



RECOVERY REGENERATION RESILIENCE

What we've learned in lockdown –
P12



STAY SAFE AT HOME

COUNTERING THE
CYBER SECURITY
THREAT **P20 >**



TRENDS THAT LAST
WHAT BEHAVIOURAL
CHANGES WILL STICK? **P22**

**THE INDUSTRY COMES
TOGETHER** BPMA
CONFERENCE DETAILS **P36**

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WELCOME



Planning the last few issues has raised so many questions for the BPMA; what to write about, the tone, and approach. With the world still holding its breath to see what the outcomes of easing lockdowns will

be, every economy reviewing the impact, every business cautiously moving forwards and, as individuals, what approach is best for them and their families, the topics in this issue have been selected carefully to represent the needs of the industry.

We have centred this issue on the themes of recovery, resilience and importantly regeneration. Many businesses have found this time incredibly tough and hard choices have been made for survival. Yet from this new reality, a regenerative

theme has emerged. Recovery in many ways is the short-term view – regeneration has materialised from the frank reassessment of our businesses, the market and our collective needs for the long term.

All areas of the economy are fighting to protect their corner. Within creative industries the mood is collaborative and faced firmly forwards. A failure of the creative industry infrastructure will be detrimental to the future success of the campaigns of which we are an integral part. The BPMA has been lobbying to change terms of engagement with end user markets. With other sections of the marketing and advertising industry calling for the same, understanding the cost of credit to the wider industry should be aligned with other sectors such as tech.

With this, our industry must be ready for the next stages of economic restoration.

As part of the measures to support its members, the BPMA has announced its virtual conference on 9 September exclusively for members (see p4 and p34 for more details). The BPMA will use this platform to provide world class content, business workshops, plus create a networking hub where all members can safely meet, exchange ideas and of course the latest innovations to spark conversations.

The last few months have shown us that to succeed, being focussed on recommitting internally to your cause is essential. Consider the inclusive, service orientated, resilient and idealistic drivers behind your business. Remind yourselves, your teams and your clients why you are the company to take them forward.

Carey Trevill
BPMA CEO

Product Media Magazine is available to the whole promotional merchandise industry. It is the official magazine of the British Promotional Merchandise Association (BPMA).



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BPMA announces virtual conference in September 2020

Following the success of its webinar series for members, the BPMA has announced its plan to activate a virtual conference this autumn.

The BPMA Conference 2020 will now take place on 9 September via a fully interactive virtual platform. Open only to BPMA members, the conference will bring together world class speakers, inspiring content to support suppliers and distributors plus bring opportunities to network. In addition, BPMA supplier members will have the opportunity to exhibit and present new products. The conference timing represents an essential platform for BPMA members to rebuild business in September as end users continue the route to economic recovery. (See p36 for more details.)

Merchandise World plans for biggest and best in 2021

Working with partner, Sourcing City, the BPMA has also announced changes for Merchandise World this year.

During the pandemic, supporting the industry has been paramount to the BPMA in order to ensure business is able to not only survive but thrive when the green shoots of recovery present themselves. Following discussions between the BPMA and Sourcing City, assessing the changing situation in the UK, it has been decided that the focus of Merchandise World will now be January 2021 rather than September. This will enable Merchandise World to kick off the start of 2021 with positive engagement across the trade.

Putting the industry and its businesses first, focuses efforts on January 2021 and will deliver an exceptional Merchandise World that brings the brightest and best together.

BPMA chair, Angela Wagstaff, said: "Virtual events have been in discussion and planning since the start of the crisis. We are now ready to activate our conference in September. Working closely and in co-operation with the Sourcing City team, we were able to agree a way forward that worked for Merchandise World and afforded a new opportunity for BPMA members in September. The BPMA executive team have been working behind the scenes to move the planned event in June to the larger event in September. Announcements will be made shortly regarding tickets for

the event and the opportunity for BPMA members to come together."

David Long, CEO of Sourcing City, said: "As distributors return to work their key focus is naturally to rebuild their business. The BPMA conference will be focused on doing much to help this, and suppliers will be able to present new products. To expect people to take time for Merchandise World in the same month is not really practical. We all feel it is best to focus all of our efforts this year on building the biggest and best Merchandise World in January 2021."

Sourcing City will contact all September 2020 exhibitors in due course to update and advise. Plans for Merchandise World at The Ricoh in January 2021 are continuing as normal. The floorplan is currently being redrawn to ensure every aisle is at least three metres wide and every aspect of visitor safety will be planned in line with Government advice and guidelines. Milton Keynes remains the planned destination for Merchandise World in September 2021.



Triple scoop for First Editions

First Editions, the specialist trade manufacturer of British-made, branded sports bottles and drinkware, has announced an impressive treble of quality achievements.

As well as being awarded the highest industry standard, the BPMA Charter Status, the Birmingham-based manufacturer also achieved the globally recognised ISO 9001: 2015 quality management system standard and the ISO 14001 environmental standard.

To satisfy the rigours of the audit process, First Editions demonstrated first-class levels of customer service and a commitment to continual improvement and best practice in both quality and environmental management at all levels of the organisation.

After receiving confirmation of the certifications, First Editions operations

director, Mark Alderson said: "We are delighted that our continued hard work and high standards of business practice and customer service have been recognised. BPMA Charter status and ISO standards are both hallmarks of trust and provide further proof that we are serious about service and will always strive to deliver quality for our customers."

There is significant advantage in using Charter status suppliers accredited with ISO 9001 and 14001, helping to ensure consistent and good quality products and services that are delivered in a sustainable way, which in turn brings many business benefits.



Merchandise sector backs food banks initiative

Sourcing City's 'Feed a Family' campaign has raised £12,391 to provide meals for hard-pressed families during the pandemic.

The company appealed to merchandise businesses to support local food banks with the promise that it would boost any food bank donations that were made, with a total fund of £10,000 to donate.

In the UK, more than 14 million people are living in poverty, including 4.5 million children. As the industry looks to recover and rebuild, Sourcing City founder and CEO, David Long, urged support for those who have been worst hit.

"We have all been impacted by the current crisis, and even though our own business has been significantly hit, we want to do something to help hungry families if we can," he said. "Even in this situation very few of us will be short of food, and many of us are still in a better position than the poorest in our society. Surely, everyone deserves to have the food they need. We also appreciate that not everyone is in a position to help even if they want to."



Sourcing City asked those companies that were able to assist to find their local food bank and make a cash donation of any amount - from £5 to £1,000. The companies then sent a copy of the receipt to Sourcing City. Contributors included Carol Ingram, Richard Pettinger, Laltex, and Promo Seeds UK.

On 17 June Sourcing City added £10,000 to the donation receipts of £2,391. The Sourcing City donation went to the Trussell Trust, an organisation that supports Food Banks nationwide. trusselltrust.org.



Grant joins the Galpeg programme

A well-known name from the promotional industry is the latest to join Galpeg's Associate programme.

Grant Silverman has more than 20 years' experience working as a distributor. He has ambitious plans for the future and decided to launch Wow Merchandise in association with Galpeg, which provides all the administrative and financial resources needed to get his business up and running.

Silverman said: "When setting up my business, it was important for me to get going from day one and having the Galpeg team already in place to help me was invaluable. It means I can concentrate on what I do best while getting help with expert back office support, order financing and lead generation tools. This allows me to compete with the biggest and best and have all the resources to hand to make a real success of Wow Merchandise."

Joining Galpeg has also offered the bonus of a network of like-minded people to tap into for advice.

Galpeg's Paul Green said: "It's fantastic to have someone as experienced as Grant join our Associate programme. It's a real privilege to support new and growing businesses such as his."

"It just shows that even in the difficult times we've been experiencing recently, the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in the promotional industry, and we find that truly inspiring."

To learn more about the Galpeg programme, visit galpeg.com.

PF Concept launches Be Safe anti-microbial collection

PF Concept has added new anti-microbial products to its health and safety products collection that helps people navigate new social distance requirements.

Following detailed product development and rigorous testing, PF Concept launched the Be Safe Concept range of PF manufactured products with 'antimicrobial protection'. The products feature Biomaster technology, which is claimed to inhibit the growth of bacteria by up to 99.99%.

The first launches include the Americano Pure reusable mug, new versions of the popular face mask strap and hygiene key, plus the new hygiene handle. Further additions will follow.

