

 Growing network



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Don't expect a return to normal COVID has changed how we do business

ALAN MANLY - SEPTEMBER 13, 2021

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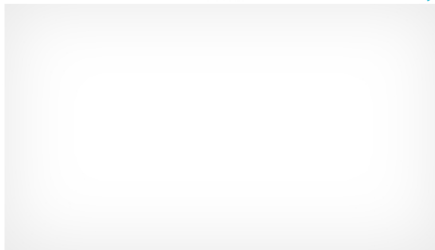
COVID has been a unifying force in that we have all been subjected to change at the same time. But thinking things will 'go back to normal' ignores the fact that would involve yet another change, writes business coach and best selling author Alan Manly.

Who cannot recall where they were when the first lockdown in our lifetime was announced? It almost seemed fun at the time – until the toilet paper ran out.

Now the novelty has worn off, the question on many people's lips is, "How will COVID change our business relationships longer term?"

For a guide as to how humans react to change, I reference the Change Curve by Kubler Ross, which describes the internal emotional journey that individuals typically experience when dealing with change and transition.

ADVERTISING



This journey consists of multiple stages that people go through: shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Understanding this process of change in the COVID context will help organisations understand how and why client engagement has forever been altered.

COVID-induced change

1. Shock and denial

Who in business wasn't shocked when clients – and for many, staff – were prohibited from entering our premises?

Then it dawned that salespeople were no longer on the road. They were at home learning, by way of immersion, about Zoom and haplessly providing schadenfreude entertainment when the call went out, "you are on mute!"

"This must end" was a common cry epitomising the denial that this would or could have happened to us.

2. Anger

Expressed as protests in the streets and civil disobedience by refusing to wear masks or belligerently refusing to stop visiting family! Dob in a neighbour, we were urged.

The mantra "we're all in this together" – despite its intention as a unifying call-to-action – angered many.

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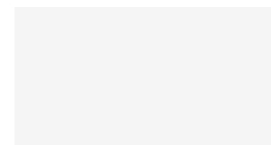
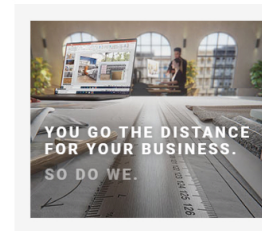
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3. Bargaining

There were pleas from many that if we wear masks and wash our hands obsessively, we can return to business as usual. Authorities talked of a new normal as the counteroffer.

4. Depression

The toll has been real and measurable. The volume of [mental health-related PBS prescriptions dispensed spiked](#) in March 2020 when restrictions were first introduced.

Over a year later, [Lifeline reported its highest ever daily calls volume](#) as new lockdowns hit parts of Australia.

5. Acceptance

Acceptance of change ultimately results in adaptive behaviour.

For example, in the 4 weeks to 25 April 2021, when Australia was largely COVID-free, [20 per cent of Medicare Benefits Scheme \(MBS\) mental health services](#) were still being delivered via telehealth.

Patients had adapted to the virtual delivery method.

Changed reality

"The Australian economy has recorded an unprecedented stretch of economic growth since the 'recession we had to have' in 1991," the [Australian Parliament](#) lamented in late 2018.

Less than 18 months later, Australia had tipped into recession as the pandemic struck.

There are now middle-aged adults who have experienced financial adversity for the first time. Many have been forced onto unemployment benefits, having never before been out of work.

The result? Any feelings of entitlement to prosperity have been dampened. They have experienced change through no fault of their own.

These new veterans of the Change Curve have a new outlook. Failing to acknowledge this risks alienating them, perhaps permanently.

Changed acquisition outlook

Suddenly, a word rarely used in the world of customer satisfaction has been core to its success: [logistics](#). That is, "the overall process of managing how resources are acquired, stored, and transported to their final destination".

[Rarely have logistics been the competitive battleground](#) for customer satisfaction and product differential.

Before COVID, acquiring goods typically required a trip to the store: driving, parking, browsing, hoping for personal service, carrying the goods to the car, and driving home. Some trips involved socialising with others, a form of entertainment.

Now, shopping is acquisition focused. We Google items, chose from a variety of websites, select the preferred seller, click, and pay, and the goods are on their way. A 24-hour turnaround is expected from order to door.

Product differentiation has been reduced to logistics.

The new normal

COVID has given the world the Change Curve, or more colloquially "lockdown survivorship".

Being denied the gratification of social shopping, the need to acquire has become somewhat hedonistic: "I want it and I want it now!"

Forced through the process of change once already, few clients are willing to do so again simply to revert back to the way things were. Hence COVID has forever changed the way we engage with clients forever.

Welcome to the new normal.

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Alan Manly

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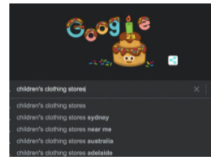
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