How to inspire through uncertainty

A guide for brands who need to plan for their future.

Brought to you by the place where people plan for the future.
Pinterest is unique. It’s a platform where people consciously come to plan their future rather than scrolling through posts about the past.

Because Pinterest is grounded in the future, we get an earlier indication of where consumers are headed, and can help brands better predict what’s to come for their category.

Right now, every marketer in the world needs that insight.

Consider this a field guide for how brands can stand apart by staying ahead of a rapidly changing curve of consumer behavior.
There are four important phases to consider as you’re planning—or re-planning—your advertising investment in light of COVID-19.

They align with emerging consumer behaviors and search trends on Pinterest.

These phases also assume that, once the shelter-at-home rules loosen, we’ll be returning to both an injured economy and a changed collective psyche.

Here’s what consumer trends on Pinterest are teaching us about the four phases of marketing for this moment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triage + Information</strong></td>
<td><strong>Empathy + Relevance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Escapism + Optimism</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recovery + Rebound</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First 21 days</strong></td>
<td><strong>Days 7-45</strong></td>
<td><strong>Days 45-120</strong></td>
<td><strong>-10 days from quarantine lift onward</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Your audience is disoriented.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Your audience is worried.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Your audience is restless.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Your audience is rebuilding.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People are overwhelmed and uncertain. They’re trying to get situated and deal with isolation, working from home, and homeschooling young children.</td>
<td>The loss and pain of the situation is setting in. They’re looking for solutions, yes, but also solace. They want to feel better—and help others feel better—all with limited resources.</td>
<td>Boredom is real. So is loneliness. People are eager to escape the present and start looking forward. They want to feel in control. They’re planning for the future again—not just the now.</td>
<td>Back to life. People are re-establishing old routines while likely making more conscious brand decisions than before. Economic health concerns may replace personal health worries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home office</strong>&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>Care packages</strong>&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>Future apartment</strong>&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>Summer party</strong>&lt;sup&gt;7&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td><strong>DIY Haircut</strong>&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>WFH outfits</strong>&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>Future wedding</strong>&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td><strong>Event planning</strong>&lt;sup&gt;8&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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**Rough Timeline**

- First 21 days
- Days 7-45
- Days 45-120
- -10 days from quarantine lift onward

**Consumer Mindset**

- Your audience is disoriented.
- Your audience is worried.
- Your audience is restless.
- Your audience is rebuilding.

**Real Search Trends on Pinterest**

Back to the future.
Recent searches on Pinterest suggest people are returning to planning for—and getting excited about—the future.

This graph looks back on the last few weeks. But its most important message isn’t where people have been—it’s where they’re going.

The trend lines represent nearly 100% of US Pinterest search queries, separated into two categories—future optimism and information for right now.

Look at the “future optimism” line. Those searches include things like event planning, future family, travel, outfits for men and women and even wedding dresses. They dipped immediately after isolation began, but over the last two weeks searches about the future have been steadily rising—and we expect that trend to continue.

Similarly, searches for information, like easy pantry recipes and at-home activities for kids, predictably spiked immediately after isolation began. They remain strong, but they’ve also been leveling off in recent weeks.

Source: Pinterest Internal Data, Global, February 1 - May 3, 2020. Information for now includes recipes, activities, etc. Future optimism includes events, travel, weddings, etc.
Consumers are ahead of where you might think.

It might be tempting to think your consumers are in phase one, maybe phase two, at this point.

In fact, our searches indicate that—at least on Pinterest—many audience behaviors are already moving swiftly into phase three and beyond.

It makes sense. Pinterest has always been the first place they go to make future plans. So it’s the best place to get a sense for their next move.

If consumers are here today...

...you should already be planning creative + media for here.

Recovery + Rebound

Empathy + Relevance

Escapism & Optimism

Triage + Information

Keep in mind: Phases aren’t mutually exclusive. As some people are moving from phase one to two, others will move from phase two to three.

Timing also depends on the country. For example, our research shows consumer phases in Italy are about 10 days ahead of consumer phases in the United States.
Plan your media mix and message to the moment.