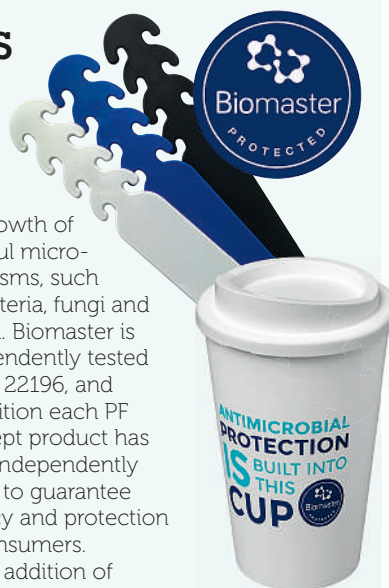
Phil Morgan, CEO UK & Ireland at PF Concept, said: "These new additions to the range highlight the PF Concept commitment to innovation, product development and personal safety. In recent weeks, we have been able to react quickly to market needs and introduce new items to our Be Safe Concept. We believe these items will again offer something new, exciting and extremely effective."

Biomaster, manufactured by Stafford-based Addmaster, works by binding to the cell wall of a product, preventing

the growth of harmful micro-organisms, such as bacteria, fungi and mould. Biomaster is independently tested to ISO 22196, and in addition each PF Concept product has been independently tested to guarantee efficacy and protection for consumers.

The addition of Biomaster into plastic products does not affect its function, decorating options, smell or the end-of-life recycling options.

Addmaster marketing manager, Karl Shaw, said: "We are very excited to have PF Concept in our customer portfolio and to be able to introduce the benefits of Biomaster antimicrobial technology to the promotional merchandise market. The company's innovative approach to product development, European manufacture and growing markets across Europe is an excellent fit with our own objectives and we look forward to working with them to improve customer hygiene."



German show moved to autumn

HAPTICA live '20 is the latest merchandise exhibition to be postponed due to the pandemic. The German show was scheduled to take place at the World Conference Center Bonn (WCCB) on 18 June, but will now be staged at the WCCB on 8 September.

Organiser WA Media said that large-scale events remain completely banned in Germany up until 31 August, 2020. More recent legal stipulations on trade shows and congresses state no specifications regarding the size and type of the events allowed. A clarification of these issues is not foreseeable.

The event will therefore take place after the summer holidays, at a time that is favourable for the industry with a view to year-end business. The show will begin at 8.30 and will end at 15.30.

An event concept that satisfies all of the safety and hygiene requirements laid down by the authorities and at the same time does justice to the character of the experience of haptic advertising is currently being drawn up. Trusted



elements such as the Best Practice Show and the lecture programme will remain intact. Details on the agenda of the event will be announced shortly.

Brit München, Project Manager of HAPTICA live, said: "Of course, the current situation is facing the entire industry with huge challenges. However, it is

important for the advertisers as well as for the distributors and suppliers to remain visible and relevant. Even and especially in times of crisis, haptic advertising can fully exploit its strengths. Demonstrating these strengths is an essential concern of HAPTICA live, which we will emphatically pursue in September."

Promotional clothing companies pivot towards face masks

Screenworks has launched what it claims is the first-to-market anti-viral, reusable facemask in the UK. The Bumpaa brand of products, which are treated with ViralOff technology, are proving hugely popular with trade clients, and have sold more than 100,000 units per week since launch.

The fabric masks, which are manufactured in the UK and packed at the Screenworks' facility in Suffolk, are treated with the anti-viral, anti-bacterial textile technology to protect the product. This treatment is proven to reduce viruses by up to 99% over two hours. The masks can be reused, helping to save vital PPE for the NHS, and preventing disposable masks going to landfill. Fully brandable, lightweight and comfortable, the masks come in a range of colours and sizes, and can be available from stock in as little as one day, with bespoke designs for orders over 10,000, starting with a three-week lead time.

Masks are treated with Polygiene's ViralOff technology, which helps garments, footwear and textiles stay fresh and last longer.

Duncan Gilmour, managing director at Screenworks, said: "COVID-19 has had a huge impact on the textile decoration sector. During our initial brainstorming around how we could pivot, we did look into PPE, however our due diligence on suppliers flagged a large number whose products would not meet quality standards. This prompted us to look into other options; for superior products with real longevity that would support new needs for social distancing."

In order to meet demand, Screenworks has re-enrolled previously furloughed team members to commence the production line. Screenworks will be launching further product lines to meet with trade and consumer demand.

Meanwhile, Listawood has formed a partnership with Savile Row tailors 'Cad & the Dandy' to develop a high quality and stylish range of masks.

The handmade masks offer a choice of branding options, ranging from custom labels on their most popular cloths to

edge-to-edge high definition full colour custom print. The masks are available branded from just 10 pieces.

The 'Savile Row Classic' and 'Savile Row Corporate' styles are 100% machine washable with a soft, breathable antimicrobial cotton inner liner. Each mask is gift-wrapped and packed into an individual gift box along with two PM2.5 carbon filters. A signed gift card is inserted by the tailor who made the mask.



BPMA plans for the long term

Following her appointment as interim CEO in February, the Board has confirmed interim CEO Carey Trevill has accepted a long-term role with the BPMA to deliver a raft of strategic plans for the organisation.

Stepping into the role just as the global pandemic broke, Trevill has set about bringing rapid and important updates to members via live weekly broadcasts covering Government changes, critical to keeping businesses solvent during the crisis. Together with lobbying Government on member issues and bringing end user insight into the communication mix, it has been a very different start from the original plans anticipated in February for the new CEO.

BPMA chair Angela Wagstaff commented: "Following the last few turbulent months for the industry and the UK economy, maintaining a strong presence from the BPMA to lead the sector forward has been paramount. Confirming Carey's appointment enables us to continue leading from the front and driving the regeneration necessary to help us survive and thrive, not only for our members but to shine the spotlight on our industry throughout the UK

economy's recovery process."

The BPMA Board has also implemented a generous financial support package for members renewing in 2020/21, giving each member three months of complimentary membership to start the new membership year. Decisive moves to help suppliers and distributors has been at the forefront of the BPMA's strategy to support members through this tough trading period.

Now focussing on recovery and regeneration, Trevill said: "It has been a privilege to guide BPMA members through the onslaught of information and changes during the crisis. We have a framework to operate in for the short term, we are now focussing ahead. Anticipating market changes, we must navigate and establish our industry as integral to the future recovery of UK business."

With the BPMA's Conference taking place in September this year, its first virtual event that also lets members gain access to an exclusive member networking hub online, the BPMA looks set to establish the promotional merchandise industry as one to watch within the marketing arena.



British made approach for Snap

Snap Products has been accredited as a member of Made in Britain in recognition of its hand sanitiser brand biofree and UK made range of paper products, signage and floor graphics.

The Aldershot company's adoption of the protected mark will help buyers recognise its product range is British-made, as well as making it less reliant on an overseas supply chain.

Helen Dyl, operations director, Snap Products, said the company opted to become a member to show commitment to UK the manufactured products that have become a lifeline to the company during the pandemic.

"The Made in Britain accreditation marks a turning point in our business, as we now have the largest production capacity in our history since our recent move," she said. "This will enable us to ramp up our UK manufacturing arm which has been a goal for some time."

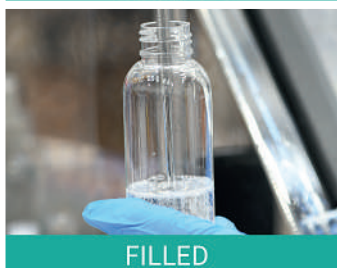
John Pearce, chief executive of Made in Britain, said: "We're delighted that

Snap Products has joined the community of more than 1,200 British manufacturers. The more the mark is used and seen, the more it is recognised as a mark of quality."

Read more on p22.



BRANDED



FILLED



CUSTOMISED



MANUFACTURED

New addition for Team Robey

The BPMA is delighted to announce that its membership manager, Tom Robey and his wife Vicki welcomed baby Callaghan to the world on Friday 29 May 2020.

Congratulations from all the BPMA team on the latest edition to the family.





PF Concept UK Ltd

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LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL?

Society and business is changing as we move into the next phase of the pandemic, says **Clive Allcott**



So hopefully as you are reading this, a sense of normality will be returning to the world and to our working lives. It really has been a traumatic time for all of us with our beloved promotions industry being one of the industries to be hit hard by the Covid 19 pandemic.

While the trading arena and climate may well have changed, businesses, events, hospitality and day to day commerce will now be gathering momentum creating opportunities for us all.

Will facemasks become the new T-shirt? Are hand sanitisers the new essential accessory? Is branded PPE the new must-have product? These are all new sales channels that can and need to be embraced offering new routes to market



across many sales platforms. Who would have thought a facemask would become a necessary item of clothing along with a hand sanitiser as an essential pocket item. Personalisation of these items will become common place so prospect accordingly.

