Chapter 2:
Walking Through the Uncanny Valley
This past weekend I saw a socially distant 40th birthday gathering posted on Instagram.

While I had previously seen others, this one made the evening news. Unsurprisingly, the guests were spaced out well beyond arm’s reach around the driveway and my first thought was, “Oh, fun, Steve turned 40 and they got him a ‘cake’ made of toilet paper, that’s clever.” Had you asked your 2019 self if you’d be celebrating a 2020 birthday, wedding, or other life event with a handful of people spaced 6 feet apart, you’d have told yourself you were crazy. And yet here we are, celebrating our lives in an unfamiliar fashion.

Since we published Chapter One just 2 weeks ago, our world has continued to evolve. Suddenly, states are talking about opening up while new infection hotspots are popping up. The crystal ball on when this will be over is incredibly fogged. This is leaving our respondents, and each of us, with an undercurrent of anxiety, creating feelings of boredom and of everything feeling “flat.” It’s also creeping into people’s dreams.

One constant is that people are still stocking up, in an ever-widening range of categories. Asked when they are planning to resume activities outside of the home and a difference of opinions emerge. This, of course, will have implications on how quickly the economy can recover.

We continue talking to our qual participants every week. They are becoming familiar faces and we pick up the conversation right where we left off the prior week. Sometimes we ask them a question they wish their “next week self” could answer. We hear the latest about baby goats, guitar lessons, and bar hopping inside the house. We’ve already celebrated one person’s retirement and have several birthdays coming in May.

Our survey data is fascinating as well. Data arrives every day allowing us to trend 3 and 7-day data from n=1,250 per week with a Spanish-language boost, giving us a day by day look at how behaviors, attitudes and feelings are evolving not just with gen pop but within several sub-segments. Chapter 2 focuses on the recently unemployed – over 30 million as of April 30th.

We’ve worked to give you data that’s only a few days old as of the publication date. This enables you to be current, delivering rapid response to keep up with consumers as some remain sheltered in place while others return to some semblance of their former daily lives. Those lives may sound normal but appear unrecognizable thanks to the changes imposed to balance public health and economic needs.

Chapter 3 will be available on May 14 as a webinar, presented by Quirk’s. Please join Lisa Osborne and myself as we share “Now. Next. Future: Navigating Your Business to a New Normal.” We will share the latest data and what it means for your business, as well as recommendations on how to recession-proof your brand based on best practices from the past.

–Rob Volpe, CEO, Ignite 360 | April 30, 2020
CHAPTER 2: WALKING THROUGH THE UNCANNY VALLEY

“9/11 was sort of a very fast event. This almost feels like it’s happening in slow motion right now. We’ve been at this a month, at least here... it’s going to go at least another two or three weeks. And I don’t even believe that. I think it’s going to go on longer than that.” – Kelvin, 55, tech sales and marketing executive, suburban Boston area (April 8)

Every 20 years or so we experience an event so sudden and shocking it creates a “where were you when…” moment. Thinking back on those events from the past 100 years – the crash of Wall St, Pearl Harbor, JFK’s assassination, the Challenger disaster, 9/11 – all were sudden events. Like those landmark moments in history, the Coronavirus pandemic is going to have a similar, lasting impact. Unlike those events, as Kelvin said, we’re experiencing the pandemic in slow motion, rather than a sudden BANG! It’s like the third stage of isolation that astronauts, submariners, and polar researchers experience. We’re like the frog in the pot, except we know the heat is slowly rising and we’re not sure when it’s going to cool off. And that has us worried.

The ‘unrecognizable normal’ that we now find ourselves in reminds me of NYC right after 9/11. Walking home from the Manhattan Bridge, down Flatbush Avenue, recognizable elements of life were continuing. This was minutes within the first tower’s collapse. The street looked the same, but something was different. It was surreal.

Today, we still have many normal things, but they are unrecognizable. Traffic is extremely light. People line up six feet apart to enter most stores while wearing face masks. We gather outside people’s closed windows to see them in person. Some are fortunate to be working remotely. Same tasks, just via a screen that will never fully replicate the experience of being together in person. Some workers are dubbed essential and take on great risks to perform their job.

