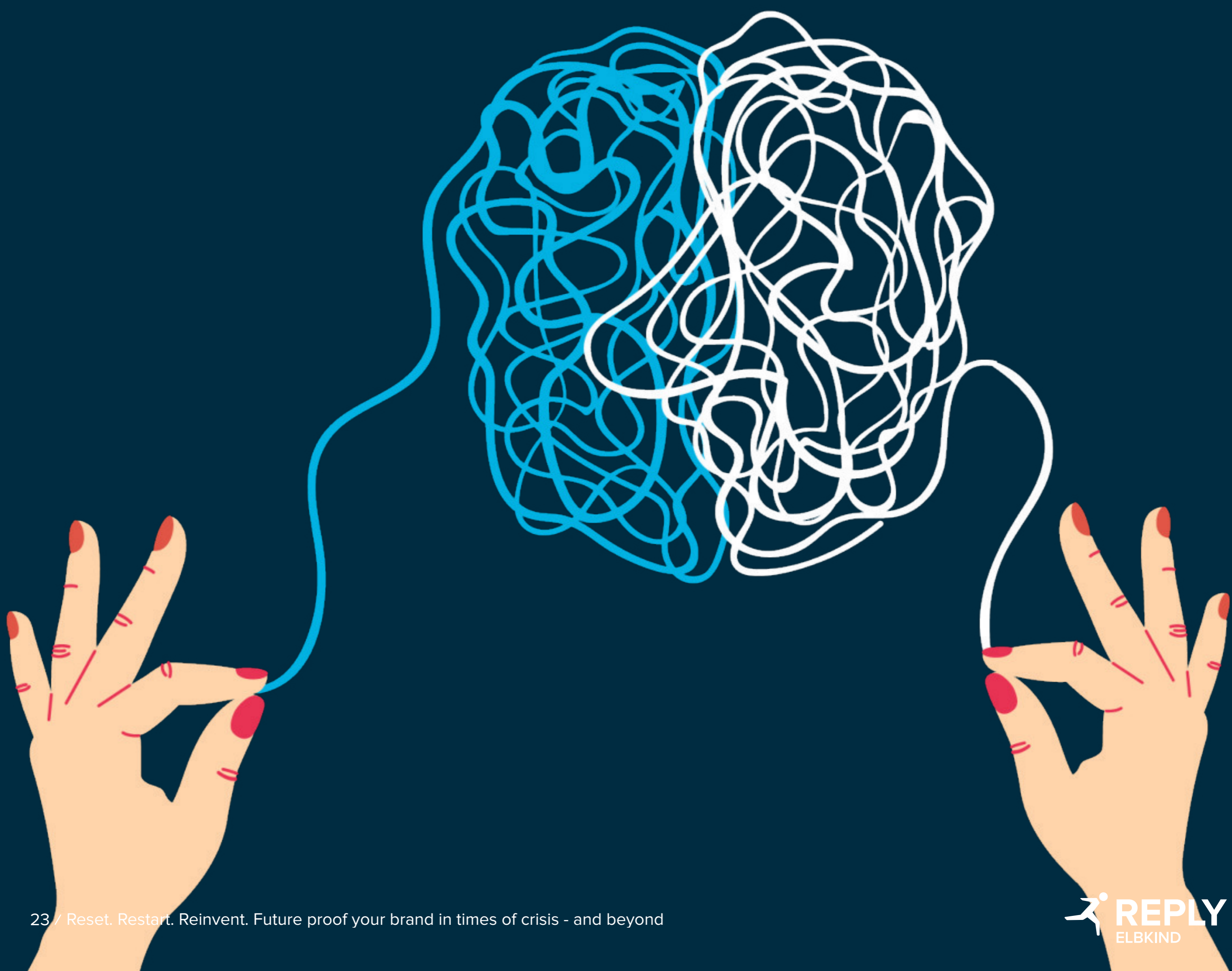
○ Consistency

Is the communication on brand while considering the context or the situation?

Would my customers expect this communication from my brand? Will they be able to relate?

Does it make sense when considering the big picture?