Social distancing has now become the new normal

which in turn has created sales openings for informative branding especially in the retail sector. These can take the shape of branded outer garments, a printed floor or wall graphic or a transport decal. There will be needs and requirements for these safety measures with emphasis on the clothing sector which offers

dual branding opportunities of brand and message. Whether it be a hi-visibility garment or a softshell jacket, branded clothing offers the perfect vehicle to promote and protect.

Contact your specialised supplier who can help you with the designs, processes and products that can carry these health and safety messages.

Stay safe and happy Selling, Clive the clothing Guru. PM



HAND SANITISER POUCHES



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JPHS508A

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- Belt loops to wear on your hip
- Quick access
- Holds 50ml bottle
- Available with or without sanitiser

JPHS508B

- Press stud closure
- Pull hook fastener to attach to bag or keyring. Available in nickel finish.
- Quick action application
- Holds 50ml bottle
- Available with or without sanitiser

JPHS508C

- Ideal for frequent users
- Open top for quick application
- Belt loops to wear on your hip
- Holds 50ml bottle
- Available with or without sanitiser

Belluno



Also available in a range of leathers.

Torino



Saffiano



Carbon Fibre



- Fast turnaround
- Brandable
- Made with minimal waste
- Refills available
- Available for direct delivery to end users home or office
- UK made by long standing UK company

Branding Options



Screen Printing



Colour Digital



Debossing



Foil Blocking

JUNIPER

Absolute[®] biofree[®] Ballpen



Individual personalisation
available

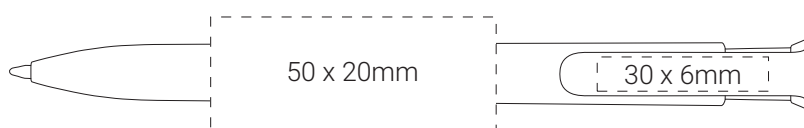


- + Industry classic design reinvented with specially formulated **silver nanoparticles**
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- + Reduce sharing in the workplace with individually personalised pens

NEW

FULL
COLOUR

SPOT
COLOUR



BUSINESS MUST FOLLOW DUE PROCESS AS LOCKDOWN EASES

BPMA members are seeking clarity on employment issues as they plan on getting back to work as lockdown eases.

A poll carried out during the BPMA webinar series found that members wanted advice on many employment issues, including redundancy, reducing working hours, holidays, and new furlough rules.

Employment expert, Amanda Chadwick of Croner, which provides the BPMA free legal advice helpline, said that as furlough tapered off, firms should prepare for new employment challenges, and urged them to seek advice in personnel issues.

"We love to help you. We don't want you to make a mistake," she said, pointing out that the experts who provided advice also advised members of HR organisation, the CIPD.

Despite experience helping firms deal with the aftermath of other periods of disruption, including foot and mouth, and the 2011 riots, Chadwick said that there had never had

anything like COVID-19 and businesses had to remain vigilant on a number of fronts.

She advised businesses to look at their staff handbooks to put legal protection in place to ensure that staff informed their employers at the earliest moment possible of medical conditions. With work entering a 'new normal' phase, employers must ensure that they have done everything required to show that staff welfare has been considered.

Managing staff leave is another topic that concerns business with changes to legislation meaning that staff can take over holiday accrued and use it over the next two years. Communication and honesty with staff is the best policy, as well as adherence to due process.

A paper trail relating to all aspects of furloughing is essential and should be kept for five years, said Chadwick, who warned that HMRC will be spot checking companies. With the introduction of flexible furloughing, companies must ensure they

have communicated with employees.

When it comes to bringing staff back to the workplace, health and safety audits for COVID-19 working will be exhaustive, and Chadwick advised employers to work closely with building owners. "Relationships with building owners are more important than ever," she said. "Ensure that you've done everything practicable. Be ready for change – it needs continuous analysis."

If redundancies become part of the picture, she advised seeking advice from Croner first as there may be other options available. Companies wishing to stay on the right side of the law must adhere to what she called the 4Cs - conversation, communication, consultation, confirmation. PM

Members can contact the BPMA free legal advice line using the number quoted in their membership pack, and by quoting their membership number. For further details, contact enquiries@bpma.co.uk



Lanyards



Keyrings



Badges



Ties & Scarves



Wristbands



Leisure



Umbrellas



Office



Pencil Cases



Technology



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WINNER



COVID-19

For more information on these or any other products in our range, contact us now on 01352 730 006 by phone; email: sales@preseli.biz or find us on the web at www.preseli.biz

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED IN LOCKDOWN

Merchandise companies have had to get used to a new world of late, but for some it has been a chance to take stock and plan for the future

The past few months have been incredibly challenging for our industry, as business dried up, staff have been furloughed and basic social connections have been eroded. It has been tough and everyone has been handling it in their own way.

BPMA members have been keeping informed and connected through its webinar programme, sharing their experiences and providing mutual support as companies look to the future. Debbie Willsmer, managing director, Willsmer Wagg and James Biggin, managing director, Steel City Marketing, are just two principals who have explained how the lockdown has affected them and their businesses. Andy Duxsbury, sales director, Prominate has also shared his experiences with *Product Media*.

How has the pandemic changed how you're doing business?

AD: Other than working from home, there has not been a lot of change. The teams have a lot of structure to their working weeks and we have tried to ensure that people are not stuck on calls all day to their colleagues which can easily happen. There are set times

to check-in with colleagues and make sure projects are moving ahead and tasks getting completed.

DW: Few of us had a global pandemic down as our next business challenge, and our business stopped overnight. The majority of our clients are still on furlough and their offices are closed. We're in contact and we're trying to create lines of communication by showing them that we care. Obviously, we still want to be doing business with them, but we're trying to understand the types of products that they're going to be needing and how they're going to be working. We're asking as many questions as we can. We believe that things will definitely start to improve from about September. So, we've got about a 12-week period to create new products and new channels, and new ways that we can sell to the clients.

It's not a hard sell – we're sending



IN TIMES LIKE THIS IT
BECOMES EVIDENT HOW
IMPORTANT THE ENTIRE
TEAM IS - *ANDY DUCKSBURY*



ANDY DUCKSBURY
SALES DIRECTOR,
PROMINATE

them useful pieces of information and helping them understand where we're at as a business and how we are as people.

JB: We wanted to maintain a spine of the business, so we could function, fully, from end to end. Interestingly, everyone seems to be making really quick decisions to make sure that we were putting ourselves in the best

position. The language had to change externally, probably internally as well. We had to show empathy and I think we've very quickly changed our marketing message to be about that.

We still drip feed products in, but it is really about trying to update people on where we're at as a business, and also try to understand where they're positioned. And that's where our marketing has changed considerably.

Has there been a change in product demand?

DW: The demand is there for the PPE. However, not every distributor is taking the decision to move into areas that they've got little or no experience in. We're looking to the future and we want to know what suppliers can offer us. We want to engage with suppliers to be inspired and motivated to get an understanding of what companies will need, because not all their teams are going to be in offices working.

People are looking at lifestyle products that staff can use, not necessarily within the workplace, such as gym kits, weights, garden or pet accessories, and things that families and colleagues can use together. Providing things that people can use personally will have meaning and also create brand loyalty.

AD: I think like most of the distributors in our industry the shift has changed towards PPE products and supporting our clients with products that will help them get back to business, such as products relating to working from home, safe office environment and some core PPE products.

JB: As a sector, we can't necessarily pivot into a new area like PPE where you're competing against massive companies that have huge volumes of stock. We want to see things that people are going to take forward after businesses have sorted themselves out and got back to work. We need to be ready to align end user brands to a new way of working, a new way of operating, and a new way of living our lives.

Anything non PPE that my team gets asked for, is a buzz. I think sustainability is a nice angle to look at. We recently had an inquiry from one of our biggest customers for pens that a customer could use once and take away with them. Six months ago, we would have never marketed a single use product, because of sustainability and eco credentials. Now we're looking at them in a different way.



DEBBIE WILLSMER
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
WILLSMER WAGG



WE BELIEVE THAT THINGS
WILL START TO IMPROVE
FROM ABOUT SEPTEMBER -
DEBBIE WILLSMER

What has the biggest challenge been for the business?

JB: The people side of it has been massive and we're still in the middle of that. As a business owner, you're perhaps working in the bedroom, when you're used to being with your team and that's where the strength lies. You can find yourself a little bit lost.