“Never did I think I’d be dodging people – walking down the street, moving away from people. But we have to be diligent.” – Brad, 44, management consultant, New York City (April 20)

We’re moving through an “Uncanny Valley” – a phrase first developed by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori in the 1970s. Mori recognized that, while people liked industrial-looking robots that had some human characteristics, the opposite was also true – people are very uncomfortable with human-like creations that display robot-like characteristics. The gap between these two likes he named The Uncanny Valley. You’ve probably fallen into an Uncanny Valley yourself if you’ve seen a movie or video game with bad human CGI. It leaves you creeped out. (The Polar Express did that for me.)

Uncanny Valley

Image sources: Shutterstock, Reuters, Wikipedia, Shutterstock
CHAPTER 2: WALKING THROUGH THE UNCANNY VALLEY

The Uncanny Valley has become a guiding principle for AI and video game developers to make sure users feel comfortable with their creations. The principle also applies to landscapes and environments. A design can and should look totally fake or photo-realistic. Anything in between and it’s disconcerting, like how having a zombie come at you gives you the willies. Something just feels off.

More recently, the Uncanny Valley is inspiring artists and architects alike as we wrestle with what’s real and what’s unreal.

Humans learned over the eons to recognize what’s “normal.” As a result, when things aren’t as they should be, like a zombie -- it looks kind of human but doesn’t move or sound like a human -- it sets off our base instincts, like fear. Since zombies aren’t slow-walking down our street, our rational mind can kick in, soothing flight or flight responses, modulating our fears into a form of low-grade anxiety.

And that’s where we are today, in a new Uncanny Valley. Not filled with zombies and creepy robots, but with a normal that’s as recognizable as it is unrecognizable. There’s a glitch in the system that has sent us on this journey. A virus. We’re adapting as best we can. As quickly as we can. But the slow-burn of the pandemic is at odds with our fast-paced, instant gratification 21st century lifestyle. The world around us looks the same but doesn’t operate quite the same way. People pull their dogs away instead of allowing them to approach strangers for a friendly hello. Cityscapes are eerily empty at times when they should be packed with traffic and people living life. We share drinks and meals with loved ones over video calls. (Let’s face it, they don’t even do that on Star Trek.) The shelves at our typically well-stocked grocery stores are still bare in spots. That makes us unsettled, having to hunt and gather our food, which keeps us at the base of Maslow’s hierarchy.

“Everyone is talking about it. The idea that the normal isn’t going to be normal. It’s going to be a new normal and you don’t know what that is and that puts you in an anxious place.”
– Barb, 68, retired (former pastor), San Antonio (April 20)

“I’m not out there like I like to be...to do my gardening...I can but it’s just the fear, all the paranoia.”
– Lusi, 65, retired nutrition professor, Chicago (April 24)

“Once you start integrating the idea of a normal and you understand that what is normal is no longer normal.”
– Jenika, 29, surgical assistant, suburban Atlanta (April 17)

Maslow’s hierarchy

“The stuff feels surreal. I kind of feel flat. Not depressed, not sad, not terribly overwhelmed, but it’s constantly there. Just knowing that my life has changed... (the pandemic is) just complicating small things which aren’t— they aren’t problems. Many people have real problems in their life, these are like, inconveniences. But it’s stressful.”
– Jenika, 29, surgical assistant, suburban Atlanta (April 17)

THE BIG IDEA

As consumers walk through the Uncanny Valley, companies need to recognize this altered state of their consumers’ anxiety and deliver products, services, and messages that acknowledge and also help alleviate their discomfort.

Let’s continue our journey...
The Altered State of Dreams and Nightmares

Coronavirus has been impacting sleep, in good and bad ways.