The four phases are a useful mental model as you map relative investment and think about what might be most strategic for your industry and audience. Here, we imagine three very different industries planning ratios of messaging and media as of mid April:

**Restaurant**

0% Recovery + Rebound

40% Escapism + Optimism

50% Empathy + Relevance

10% Triage + Information

% Of Messaging Focus + Media Spend

- “We’re donating X% of profits to Feeding America.”
- “Summer barbecue recipes”
- “Ready to try something new?”
- “Sorry orders are late. Here’s why…”
- “We’re thanking our warehouse workers…”
- “Catering your summer reunion.”
- “Start your holiday gift list.”

**Big Box Retailer**

50% Triage + Information

5% Recovery + Rebound

50% Escapism + Optimism

40% Empathy + Relevance

% Of Messaging Focus + Media Spend

- “Now offering takeout and drive-thru!”
- “Mom. Teacher. Breadwinner. We can help with ‘chef.’”
- “Ready for a new summer outfit?”
- “We’re thanking our warehouse workers…”
- “Summer barbecue recipes”
- “Start your holiday gift list.”

**CPG**

0% Triage + Information

30% Empathy + Relevance

50% Escapism + Optimism

20% Recovery + Rebound

% Of Messaging Focus + Media Spend

- “We’re donating X% of profits to Feeding America.”
- “Summer barbecue recipes”
- “Ready to try something new?”
## Actions you can take at every phase.

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### Phase 1: Triage + Information
1. **Clearly communicate critical info**
   - First, if you’re open for business—even if it’s on different terms than before—make sure people know. Be proactive and clear.

### Phase 2: Empathy + Relevance
1. **Make sure the context for your ad is as inspiring as its message.**
   - People may be getting solemn updates about the health of their families and friends in some social feeds. If you’re trying to land a more hopeful or inspiring message, place it where inspiration is welcome, not insensitive.

### Phase 3: Escapism + Optimism
1. **Offer a vision for the future**
   - Shift your brand message from support in the moment to an inspirational vision for the future. Give people something to smile about today or look forward to tomorrow.

### Phase 4: Recovery + Rebound
1. **Address how long-term habits have changed**
   - Understand which shifts in consumer habits may be permanent. For example, people who tried novel online services for the first time in the last few months may stay open to them, like grocery delivery, even after a “return to normal.”

### Phase 1: Triage + Information
2. **Pivot existing creative to eliminate irrelevant content and offer immediate solutions**
   - Do an audit of in-market creative for unintentionally problematic imagery or concepts like large group gatherings. Share useful information, like how to stop the spread and take precautions if you visit a grocery store.

### Phase 2: Empathy + Relevance
2. **Highlight how you’re helping humanity**
   - Lean into your values and start with the genuine action you’re taking to help. Consider highlighting your support for hero employees, your local community, healthcare workers and/or impacted populations. Focus creative efforts around uplifting, human stories or helpful programs and offerings.

### Phase 3: Escapism + Optimism
2. **The future is more forgiving for controversial categories.**
   - While it might feel insensitive to advertise an overseas trip or a major family purchase in the current environment, putting it in the future tense can ease the tension. For example, shift “One-way flights to Hawaii” to “Beach dreaming? Plan a future trip to Honolulu.”

### Phase 4: Recovery + Rebound
2. **Understanding economic constraints, celebrate the return to normal**
   - Keep economic and health constraints in mind, but don’t be afraid to show hopeful ways people can or have already gotten back to a (new) normal. Lean on moments of meaning more than those of extravagance.

### Phase 1: Triage + Information
3. **Take advantage of cheaper auctions**
   - Digital media is flooded with usage right now. Platforms like Pinterest are seeing unprecedented engagement metrics and cheaper-than-normal auctions. Move planned TV or OOH dollars to digital to take advantage for the foreseeable future.