Some weeks I've felt like I'd not achieved anything, while we were looking at bounce back loans and the like. Sorting out the foundations to allow us to plan has been my biggest challenge.

AD: Lack of future visibility and constantly needing to review and change plans. Like all of the BPMA members we just don't know what the next six months will bring. Will PPE be a flash in the pan? Will clients get back to ordering typical merchandise product, or will there be a massive recession? All of these questions are important to the future of the business and there are so many unknowns that it is challenging to plan.

DW: We had an exceptionally successful 2019 and I entered 2020, expecting that to continue. I've had to go through a process of mourning

the business that we had and had to accept that we have to start with a clean sheet of paper. We've got firm foundations, but the business landscape is totally unknown and I have to create a new roadmap to lead the business out of this period.

That's been difficult because, as a business owner, you're not necessarily feeling positive all of the time, but you have to lead with a clear vision. I would say we're 90% there now, so everyone that's continuing in the business has that clarity on where the business is going

What has this done to payment terms?

JB: We have been able to be fairly flexible. I'm always open to any supplier having direct contact with my bookkeeper to get reassurance. We're never not picking up the phone. In terms of suppliers needing payments upfront for new products or for products that are more bulk supplied or more wholesale, then we just turn that around to the client, and we're sort of flexible and fluid in terms of that movement. It is about dialogue and communication.

DW: We haven't actually met very many challenges other than the fact that we had some orders to actually put through and had to pay pro forma for the goods before the suppliers would put the orders into production.

We weren't in a position to ask our clients to do the same, and one of our clients has put us on a 90-day payment plan with no negotiation. We're taking each case individually. The majority of the suppliers, we've got really good working relationships with and the lines of communication are open all the time.

How are distributors sourcing products at the moment?

JB: Emails are getting shared around the team more than ever. And we've used our standard software tools that allow us to search. We don't close ourselves off to sourcing from the entire market space. Even if it does cost the business a lot, we definitely want to be able to do a full scope search.

DW: We're using a lot of the European sourcing tools as well. So, there's a good mix of supply base. We haven't necessarily been looking outside the current supply base and sourcing tools because I think that would be

slightly mad at the moment as getting the materials and getting things manufactured is really difficult. So, we need to be working with tried and tested factories.

How have staff reacted?

DW: The staff have been amazing: positive, loyal, flexible. Everybody who is working is doing a four-day week on a rota and we're covering everything. I hope that when we re-open that same mentality will remain. It's also been an opportunity for me, to listen as a business owner. There's been some great ideas that have come out of this. We have had Whatsapp groups, we've been doing painting by numbers, Zoom, office teams, and it's all been great, but the bottom line is people want to come back to work, and as a business owner, I genuinely don't know if they can, or when they can. And those decisions, will have to be made very, very soon.

I've tried to be exceptionally honest, and not sugar coat it. Extending the furlough helped but we're still going to have to make some very difficult decisions. Business might not recover to support our existing headcount. We'll see a lot of



JAMES BIGGIN
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
STEEL CITY MARKETING

improvement in 2021, but we're going to have to run our businesses in a more flexible, smaller, agile way.

AD: Amazingly! They have all been so flexible, positive, supportive and I'm incredibly proud of every one of them. You hear this a lot in business, but it is in times like this that it becomes very evident how important the entire

team is to the business and to each other. They have worked harder than ever and just got on with it and the results are reflecting their approach.

JB: I'm really pleased with how it has gone but I'm a team person, so I don't like being separate. On the personal side, sometimes it has been like wading through treacle and I tend to beat myself up about things at times.

Overall, though, I think things are pretty solid in terms of the people that are working and their understanding of where they fit into the business and the others are chomping at the bit and want to come back and contribute, but, we're still in limbo needing end user purchasing appetite.

What have you learned through this period?

AD: As always, communication is key, with our team, with clients and with suppliers. Our business is far more flexible and adaptable than I realised and the team always pulls through when it matters.

DW: That I'm a lot stronger and resilient than I thought I was. It's definitely about going back to basics and listening to the team getting them involved. Also, if you've got worries and concerns, let the people that you're working with know that.

The pressure isn't the pressure of work. It's an unknown pressure and anxiety to do with our family, friends, and loved ones. Communicate so that everyone feels they've got a voice.

JB: I had a one to one with a partner at Goldman Sachs recently, and he compared the last recession to boiling a frog. We didn't see it coming and the water gradually got hotter so people majorly suffered. This time has been like popping the frog into a pot of boiling water and it jumped straight back out. People have acted very quickly and decisively.

It's been good to take a moment to reflect on what we think people need but also accept that as an industry, we are second phase. It's when companies are settled again, that our sector will come into its own. That's not necessarily positive for right now but we need to set ourselves up in terms of choice, in terms of ideas, in terms of how we're aligning ourselves with our client base, and our partnerships with suppliers. **PM**



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THE NEXT STEPS

Looking from the ground up: where will the economy take the promotional merchandise industry? **Carey Trevill** assesses the evidence

In June, even the most pessimistic didn't expect the report of the UK economy to have shrunk by more than 20% in April this year, even if the Bank of England did expect it. During the Great Recession, our GDP didn't shrink by more than 1% in a single month.

What's the big difference? Every sector, every business, every household has been affected and we didn't see it coming. But with signs we are starting to see a return to some channels being open for business, what does this mean for our sector? Where are the opportunities to regenerate and where is the permanent and irreversible damage falling?

Time to reset

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has referred to this opportunity as the 'Great Reset'. With a collective, fast and collaborative approach, the ability of the world to emerge in a better place is possible by instigating stakeholder capitalism. The WEF concludes that if we take this chance to reset the way we operate in all sections of society, in business, education and across the world, we stand a good chance of transforming capitalism by engaging those in power to unite in change.

Recent research from The Advertising Association (AA) demonstrated that advertisers are cautiously kick starting activity and are looking for ideas and innovative approaches to resolve unplanned

challenges. Linked to the cautious approach has been the request for more Government support in the form of tax credits that could encourage more than £3.5bn additional spend in creative sectors although it may not necessarily encourage the largest advertisers to change spending plans. While HM Treasury examines the first stages of this proposal in June, the focus is firmly on economic benefit, not just more spending on advertising.

Creative kickstart

The view from the industry is with the Government listening to the creative industries, hailed as one of the most proactive across industry by the Department of International Trade, now is the time for radical ideas that SMEs could benefit from.

Part of this is our approach to sustainability, cited as an area in the UK that has gathered pace as the visible evidence of lockdown has inspired acceleration of single use plastic removal from our shelves. With the need to keep our eating and drinking utensils safe, the upward trend for drinkware looks set to continue as companies and brands seek to provide ways to keep the transformative behaviour moving forward.

Conversations between the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department of International Trade, and the BPMA have demonstrated the intense interest in UK manufacturing and production. UK-based business will be

encouraged to channel their money into a British supply chain before looking further afield. With many end users lamenting the intensely short-term nature of the demands from brands; the qualities of fast, agile, flexible business are where the promotional merchandise industry excels. Following many months of virtual contact, where we crave 'real' connection, our industry is poised to offer solutions and ideas to help the UK climb from the intense dip we find ourselves in.

Event horizon

With many of us reliant on events industry focused activation, the advent of virtual events looks set to stay with a prediction that tech can help provide a combination of the virtual and physical as we ease back into face to face. Innovation in this sector will be able to embrace the hybrid approach and while we don't expect to return to 2019 levels of business just yet, we see the events industry revolutionising its approach to support safety at events such as etc. Venues turning a room at each of its facilities into a cycle room to encourage more diverse transport options for delegates.

Understanding how we can support the measures for safety, excitement and engagement in places where our end users want, and importantly need to do business, will motivate the industry to step up and be included in our own sector reset. 



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With more staff working from home a robust cyber security strategy is essential

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has released new guidance for organisations who are encouraging more of their staff to continue working from home. There are many cyber security challenges that may present themselves at such a time, and they need to be managed.

Asking staff to work from home

While working from home will not be new to many organisations and employees, the coronavirus is forcing organisations to consider home working on a greater scale, and for a longer period of time. You may have more people working from home than usual, and some may not have done it before.

Accounts and access

If you need to set up new accounts or accesses, you should set strong passwords for user accounts. The NCSC strongly recommends implementing two-factor authentication (2FA) if available.

Preparing your staff for home working

Working from home can be daunting, especially if it's sudden. There are also practical considerations; staff who are used to sharing an office space will now be remote. Think about whether you need new services, or to just extend existing ones. For example you may want to consider services that provide chat rooms, video teleconferencing, and document sharing.