“I’ve been sleeping a lot more and it’s not a ritual, but I’ve been sleeping more. Before, noise would wake me up cause I’m a light sleeper. Now, there’s nothing going on near my apartment. I used to get six hours ‘cause I was a light sleeper and I’d always wake up. Now, I’ve been sleeping closer to eight hours. Sometimes I wake up and I go back to bed ‘cause I don’t have that much to do. So why not sleep a little bit more?”
–Jennifer, 40, unemployed event planner, New York City (April 29)

“I was hoping for, you know, like when I retire, I wanna sleep to 9 o’clock, see what that feels like. [Now] I can’t, I can’t, I can’t. I don’t know if it’s something sub-consciously. I’m consciously worried. I talk to people... they tell me [they] can’t sleep either. I’m like ‘oh, okay.’ So it’s maybe something in the back of our minds, the change.”
–Lusi, 65, retired nutrition professor, Chicago (April 24)

“I don’t know where it’s coming from. I love it. When [my mom] passed away [a few years ago I never] had a good cry session. She was one of my best friends. But her being back in [my] dreams is nice because it’s just good to see her healthy again, and happy again. And we bicker in the dreams. It’s fun.”
–Brad, 44, married, management consultant, New York City (April 20)

“I went to bed the other night and in the middle of the night I get up and start washing my hands and face and in my head I’m in my bed and I’m taking my hand and I put my hand on my... Oh my God. I put my hand on my face but I’m in bed.”
–Gail, 61, retired as of last week (former government employee), Richmond, VA (April 29)

Simmering beneath the surface, the next challenge is starting to come to a boil: will our food supply chain hold up?
Concerns about a food shortage, particularly meat, hasn’t driven purchase frequency for fresh meat, poultry, or seafood

“I believe the next shortage we’re going to see is meat. But when you hear all the stories about infections sweeping through these processing plants, I mean, how can you not at some point start having shortages of meat. Now they say we have enough…I didn’t realize this. We have huge amounts of meat in cold storage in this country, but the problem will probably be, you’ll be able to get that meat it just won’t be processed enough. So I’ve already seen in the store, finding boneless chicken thighs is harder, but look for your regular old chicken thighs with a bone and no problem.”

– Kelvin, 55, tech sales & marketing executive, suburban Boston area (April 24)

“We now have about two months’ worth of food saved up and call me somebody who’s overreacting or whatever. Fine. But if I’m wrong and the food chain doesn’t break down, we’ve got food that we’ll eat over time. If I’m right, partially right, then you know, we’re fine. There’s no downside. The meat supply chain is really having some problems that they’re reporting on now. It’s just a matter of time until the farmers are hit the same way. The field workers start getting sick and they’re not able to harvest the crops or the truck drivers who are transporting the food start to get sick and there are shortages in shipment. If it gets really bad in the grocery store and people aren’t showing up to work, they’re the breakdowns. So that has me, it’s the unemployment right now and the food chain, that has me most concerned right now this week.”

– Brad, 44, management consultant, New York City (April 20)

The pandemic is affecting people on conscious and sub-conscious levels. Honest information is important to help people process and make decisions for themselves. If you are in production and more product is coming soon, let them know, like Cottonelle did recently.
Broadly, people are still stocking up and there’s an uptick in spending in most categories. The stock-up mentality is best reflected in pantry items including rice, pasta, and sauces; 40% stating they typically buy this category once a week but 49% stating they purchased in the past week.

"At this point, I do want to stock up a little bit more on non-perishable foods just to make sure I have stuff here, just canned stuff, that kind of thing. So my goal is to start making sure... I don't foresee this ending soon... this is the world we live in right now. With so many things that I never foresaw that could happen, I just want to be prepared." – Jenika, 29, surgical assistant, suburban Atlanta (April 8)

Dairy products continue an uptick but not nearly as significant as we reported in Chapter 1. People are buying salty snacks (12% more purchased in past week than typical pre-coronavirus week) and sweet treats (up 17% over a typical week). Toilet paper continues to fly off shelves (up 25%).

Incidental purchases, such as physical copies of magazines and newspapers, are down by 41% from stated behavior prior to the pandemic. Perhaps these are considered expendable as people are more budget-conscious or could it be due to people’s desire to get through the checkout lane while touching as little as possible?