### Phase 2: Empathy + Relevance
3. **Reframe planned direct-response campaigns to deepen brand loyalty**
   - A more generic planned “Spring Sale Event!” can be reframed as a “Supporting Our Customers Event—Take 25% off.” Consider mid-funnel tactics to simultaneously elevate the brand and drive response.

### Phase 3: Escapism + Optimism
3. **Help them prepare for postponed life events**
   - Help consumers plan for a long-awaited “event season,” but remember to keep it in the context of the future. We’re seeing searches jump back up for events and event planning on Pinterest, but most are in the summer. Think: “perfect late summer wedding outfits” or “fall family reunion ideas.”

### Phase 4: Recovery + Rebound
3. **Be ready for a different holiday season**
   - As holiday media planning gets underway, be thoughtful about how consumers will feel differently. Q3/Q4 holidays will likely carry far more meaning than ever, with a strong desire for more conscious (though still very cautious) family gatherings, rituals, and moments.
Phase 1: Triage + Information

Almost all advertisers started here, but there’s a danger in getting stuck here for too long. Your audience is moving on.

1. Clearly communicate critical info
   First, if you’re open for business—even if it’s on different terms than before—make sure people know. Survey a representative sample of consumers to confirm they know what’s most important. For example, your restaurants are closed but the drive-thrus are still open, or your dealerships are closed but service stations are considered essential.

2. Pivot existing creative to eliminate irrelevant content and offer immediate solutions
   Do an audit of in-market creative for unintentionally problematic imagery or concepts like large group gatherings. Swap for existing, alternative creative. Consider using your social and paid media to share useful information, like how to stop the spread and take precautions if you visit a grocery store.

3. Take advantage of cheaper auctions
   Digital media is flooded with usage right now. Platforms like Pinterest are seeing unprecedented engagement metrics and cheaper-than-normal auctions. Move planned TV or OOH dollars to digital to take advantage for the foreseeable future.
Phase 2: Empathy + Relevance

Ads should offer timely, relevant solutions—but also solace. People want to feel seen first; then they’ll be open to how you can help.

1. Make sure the context for your ad is as inspiring as its message

People may be getting solemn updates about the health of their families and friends in some social feeds. If you’re trying to land a more hopeful or inspiring message, place it where inspiration is welcome, not insensitive.

2. Highlight how you’re helping humanity

Lean into your values and start with the genuine action you’re taking to help. Consider highlighting your support for hero employees, your local community, healthcare workers and/or impacted populations. Focus creative efforts around uplifting, human stories or helpful programs and offerings.

3. Reframe planned direct-response campaigns to deepen brand loyalty

A more generic planned "Spring Sale Event!" can be reframed as a "Supporting Our Customers Event—Take 25% off." Consider mid-funnel tactics to simultaneously elevate the brand and drive response.
Phase 3: Escapism + Optimism

Consumers are escaping the present by planning for the future. They’re seeking inspiration—something to look forward to. Your brand can be just the thing they were looking for.

1. Offer a vision for the future
Shift your brand message from support in the moment to an inspirational vision for the future. Give people something to smile about today or look forward to tomorrow.

2. The future is more forgiving for controversial categories
While it might feel insensitive to advertise an overseas trip or a major family purchase in the current environment, putting it in the future tense can ease the tension. For example, shift “One-way flights to Hawaii” to “Beach dreaming? Plan a future trip to Honolulu.”

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Phase 4: Recovery + Rebound

Things are starting to go “back to normal.” People want to celebrate, but they’ll also expect brands to reflect their “new normal.”

1. Address how long-term habits have changed
Understand which shifts in consumer habits may be permanent. For example, people who tried novel online services for the first time in the last few months may stay open to them, like grocery delivery, even after a “return to normal.”

2. Understanding economic constraints, celebrate the return to normal
Keep economic and health constraints in mind, but don’t be afraid to show hopeful ways people can or have already gotten back to a (new) normal. Lean on moments of meaning more than those of extravagance.