If you are already providing such services, you'll need to plan for a potentially large increase in users, and support them.

Remote users may need to use different software (or use familiar applications

in a different way) compared to what they do when in the office. Produce written guides for these features, and test that the software works.

Consider producing a series of 'How do I?' guides so that your support team isn't overwhelmed with requests for help. For example, you might produce a 'How to log into and use an online collaboration tool' guide.

Staff may already be stressed, so they're not in an ideal position to learn new technologies. In addition, they might not be able to ask an office workmate for help. Check how staff are coping; not just in terms of how to use new technologies, but also how they are adapting to new forms of working.

Controlling access to corporate systems

Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) allow remote users to securely access your organisation's IT resources securely. If you are already using a VPN, make sure it is fully patched. Additional licences, capacity or bandwidth may be required if your organisation normally has a limited number of remote users.

Helping staff to look after devices

Devices used for working outside an office environment are more vulnerable to theft and damage. Whether using their own device or the organisation's, encourage staff to lock their screens if left unattended, especially if there are children or housemates present. When the device is not being used, staff should keep it somewhere safe.

Make sure that staff know what to do if their device is lost or stolen. Encourage users (in a positive, blame-free manner) to report any losses as soon as

possible. Ensure staff understand the importance of keeping software (and the devices themselves) up to date, and that they know how to do this.

Removable media

USB drives can contain lots of sensitive information, are easily misplaced, and when inserted into your IT systems can introduce malware. When USB drives and cards are openly shared, it becomes hard to track what they contain, where they've been, and who has used them. You can reduce the likelihood of infection by:

- disabling removable media using MDM settings
- using antivirus tools
- only allowing products supplied by the organisation
- protecting data at rest on removable media


You can also ask staff to transfer files using alternative means rather than via USB.

Using personal rather than work devices

If you are permitting people to use their own devices to work remotely, refer to the NCSC's Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) guidance.

Coronavirus email scams

Alert staff to 'phishing' emails that try and trick users into clicking on a bad link. The scams may claim to have a 'cure' for the virus, offer a financial reward, or be encouraging you to donate. Please refer to NCSC's guidance on dealing with suspicious messages.

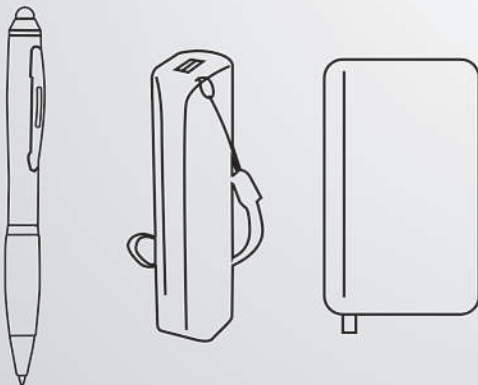
More detailed advice on all areas of cyber security is available [ncsc.gov.uk](https://www.ncsc.gov.uk) 



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STICK OR *twist!*

Life has changed during lockdown, so where can the merchandise industry connect, asks Carey Trevill

Life has changed in ways we couldn't have imagined. As we look for reassurance, brands and retailers now carry 'Covid-secure' messaging. More activity will start to come back in different forms and the demand we all need to predict is: what merchandise fits this revised picture?

Internationally, we expect hand sanitiser to be the number one item on offer in retail environments, restaurants and events. 39% of Brits surveyed expect to see capacity reduced and at least 31% see hand sanitiser as the venue's responsibility – a view held across consumers in US, Canada and Australia according to research conducted in May (IMI International NextWave Research Phase 3, 14 May 2020).

NEW PRIORITIES

Face coverings and hand sanitiser are not the only long-term transformations we need to consider when reflecting how to address our changed marketplace. With rafts of research indicating how we have all been encouraging each other to experience, experiment and embrace the virtues of self-discovery, we have a new framework of habits that look like they are here to stay.

Recent research (GlobalWebIndex, Coronavirus Research Wave 4, May 2020) shows that 37% of UK consumers strongly approve of brands running promotions during this time, and 33% feel that brands that provide support, help and tips during the period are highly favoured and will likely be a brand of choice post-pandemic, with 55% of those that approve on higher incomes.

In addition, companies behaving more sustainably has impressed 51% of us, with Gen Z and Millennials celebrating brands doing the 'right thing'. In the early stages of lockdown, sustainable practices around items such as drinkware were pushed aside. However, the visible impact of a planet slowed has shown that our desire to rid ourselves of single use plastic has remained important during this time with 44% of us still saying this has taken on new importance during the crisis. Unsurprisingly it rates more highly with under 30s.

HABITS TO STICK

We're all doing more practical things; our love of cooking has seen 34% uptake in UK households with baking at the top of the list. We are spending more on our hobbies



Diversified approach

The Pen Warehouse moved quickly to address an emerging market need, says Helen Dyl, operations director

Our industry is built on reacting quickly to demand and that part of our DNA kicked in, in early March, as we set about developing a liquid hand sanitiser under the brand 'biofree'. This product had to be made in the UK to service the immediate needs of our customers and the alcohol content had to remain high as the WHO was changing its advice on this point often.

Importing was therefore not an option, and we needed to utilise our in-house R&D capabilities and large production facilities. Within two weeks of initial testing we had manufactured our first batch of HSE licensed hand sanitiser in-house.

Three months on we have sold over a quarter million units and are now expanding our range to include gel hand sanitisers as well as other hygiene products, all manufactured at our HQ in Hampshire. This is now a permanent product line for Snap Products and it would not have been possible without the support of the industry.

Growth strategy

Jamie Gray, director, Sow Easy, says lockdown has encouraged us to turn to nature

There is no doubt that 2020 will be one of those years that is written about in history books. As we've witnessed humanity adapt to a 'remote' new way of working, shopping, dining, and well, just living, we've seen something marvellous happen to the planet. Air pollution levels are down, environmental noise levels have been reduced, and beach waters are crystal clear. There's been an obvious change in how humans are connecting to nature. As we've been pulled away from our normal routines, and many have faced furlough or even unemployment, humans seemed to have turned to nature to find some solace in these often overwhelming and anxiety-inducing times.

Getting out in nature and taking walks have been a popular way to maintain sanity, and Facebook and Instagram feeds

have filled with snapshots of backyard vegetable gardens. Growing one's own food has always conveyed feelings of pride and self-sufficiency. As schools closed and family homes became classrooms, parents especially have taken up gardening as a way to engage their children in lessons on nurturing.

Connecting with nature, and gardening in particular, has a myriad of mental health benefits. As more people engage with planting and begin to experience its benefits, we expect to see the trend become increasingly popular.

As an eco-friendly seed and plant promotions company, we dedicate ourselves to bringing consumers easy access to seeds in creative ways. All of our products are made to be branded, and with the option of vegetable, fruit, herb, or flower seeds, the seeds can be linked to the brand messaging.

In addition to normalising the art of the video call, the pandemic has unlocked a lot of creativity surrounding 'snail mail'. During



the pandemic, we had the most luck selling seeded promotions that could easily fit through a letterbox, like our Seedsticks or Seed Packets.

We can only assume moving forward, brands will continue to embrace this newfound (or perhaps rekindled) love of gardening amongst their customer base. We sure hope that they do, not only for our business, but for the wellbeing of the world to come.



such as gardening. An average of 20% of UK consumers state they will continue with their new habits as part of life moving forward. The reality of embracing the simpler things in life and our appreciation of activities that connect ourselves look like they are here stay.

Adaptation and repositioning of your current and future ranges will be essential to contextualise their use in the post pandemic era. Understanding the shift in perception of product use

will help you adjust your proposition to an end user market looking for ideas. Talk to your clients to understand where they see their challenges and keep an eye on wider B2C and B2B behaviours as we adapt in changed environments.

Inspiring and innovating to provide solutions around habits formed in this time will demonstrate our industry's entrepreneurial ability to answer needs that your customers may not realise our industry can fuel and drive.



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MARKETING UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

NEW IMPROVED

Don't waste the opportunity of lockdown to cast a fresh eye on your marketing messages, says **Dee Blick**



To say that we are in oft quoted 'unprecedented times' is an understatement. When it comes to marketing all bets are off.

For many BPMA members, business has either ground to a halt or is thin on the ground; a combination of safe distancing guidelines and the challenges in reaching target audiences. All of those exhibitions planned, training events, anniversary milestones, where promotional merchandise was part and parcel of the marketing budget have been postponed for the foreseeable future.