What would you do if you were unemployed during the pandemic? Having been laid off twice in my career, I can say that unexpected unemployment is very much an Uncanny Valley situation. The world around you is going about its normal day but you don’t represent the normal since you are still in your pajamas, have maybe brushed your teeth, and are wondering how you are going to make ends meet on your reduced income and still catch The View.

If you were unemployed, how would your shopping differ? As the numbers of newly unemployed continues to rise, we looked at their purchase behaviors compared to the general group. Rather than explore whether or not they were buying in categories, we analyzed if they are spending more or less since money becomes a worry when you’ve lost an income in your household.

"I'm cutting back. I have money, but I'm saving that money for essentials and things that are coming up, for food and the other bills that I'm not able to do that with. So that [mortgage relief] kind of buys me three months of not worrying about my mortgage, which is my biggest expense. And also, in a way, since I used to spend so much money going out to like Starbucks, like the juices, like I was doing going out with friends. So those things I'm not doing now. So, I feel in a way that's kind of balancing out. So, I'm not going out and I'm not spending like I used to. I'm also not making anything, but in that sense, that's helped out, and in a natural way. So, I looked at the essentials what I need and what I don't need. I canceled some subscriptions to things, to some magazines that I never read. I'm not buying those expensive juices that I used to that I couldn't get on delivery. And I did do calculations of what's my expenditure this month, and what can I cut out, and how long will the money I have in the bank right now last without taking anything or having to transfer from my other accounts? Because it's going to be a few months."

– Jennifer, 40, unemployed event planner, New York City (April 22)
"LET THEM EAT CAKE": SHOPPING REALITIES FOR THE RECENTLY UNEMPLOYED

With over 30 million people unemployed, they are showing up in our data, giving us a sense of how this important consumer group is approaching their shopping. However, in the absolute, these may not be seen fully in sales as the total number of shoppers remains large and people remain in a stock-up mentality. Think of this as the canary in the coal mine for where people might make some trade-offs.

**THOUGHT STARTERS FOR YOUR BUSINESS OR BRAND**

Purchase cycles in some categories may be disrupted due to more extreme stock-up behavior and resultant longer consumption periods. When analyzing sales data keep this dynamic in mind and consider adjusting promotion schedules and marketing spend to better align to this current behavior.

How people evaluate which brands or products are worth spending extra on changes during an economic downturn. Not only do you need to be worth it from an affordability perspective, but you have to deliver something of value to the consumer – better quality, better flavor, a better experience, or better reassurance that everything will be ok – in comparison to your competition.

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Among the recently unemployed, a higher percentage indicated they decreased their spend on breakfast cereal and granola a little (15% v 10% gen pop) along with a lower percentage who indicated they spent more in the past week (25% v. 28%). This stood out as cereal is a category that can be either affordable or expensive, depending on whether it’s on deal and which brands you buy.

Pantry items like rice, pasta and sauces are the go-to foods in lean times due to being less expensive, filling and eaten hot, which helps the sense of satiety. Compared to gen pop, there was a 23% increase of the recently unemployed who were increasing their spend in this category.

‘Quarantinis’ and Zoom Happy Hours are all the rage right now. The alcohol category seems split at the moment. 15% of our unemployed cohort say they decreased their alcohol purchases ‘a lot’ in the past week, compared to 8% of gen pop. Meanwhile, 19% of gen pop claim they increased their spend a little, while only 14% of the unemployed increased their purchases of alcohol.

When we asked about purchases of products with CBD and THC, a greater percentage (18%) of recently unemployed were decreasing purchases compared to 10% increasing. Perhaps, like alcohol, they stocked up earlier in the pandemic?

Soft drinks saw an even larger disparity in people who said they were decreasing their spend a lot. 14% of the recently unemployed were cutting their spend a lot compared to 8% of gen pop. While soft drinks have been challenged in recent years with people shifting to sparkling and still water, financial needs may start driving category declines even faster.