SUMMARY



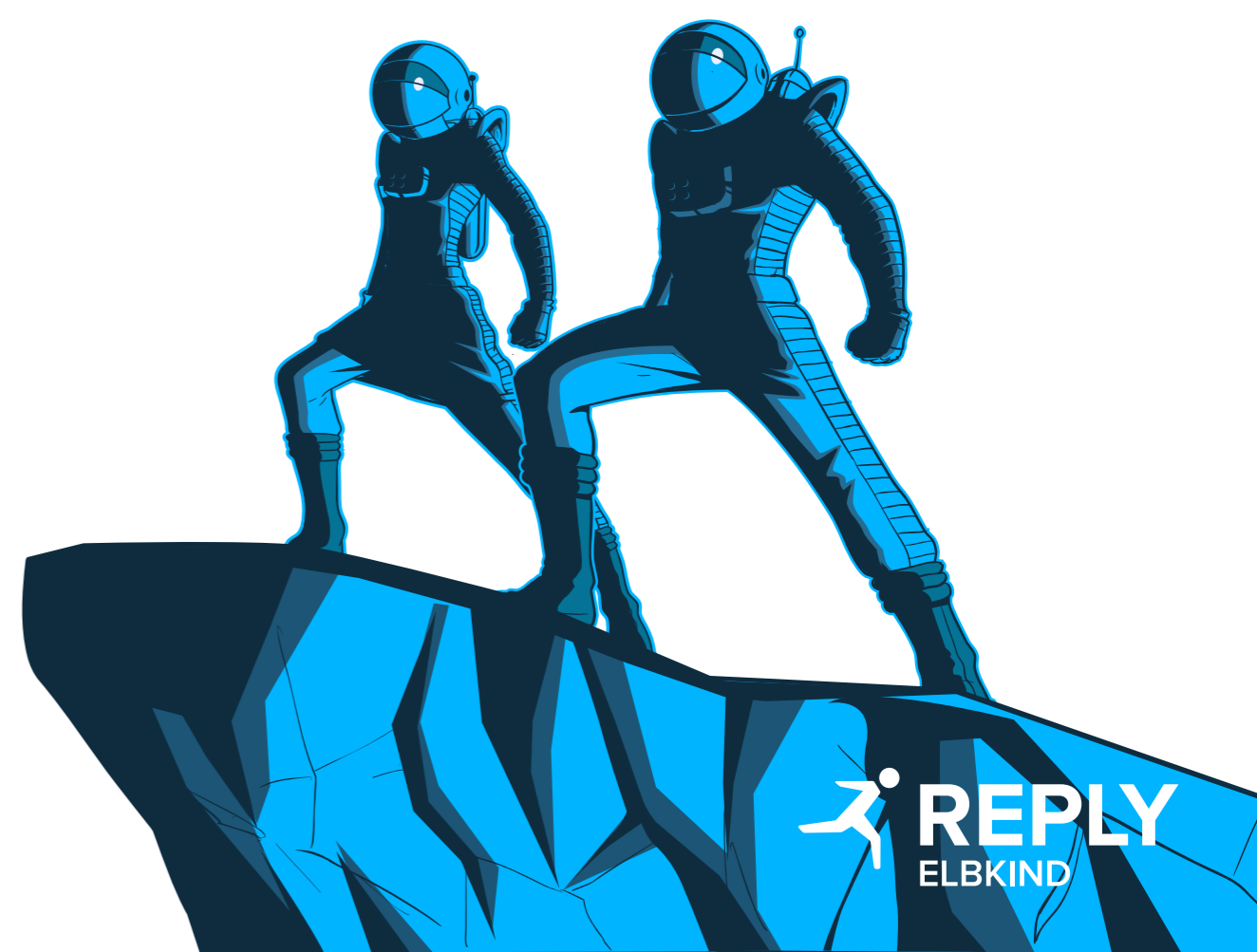
We are aware that building and maintaining a brand takes a lot of effort – especially in tough times, when you are putting out fires left and right. Nonetheless, being customer centric and setting up proper digital brand management is always the way to go. So where does all this lead us?

What people want from Amazon right now is very different from what they want from an airline or their favourite restaurant. Have a system in place to find out what those needs are. Even during a pandemic, customer needs vary – just like they always do.

FIGURE OUT WHAT YOUR CUSTOMERS REALLY APPRECIATE YOU FOR AND FIND A WAY TO STRENGTHEN IT.

The one thing that doesn't vary: in every field going forward, you must have a digital leg to stand on to be successful. This holds true for both your communication and commerce as well as finding other services you can provide online. With now even schools being forced to communicate digitally, and birthdays and holidays being celebrated via video chat, we are safe to say that digital has entered every aspect of our lives, being true for all generations. If you haven't fully embraced digital yet, it's time.

If after reading this paper you can say that your brand has asked all the right questions and knows how to answer them – good job! If not, then you need to start yesterday. In both cases, we are happy to assist with whatever we can.



Feel free to share this paper with anyone who you think should read it. But bear in mind that all thoughts and ideas expressed in these pages are copyright-protected. So, in short: please ask before using or changing it, especially for commercial purposes.

It goes without saying that we are very happy to provide in-depth consultation for you, your company, your product and your people. Don't hesitate to reach out – we're available via phone, e-mail, video conferencing, chat roulette – you name it, we'll be there.

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