Clients are struggling with staff on furlough and an overriding focus on making it to the next month. Even when you have been able to contact the right person to discuss promotional merchandise within their marketing mix, are they in the mood to discuss anything beyond their pressing needs?

Don't despair

But it won't last forever. We will bounce back.

Exhibitions will come back; we won't be spending our lives on Zoom to the exclusion of every other communication channel we have grown to love. Brands will see how they must make an impact with potential customers beyond the digital horizon if they are to win hearts and minds. So, we must focus on how to market

effectively beyond the current situation.

I have found myself busier than ever with clients, making wholesale adjustments to marketing plans and revising their marketing messages not just for the here and now but for the post pandemic era.

So, I wanted to share with you what I have been doing on a practical kick-theory-to-the-kerb basis in the hope it helps your marketing.

Practical steps

It's vital you revisit your target audiences

one by one. For each group look at:

- The marketing messages you have used to date. List them one by one.
- How will each one of these messages and indeed your overall positioning differ post pandemic? Subtle or major? List each change.
- What are the new barriers if any to a sale? Are there more or less? List each barrier.
- What is it about your products and the accompanying services that will have even more appeal in the post pandemic era? List each benefit.

Now create your new marketing



messages. What's the difference between old and new?

It is lazy marketing to rinse and repeat the messages that have served you well to date in your various communications (flyers, website, direct mail, newsletters, e-marketing posts, and so on). The chances are that you'll have to make fine tweaks, but it may be that a complete overhaul is in order.

- You must show you mean business by standing in the shoes of every one of your potential customers and viewing your landscape through their eyes.
- You might have to really demonstrate the value you deliver. Promotional merchandise does, in my experience as a marketer spanning 37 years, deliver a ROI every time - if planned into a campaign with realistic objectives. You might now have to really demonstrate this fact.
- You might have to bolster what you offer with more facts and figures and more case studies to win over the sceptic.
- You might have to spell out in detail your new safety policy especially if you offer delivery and despatch.

And more.

Until you do this exercise you won't know. It will make you work at a more intense level leaving nothing to chance.

Driving performance

Let me give you an example.

One of my clients, Kalimex, sells trade quality automotive products via motor factors; the biggest purchasers of these products being motor mechanics. Trade from motor factors and motor mechanics ground to a halt at the start of the pandemic and sales plummeted by 80% overnight. We have used this time to reappraise our marketing messages and

make big changes to them.

It was clear that with services and MOTs being put off and cars left on drives or taken for short runs, mechanics would be in even greater demand as lockdown began to ease. Added to this is the fact that for many motorists now counting their pennies, a new car is no longer on their list. So, keeping their existing car in good repair and on the road for longer is a priority. And of course, we are being encouraged to drive to work rather than use public transport – a trend that will continue for the foreseeable future. So, although the pandemic has caused major problems the emerging picture is an altogether different one.

So, acknowledging all these facts, we have launched a series of articles in the trade media discussing the new demand for mechanics and promoting the top six products Kalimex supplies that will be in demand by mechanics and consequently that motor factors should have on their 'must order' list as they began to open. We have also launched a campaign 'Accelerate'. We are targeting motor factors and motor mechanics with a range of promotional gifts (T-shirts, specially printed anniversary mugs filled with Haribo, pens, keyrings, jackets). There are also template email wordings, a packed newsletter and bespoke marketing tips; the latter about how each group should market their respective businesses post pandemic. Of course, we are detailing why these six products will make motorists and mechanics happy.

Early signs are very encouraging.

The editors of all the trade publications have been enthusiastic to our 'pitch' because it is so relevant and insightful. Without exception we have secured significant coverage (single page and



Kalimex has used merchandise to engage with its primary market



About Dee

A Fellow of The Chartered Institute of Marketing (FCIM), Dee Blick has 37 years' experience in marketing. A demon at copywriting, practical marketing plans and campaign creation, she is a firm believer in the power of 'lumpy mail', the simple but powerful premise that adding a promotional item to a relevant mailing can have a spectacular impact.

Dee is the international bestselling author of *The Ultimate Small Business Marketing Book* and *The 15 Essential Marketing Masterclasses for Your Small Business*.



double page features). The six products we have been highlighting as 'must haves' in any workshop are unsurprisingly the ones in most demand by motor factors.

A final message

Don't continue with your marketing as if nothing has happened by simply picking up where you left off. The world has changed. Put your marketing messages under the microscope and don't delay in making changes. Promotional merchandise is here to stay. Fly the flag for what you offer and provide great examples and case studies that demonstrate why this is the case. My motto as a marketer is that you can wow with promotional merchandise and you can win with promotional merchandise. PM

FACE FACTS

After years of being touted as the coming thing, video conferencing is having its moment.

Melissa Chevin assesses its impact.



Whatever the other legacies of the COVID-19 crisis, it is likely to be remembered as the event which brought video conferencing into the business mainstream.

As thousands of us began to work from home, webcams – those previously neglected novelties on our computers – began to be pressed into service as virtual meetings started replacing the ‘real thing’.

Despite one or two negative headlines – the now-fixed security loophole with Zoom being perhaps the most prominent – it’s frankly amazing how quickly even the most technophobic worker embraced this technology.

No going back?

In many quarters, video conferencing – as part of a larger remote-working package

– has proven so successful that many companies are honestly asking themselves whether they can in future justify having staff in offices which are increasingly expensive to maintain.

But can the world of the online meeting ever truly replace face-to-face engagement? That’s a question to which we shall return.

Platform choice

First though, what does it take to make the most of this brave new world? First stop has to be your choice of platform. Many smart phones and tablets now have excellent cameras and are great for ‘one-to-ones’; for larger meetings, though, things can start to get a bit unwieldy, and a desktop computer is the best choice.

Then there is the choice of platform, with Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Skype leading

the pack. There are dozens of competitors, some arguably better than others – but as with a lot of software, you may find that conforming to safe corporate choices gives you the most dependable interoperability with colleagues and contacts.

Finally, you’ll need to adapt to a new way of behaving at meetings – and we’re not just talking about checking that your backdrop is neat and tidy.

Most people taking their first steps in video conferencing quickly discover that everyone trying to speak as they might around a table doesn’t really work online. Those hosting meetings will need to have an idea as to how they’re going to run them, while participants need to learn a little patience.

Reading the room

This lack of flexibility is perhaps one of the reasons why it’s

unlikely online meetings will totally replace the ‘real thing’, at least for the most important occasions. But there are other things the world of online conferencing lacks.

Psychologists say that one of the things which happens during face-to-face meetings is that we respond to tiny cues from the other participants, such as nods, eye contact, and facial expressions.

When we are physically sitting across a table from someone, these subtle indicators are easily picked up. But when all you have to go on is a thumbnail image in a chequerboard, these are likely to be lost, which could cause us to misinterpret someone’s emotions or intention. Many of us who have sent seemingly innocuous emails which the recipient took entirely in the wrong way will know the inherent danger.

So, while ‘Zooming’ might be here to stay, it’s safe to say there are still very good reasons to ‘zoom in’ on the person behind the camera.

Melissa Chevin is BPMA board director and marketing consultant with GF Consulting - mchevin@gf-consult.co.uk






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GETTING BACK TO WORK

As the lockdown eases, mental health concerns of staff need to be considered

After several months of lockdown, some companies are now looking to resume activity. This can include bringing staff back into the workplace after time working from home, or being furloughed.

People can have mixed feelings about this. Whereas some may be able to almost click back into gear, others will feel anxious about going back to work. There is no right or wrong way to feel, and employers should try to support staff in the most appropriate ways possible.

Staff can move through a range of emotions relating to lockdown easing. They may feel:

- Stressed and unprepared for the changes. People may have become protective of their lockdown routine and would rather not deal with change or uncertainty.
- Anxious, afraid or panicked that the changes may cause an increase in infections, or that someone they care about may be put at risk.
- Angry or frustrated, perhaps because people aren't following social distancing rules. Some may feel that the changes are wrong, or the measures in place aren't enough. Other people may seem to have more freedom than those who are shielding or live somewhere with more restrictions.
- Grief for people who have died.
- Uneasy about relationships that have changed during full lockdown.
- Stigmatised or that others will avoid them, perhaps because they've already had coronavirus.

- Like they're having to make an unfair sacrifice if they are being asked to go back to work when others are still at home.
- Unsupported or disregarded, perhaps if they're asked to go back to work without having access to things like childcare or PPE.

As restrictions are being lifted differently around the UK, it might feel like others are following different rules. The general mood may feel quite different to full lockdown when most people were following the same rules.

