

The Business of Halal in a Crisis: A Survival Kit against COVID 19

by Laurent Marliere



A. Strategies to minimize the COVID-19 Impact on the Halal Industry

The Halal Industry is impacted by sectors. So each sector require a specific answer.
Halal travel or Halal food are not impacted the same way as Islamic finance or Modest fashion

1. Adapting the Distribution Channel to local suppliers. Filling gaps and dependency
2. No back down on the compliance to avoid a mad cow effect
3. 3 T's : Transparency, trust ... and traceability
4. Go online and become digital
5. Learning and preparing for the upcoming pandemic waves. Work on your operational manuals
6. Dialogue with your Government/Authorities to improve the regulatory framework (testing, certification, import/export, Tax, labour)

B. Recovery Strategy

We are in the middle of the pandemic crisis and you should already be thinking about the post COVID 19 era.
Here are 8 very powerful and practical marketing tips to get out of the crisis stronger than you entered it.

1. **Change your mindset**

Sir Winston Churchill said: "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

The alarming media frenzy is overwhelming, the pressure from colleagues, staff, family is substantial in an era of fear. As a key partner in your firm, you need to demonstrate **leadership**. This starts with you and your mindset. Remain a winner and anticipate the end of the crisis once you have handled the immediate urgencies.

"God Helps Those Who Help Themselves": *One day, the Prophet (PBUH) saw a Bedouin man dismount his camel and begin to walk away. The Prophet asked him, "aren't you going to tie your camel?" The man replied "I put my trust in Allah." The prophet said: "First tie your camel, then put your trust in Allah."*

2. **Use strategically your time**

You are probably locked down at home. It is a unique chance to get out of your daily routine and **think** strategically. How can you upgrade your business for the short-term and the long-term? After a crisis like 9/11, the 2008 Credit crunch and the Covid-19 pandemic, some changes will remain and become standards. Spend time reading articles on strategy and the market. Imagine how your clients will adapt their business and how you can align your services. How can you go from niche to global ?

3. **Adapt your services and their delivery**

Your services or products need to be adapted to the new needs of clients.

Changes will occur for the services themselves AND for the "delivery" of these services as well.

4. **Maintain your marketing budget**

While what we are experiencing is very worrying, this is not the time to think about reducing this budget despite the desire and pressure from partners worried about their dividends. Reducing your budget would be an overreaction that will impact the firm in the long run. Many competing companies will reduce their marketing expenses, which will give you more space to shine in the market.

In a pandemic, events and rallies are cancelled. Budgets in your firm become available and can be used differently. Beware, after the crisis, people will have a desire to get together and attend events while price may rise. The demand will be high, conference organizers and hotels will have to recover and adapt their prices. Networking budgets should not be cut but buffered when you will need them in some months.

5. Matchmaking instead of networking

The business development of Halal professional firms is mainly based on peer to peer meetings at large conferences (Mihas, Gulfood, Alimentaria, ...). The massive cancellation of events and the fear to delegate your best professionals to places where they could get infected, heavily impacts your revenues. This is particularly impactful for firms dealing internationally

The way to go around it, is to evolve from mass networking into individual "matchmaking". You must avoid the crowds where mass fishing is now irrelevant to precisely target prospects during one-to-one meetings organized through videoconferencing. Matchmaking is about market intelligence, fine understanding of a client's precise needs and going bilateral instead of mass fishing.

6. Upgrade your digital communication

There is a multitude of digital communication instruments. Almost an anarchy between Zoom, Slack, Teams, Skype, Loop, GoToMeeting, WhatsApp, WeChat, Viber ...

These softwares often carry a cultural context and are used more heavily in some parts of the world. Mastering them is a pre-condition to enter the market and reach out to prospects and clients. You do not want to lose time and look like an amateur when it is time to pick up the conversation with an important prospect.

7. Focus on digital marketing

More crisis means more digital. It is an opportunity to convince your conservative partners to step ahead in digital. People and clients are sitting at home linked to the world only through the Internet. For instance you can accelerate:

- Content Marketing: publish content to maximize your visibility. Step into the production of short videos and create your firm's TV channel on YouTube.
- Search Engines (SEOs): improve your website's referencing and keywords
- Cost per click (SEM): position your firm for online searches and the search for information
- App: Transform your web site in a dynamic app.
- Email Marketing: Connect with your current and potential customers with specific offers/expertise
- Social media: Improve and harmonize the use of tools like LinkedIn, twitter, Facebook for professionals,...
- Statistics: develop or use datas to improve your understanding of the market
- CRM: Update and clean your clients database. Make sure you can reach your best clients through SMS and texts. Are all your clients connected to your LinkedIn ?

8. Be a sustainable individual and firm

"Halal" means "sustainable". Before the Corona crisis, the media were asking you to save the planet, the climate, the environment. Activist Greta Thunberg had as much media coverage as Donald Trump. People are sensitive and sensible. They are affected. It is counter-productive to propagate panic-inducing content, to capitalize on fear, to increase the prices of your services. Acting as a good corporate citizen and behaving as a responsible corporation will bring you more new mandates than exploiting without finesse a crisis.

The Corona crisis only brings one positive effect: it pushes us to refresh our business development in a time of disruption. It is not time to stop everything in terms of marketing, communications and business development, on the contrary. However, you need to rethink your ways of doing things and invest time and money intelligently.

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