3. Be ready for a different holiday season
As holiday media planning gets underway, be thoughtful about how consumers will feel differently. Q3/Q4 holidays will likely carry far more meaning than ever, with a strong desire for more conscious (though still very cautious) family gatherings, rituals and moments.
How Pinterest can help.
We want to invest in you. These programs are available now, and your Pinterest partner is standing by to walk you through it.

Repurpose with Purpose
A weekly download of consumer insights enable your business to quickly adapt your existing creative and activation strategy. Qualifying campaigns also unlock opportunities for Creative Strategy "Repurpose with Purpose" Workshops, paired with media incentives and measurement support.

Phase 1:
Triage + Information

Phase 2:
Empathy + Relevance

Future Now
Leveraging our forward-looking insights, partnership teams will help guide new campaign development that executes on one of two objectives: 1) help Pinners plan for the future they want, 2) help brands adapt to the future normal of their category. Qualifying campaigns will also unlock opportunities for Creative Strategy 'Future now' Workshops, paired with media incentives and measurement support.

Phase 3:
Escapism + Optimism

Phase 4:
Recovery + Rebound

Hard to believe people are in the future, now? Take The Atlantic’s word for it. Check out this article about how Pinners are escaping to the future.

“The Strange Pleasure of Planning a Post-Pandemic Vacation
For people hoping to travel after the crisis passes, Pinterest helps them envision a future that feels impossible to imagine right now.
HANNAH GIBSON, APRIL 14, 2020

“Whenever I’m feeling anxious, the best thing I can do is to plan something ... At some point, I will get to Vancouver. Right now, I can travel around the world— on Pinterest.”
Lasting changes in phase four.

Based on search behavior on Pinterest, we anticipate some industries will see permanent changes in consumer behavior after months of isolation. We can help. Please reach out to learn more.

Retail
For brick and mortar stores, customers will expect a new level of cleanliness. Share the steps you’ve taken to deep-clean your stores; be public about how consumer safety and cleanliness is a company value; consider making products like hand sanitizer, gloves or masks available in your stores for added comfort.

Grocery
Now that more people have experienced the convenience of grocery delivery or store pickup, many will never look back. Meet the demand by connecting online recipe searches with subscription services, frozen meals or boxed grocery delivery.

Restaurant
People may be slow to leave their homes, but they could be more open to ordering delivery than they were during lockdown. If you reopen or expand your services, make sure customers are aware of what’s available in their locations.

Health
Trends toward self-care, vitamins, fitness, etc. will likely increase as people realize the importance of establishing healthy habits to fight the virus.

Fashion + Beauty
During isolation, augmented reality options like AR try-on and foundation matching went from cutting-edge alternatives to expected solutions. Be prepared for a new level of enthusiasm for no-contact beauty and fashion shopping.

Automotive
If people are nervous about public transport or air travel, they may purchase, lease or rent cars instead. That said, physical dealerships should plan to evolve as ‘public showcasing’ could deter germ-conscious customers. Accelerate the adoption of augmented reality auto shopping online and in-app.

Financial Services
We’ve seen surges in searches for financial guidance. As the economy continues to fluctuate post-COVID, people are seeking rock steady, well-known partners that they know they can trust. That said, be wary of showing up in “insensitive” contexts, e.g. between posts from friends about hard times.

Travel
Inspiration and upper-funnel marketing will be the safest message at first, as travel anxiety could continue. Visualize the travel experience—don’t stop at price.

Telecommunications
Some people will keep working from home, or work from home more often. Digitization of home will continue. 5G will be in high demand after some experienced bandwidth strain during the pandemic.

Entertainment
Major motion pictures could shift release methods, as people are spoiled for straight-to-VOD platforms or short theatrical runs. People who used OTT services during the pandemic will have a choice to make: keep the subscription or cancel now that things are headed back to normal? Give them a reason to stay.
Consumers are asking for inspiration, now more than ever.

They need brands to paint a clear vision of what’s to come, with empathy, optimism and a sense of intellectual generosity.

They are depending on you to share the leadership, the inspiration and the ideas they need—not just to cope, but to re-imagine, with more conviction and certainty than ever—how they can create a life they love.