Supportive employers

The Society of Occupational Medicine (SOM) has worked with organisations including MIND and the CIPD to produce a toolkit to help employers manage the move back to work. It stresses that businesses have to ensure that the return to work is safe for all workers.


Making work attractive and providing reassurance to staff is key to encourage their return to work. Within this, mental health and wellbeing support is a key principle. It is also key for employers to ensure workers know how and with whom to raise concerns. Line managers should work together with staff to resolve any concerns; and teams should be empowered to work up solutions (within the parameters of public health guidelines and employer's duty of care).

Research shows that many workers are going to return with depleted mental

health, which is an ongoing risk. There are many reasons for this but mentally healthy workplaces will be a priority as the nation transitions out of lockdown. There is a close link between workforce wellbeing and organisational resilience and productivity.

Employers should provide and promote access to mental health support for all employees, including awareness raising, and tools and techniques to manage mental health (see MIND's Wellness Action Plans – mind.org.uk)

For employees who have a known, pre-existing mental health issue, ensure support is in place and that they are able to access this. It is particularly important that all employees take extra steps to protect their mental health during this time. Promote mentally healthy practices, such as connections and exercise.

Employers should plan ahead for furloughed employees returning to work. Set up a return-to-work one-to-one in advance to discuss positive personal and professional steps that will support their return. Aim to make their first few days back in the office as smooth as possible, ask them how they're feeling and reassure them they have time to get back up to speed within their role. This is similar approach to when an employee has been off work with a mental health problem. 

The Returning to Work toolkit can be downloaded at som.org.uk. Mind.org.uk has many resources to help companies and individuals deal with the challenges posed by COVID-19, including Wellness Action Plan templates

1ST TIME LUCKY?

Mike Collins explains how one BPMA distributor's first experience of using Direct Route helped it beat the odds



It is no exaggeration to say that we are in challenging times, with BPMA members working tirelessly to keep business as usual despite business being anything but usual. In the past few months, we have spoken to many members and with a combination of tenacity, experience, and a deep-seated understanding of the promotional goods sector, we have managed to recover more than £1.2 million of overdue invoices and debt. And each day sees this figure added to. It has been heartening for our team to be on the receiving end of some amazing feedback from the many distributors we have helped and of course suppliers too.

Here is one story that really stands out. Our thanks to the distributor, which gave its permission to share it with no details spared other than omitting its name.

Empathetic approach

We were contacted by this BPMA distributor member in May. It had not used Direct Route but now during the coronavirus pandemic it wanted us to collect some overdue monies. Free advice and guidance were in plentiful supply from our locally based support manager. During the initial conversation it became clear that the distributor wanted to keep its customer if possible. And so, the free Direct Route COVID-19 Support Service was recommended because it is more empathetic than traditional debt recovery methods.

A free COVID-19 customer reminder was sent out that same day inviting the customer to communicate and provide either full payment, a date for settlement or, an instalment offer, by Friday 8th May.

The date came and went without the distributor being paid. The email reminder had

been ignored. This sent out a warning signal about the customer's current financial position. It was time to make a difficult decision. Should this very high-profile customer be escalated to full debt collection?

Difficult decision

On Tuesday 12th May, after a weekend of reflection the distributor decided it had little option left. With the customer not responding, what else could it realistically be expected to do? The case was escalated to full debt collection and a formal seven-day demand despatched.

By Friday 15th May, just three days after escalating to full debt collection, the distributor received its money. Great news indeed and a boost to the cashflow which in the current climate warrants a sigh of relief to say the least.

On Monday 18th May this 'ordinary collection' became astonishing news. Why? Because the debtor company in question filed for administration and formally declared its insolvency. This did not matter to the happy distributor whose records may show it was quite possibly the last ever business to be paid by the failed debtor company.

Who was the debtor? None other than Casual Dining Group Ltd, whose brands include Bella Italia, Café Rouge, Belgo, Huxleys, Oriel, and Las Iguanas.

This BPMA distributor can now dine out knowing it had done the right thing in contacting Direct Route to help it recover monies it had given up on collecting using its own resources.

The moral of the story?

Don't sit on debt and don't let overdue invoices turn into debt. Procrastination could

cost you dear especially in this pandemic where unfortunately it is the case that those making the most noise will be the ones most likely to be at the head of the queue.

Zero cost debt collection options are available by contacting your local account advisor noted below.

Find out more about the COVID-19 support service at directroute.co.uk/covid19support.

Mike Collins is managing director of Direct Route



Local Support Contact Details

Please contact a member of our local support team for advice on any matter related to debt and credit management.

London and South East

David Barker
dbarker@directroute.co.uk
07766 545871

South Wales and South West

Ron Dingle
rdingle@directroute.co.uk
07976 675420

Midlands and East Anglia

Ken Brown
kbrown@directroute.co.uk
07795 214426

North Wales and North West

Ian Jenkinson
ijenkinson@directroute.co.uk
07860 197476

East Pennine Lincolnshire & Yorkshire

Shaun Egan
segan@directroute.co.uk
07801 108402

North East, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Mike Collins
mike@accountassyst.com
07866 427363





PROTECTING PROMOTIONAL MERCHANDISE

The provision of PPE has been a lifeline for many merchandise companies, but as we exit lockdown the emphasis can shift back to what we do best

PPE was perhaps not an expression we used very often, if at all back in February. Fast forward to now and we're all now too aware of what PPE – Personal Protective Equipment – stands for. At a personal level, this might signify 'safety, security, protected'. For business it means 'employee safety, essential, necessary'.

For those in the promotional merchandise industry, PPE has presented a lifeline of requests for their businesses, trusted by clients to secure the right goods, saving jobs and livelihoods.

Fit for purpose

Many in the promotional merchandise industry have taken advantage of BPMA-run sessions for their members to help advise on this highly regulated area, aimed at explaining the very different responsibilities for the supply chain versus the promotional merchandise 'norm'. Working closely with notified bodies SGS and BSI, plus PPE Trade Body, BSIF, the BPMA has provided

a plethora of information to help spot fakes, understand certification, plus how to advertise and promote this new area responsibly.

With so much focus on this area, it's important to remind the wider industry reeling from complex regulations which come with fines and more, this is not our core expertise. It's as far away from supplying a pen or lanyard as you can get.


Testing times

Since early June, public transport in the UK now demands a face covering – fabric covering carrying branding or messaging. Familiar territory for our industry and one many businesses are adopting to capitalise on the demand and continued trend but without the demands of PPE Regulations. A safer route for many already seeing the PPE market as viable but complex.

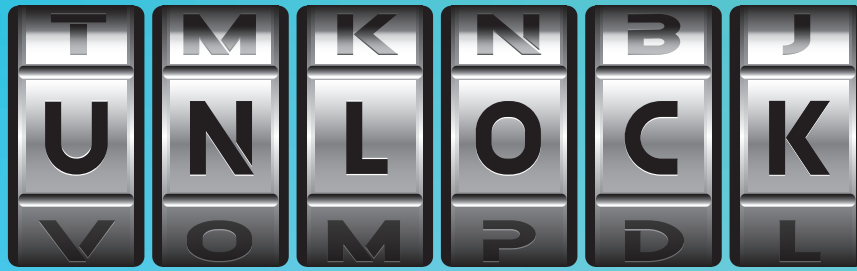
It's useful to note for face coverings, the BPMA has advised that under guidance from benefit providers SGS and Intertek, it is recommended face

coverings that are printed using dye sublimation processes, printed or coated fabrics undergo testing as standard (lead, cadmium, and also recommend colour fastness and other tests). It is further recommended that any face coverings for children are tested under EN71-1, 2 and 3 under general product safety. However we view these new categories on our websites and price lists, they are there to provide a level of comfort to the wearer so always take the responsible route, testing where necessary.

Core business

Even with a market for products which look likely to be part of our lives for some time to come, end users are starting to plan and create, needing our ideas and innovation to help bring their brands to life. PPE is not the only fruitful outcome they expect to see from us – feed the ideas, the concepts and the far-fetched to let the wider industry know we're in business and that business is promotional merchandise. 

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
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NOW MORE THAN EVER

Tough times call for decisive action. **Simon Adam** explains how Briman companies have adapted to these difficult times

As the crisis struck, it seemed that almost over a single weekend, we went from a record sales week to zero sales as the tap was turned off.

While we don't mould in plastic on site we do have laser cutters and an ideal sheet material in acrylic that can be easily sanitised. This gives us the flexibility to produce a wide choice of shapes and sizes from one material type, enabling us to create a whole range of no touch keyrings and tools to help people avoid direct contact with surfaces. In order to mitigate the additional cost of laser cutting from acrylic, rigorous attention was given to speedy identification of the best combinations of functionality and form within the individual prototype designs, ready to enter a very competitive marketplace.


The need for our swift response to an increasingly worsening situation meant the usual demands of large branding areas had to take second place to the new priorities of customer needs: products which initially promote safety but must also be functional,

fit for purpose, comfortable and easy to use.

At a time when we needed it most, orders both large and small have proved the success of the new products, with the Keep Safe Everywhere keyrings and office tool leading the way. From those original 'no touch' products, a choice of cough/sneeze screens was developed together with a wide choice of social distancing badges.

Now is the right time to buy British manufactured goods. To see the benefits on both our industry and the UK economy as a whole, we need increased manufacturing and a return to employment across the country to generate greater spending and taxes.

Many are surprised to learn about what UK companies still make, and more would be possible if manufacturers had the confidence to invest. The country must learn from the problems exposed by the current crisis, particularly overreliance on imported goods. It isn't healthy when the going gets tough.

Simon Adam is managing director of WCM&A, a Briman member company. 

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STAY ON COURSE



Members are using the lockdown to drive staff career development through the BPMA Education Programme, says **Daniela Arena**

Lockdown learning has been extremely popular. I have personally taken the time to listen on several education webinars, something I have always struggled to do.

BPMA members have followed suit and it has been another successful few months for learners on the TPM course. Staff on furlough are still signing up to the course and we have had some exam success stories too.

Working and studying at home has its perks: it's a comfortable, low-pressure environment. However, some find it difficult with so many distractions. Procrastination and distraction can prevent you from accomplishing what you need to get done. Watching TV, keeping in contact with the team via live chat

systems, scrolling through social media, or other activities are big productivity killers. Some learners are also juggling home learning with the children too.

However, by staying focused and determined, and with a little bit of self-discipline, planning and organisation learners have enhanced their skills to come back to their jobs more knowledgeable and stronger than ever and that deserves reward and recognition.

It has been an absolute privilege to work with the learners and get them ready for the exams during this unsettling time. I look forward to helping all the 100 learners on the programme develop their skills and to meeting them face to face in the future. PM

Learning success

George Gravestock, from supplier B-Loony, is one such success story. "I have recently completed the TPM course," he said. "I have learnt some interesting and useful information to help me in the promotional industry. The learning centre was easy to use and getting the final exam organised was quick and uncomplicated - even during lockdown. My BPMA contact, Daniela Arena was very helpful and friendly throughout the course and then the final exam."

Owner of B-loony Andy McInnes, said: "We were delighted to offer George the opportunity to undertake some training while on lockdown and to widen his industry knowledge. B-Loony has enthusiastically supported the BPMA's Education Programme for a number of years and actively encouraged staff to enter at the different levels. Each qualification really enhances peoples' skills."

Bethany Matwiejew from Fluid Branding, who joined the company just before lockdown, said: "The BPMA course was fantastic, with great learning facilities, and provided excellent learning tools to help me pass my exam. Daniela was a brilliant support and guided me through the exam to help me receive my qualification. I would highly recommend this training course for anyone looking to receive their qualifications."

UK Lanyard Makers' Adam Gagliani- Saunders was advised to undertake the TPM while furloughed. "This was something I was very grateful for since I was unable to work from home and needed something to keep me occupied," he said. "I have passed my TPM exam and now feel I have much better knowledge on, not only the promotional industry but things such as manufacturing methods, marketing and quality control."

Name	Company	Course	Date of Exam
Joachim MacAskill	Outstanding Branding	TPM	15/04/2020
Liam Lawrence	Outstanding Branding	TPM	16/04/2020
Jasmin Howard	thesourcer.com	TPM	14/04/2020
Dalia Suleman	Outstanding Branding	TPM	20/04/2020
Lauren Hall	Drayton Gifts	TPM	24/04/2020
Lee-Ann de Leca	Drayton Gifts	TPM	29/04/2020
Natalie Spicer	Drayton Gifts	TPM	06/05/2020
Bethany Matwiejew	Fluid Branding	TPM	13/05/2020
Charlotte Smith	Pink Sheep	TPM	12/05/2020
Adam Gagliani-Saunders	UK Lanyard Makers	TPM	26/05/2020
George Gravestock	B-Loony	TPM	28/05/2020

Content is King

Training and development is at the heart of the BPMA and at the heart of the industry. The BPMA education programme has been written for the industry by the industry.

The BPMA executive team will be working on revamping current content and creating new content throughout 2020. We welcome input from members with specific areas of knowledge and expertise who would like to contribute and support the programme. It is vital the content of this programme is continuously checked, validated and updated.

We are now calling for NEW content and would like experts in their field, whether a supplier or distributor, to come forward and contribute to the established industry

education programme to help maintain the high standards we have set for the benefit of our members in general and our industry at large. We are particularly interested in content for new on trend product categories, personalisation and new branding applications, and sales team training and social media.

If you are an expert in in these areas or would like to contribute to the only industry training programme by working with the BPMA to write new, relevant inspiring content, then we would love to hear from you.

To discuss the opportunities further please contact Daniela Arena on daniela@bpma.co.uk



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BPMA brings members together

A new virtual conference and exhibition for BPMA members aims to help the industry move forward with purpose

The global pandemic has brought much disruption to everyday lives including to events across every sector. With safety the primary concern driving significant changes in the way we all interact, many of the usual industry conferences and events that we rely on for income and connections have been either postponed or cancelled.

The September edition of the promotional merchandise sector's show, Merchandise World, has been affected in this way. However, the BPMA has taken an opportunity to occupy the date when it would have taken place to deliver its September conference – with a difference.

Virtual conference

Focused on a 'three Rs' approach of recovery, regeneration and resilience, the BPMA has created a virtual conference with access to an exclusive member-only networking hub to reconnect members after lockdown.

"Bringing members together has been essential during the COVID-19 crisis," said BPMA CEO Carey Trevill. "A live date where we could all come together to hear from business leaders on a range of topics to support business needs now and in the future was going to really benefit the members. But we knew we needed to do more. The BPMA Conference ticket unlocks your pass to

the BPMA member network hub where suppliers and distributors can come together in a secure on-line environment, open for several weeks after the live date. The importance of being able to network and conduct business as end-user markets re-start is imperative."

Advice and inspiration


Boasting an impressive line-up of speakers, panels and workshops, deep dive subjects will include leadership, remote selling, workplace wellbeing, plus hands on financial and employment advice, the live event is set to bring a wealth of knowledge and skills for members attending. Access to the content will be available throughout the period allowing members to listen back to advice and inspiring talks at times to suit. The full agenda is being published from July.

Citing the opportunity as one that presents all suppliers in 'exhibitor' mode means that each supplier member signing up to the ticketed event will be able to access important live content on the day but also bring their shopfront into the conference for distributors to show off launches, ranges and stock availability. With detailed profiles, each supplier will be able to alert distributors to what's on offer plus approach those seeking specific items through timed meetings and group presentations.

Distributors will be able to buy single and group company passes that give them access to the live date and importantly, the supplier virtual exhibitor section, plus the chance to arrange timed one-to-one meetings.

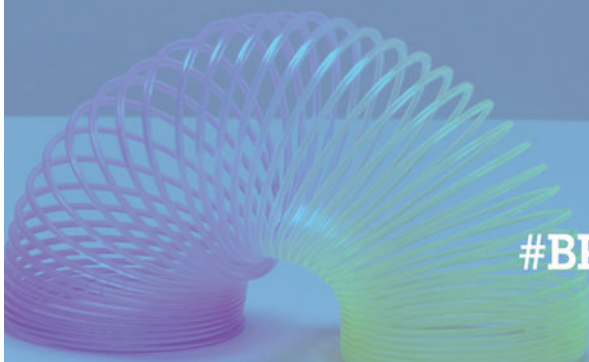
Back to business

Trevill added: "We know that understanding who is open and not has been a massive challenge during lockdown and how businesses may be operating differently from here. We have designated the week after the live date as supplier week, enabling everyone who has registered to arrange those all-important meetings that can be hard to squeeze into one day. Access to the networking hub and content will continue to be available for a further period to make the investment into the passes worthwhile for every member. It was important to also provide different passes for suppliers and distributors to ensure every business could represent themselves in this important virtual space to the best of their ability."

Tickets will be available for sale from early July with supplier prices starting at £150 for a business pass and distributor passes from £25 for a single pass. Interested members should head over to the BPMA events page (bpma.co.uk/events) for more information. 

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