The sweet tooth is being indulged by everyone, but more so by the unemployed with 30% more increasing their spend on sweet treats and desserts than gen pop. In the salty snack aisle, a greater percent of recently unemployed were decreasing their spend a lot (18%) in the category compared to gen pop (11%) Let them eat cake, indeed.

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Unemployed since past 1 month, n=249; Total category spend increase/decrease responses, n=6,547; Gen Pop = The US adult population aged 18+ representative of age, gender, region and ethnicity.
Speaking of leaders that may say incredulous things, we took that same group of people unemployed in the past month and looked at who they wanted to hear from for information on the financial and economic impact and compared it to our gen pop responses.

Among both groups, State Governors are a source people want to hear from about the financial and economic impact with 67% of total selecting the governors and 48% selecting the President. Over one-third of gen pop were not interested in hearing from the President.

It may seem counter-intuitive but the recently unemployed seem to lose interest compared to gen pop in hearing about the financial and economic impact from sources other than leading elected officials. Industry, like banks, which could assist with mortgage and credit card payment relief are not being turned to compared to gen pop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources Interested in Hearing from on Financial and Economic Impact</th>
<th>Total Gen Pop</th>
<th>Last Month Unemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The President</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Government Officials</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your State Governor</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Government Officials, not the Governor</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Organizations, such as WHO or UN</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, Industry Associations</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Banking institutions, such as The Federal Reserve</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Securities &amp; Exchange Commission (SEC) (stock market)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banks or Insurance companies</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>US Senator or US representative</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local city or county officials (eg. mayor, sheriff)</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>58%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

THOUGHT STARTER FOR YOUR BUSINESS OR BRAND

There’s something to be said for being honest and having a penchant for action in a crisis. However, if your life conditions have been suddenly impacted, like losing your job, then you care a lot less. Building and applying empathy with your core consumer will help connect more authentically with your audience.
As we continue through the Uncanny Valley, the emotions we feel change daily depending on what’s in the news and in our own world.

What’s noticeable however, is that, since the beginning of April, the number of people feeling heightened anxiety has decreased by 15% points while those reporting being happy increased by 17% points. Our feeling of being safe also increased by 15% points to 71% of respondents.

These shifts are coming as we grow accustomed to our new shelter-in-place lifestyles and we pass the “worst week is yet to come” in many major metropolitan areas. Sunny spring weather might be helping moods too.

Peeling apart the numbers further, considering our recently unemployed, and a different story starts to unfold.

Anxiety levels are 30% points higher than gen pop while the people reporting being happy is 26% points lower than gen pop. Safety is only 5% points lower at the higher level but nearly a third more are only feeling moderately safe compared to gen pop.

Don’t take for granted that your consumer will be happy and feeling great as things open up. Some consumers are beginning to feel a different impact from the pandemic that may not lift as quickly. Communications should be modulated accordingly.
GEN POP IS GETTING INTO THE GROOVE
AND OFF THE COUCH

At the beginning of April, it looked like we were a nation of couch potatoes. Going for walks, exercising at home, all looked flat in terms of any increases or, in the cases of taking walks, actually declined.

As the month has progressed and we’ve gone through this lockdown, we’ve adapted our indoor behaviors. Comparing stated pre-coronavirus behaviors with past week behaviors, we note the following differences …

"Because of the shelter-in-place I’ve got so much time now. Instead of just wasting time around the house. And just watching Netflix and YouTube, maybe I can take this time to either learn the guitar or learn a language or learn how to cook better. I think a lot of people are taking advantage of this self-discovery because of the virus shelter-in-place."

– Larry, 66, retired project manager, SF Bay Area (April 22)

Weekly cooking or baking from home is up 30% compared to pre-pandemic. Nearly half of our respondents now report buying take out or delivery in the past week, an increase of 64%.

Playing video games is up 24% and reading books is up 38%

Subscription services are now reported in 40% of households, up from 35% just a month ago. Urban residents are driving the growth with over 52% reporting new subscriptions.

New kid on the block, Quibi, while still small, seems to be gaining traction, now up from 1% to 2% of households in just a few weeks. Heavy advertising helping subscriber acquisition?

Exercising at home was minimal at the beginning of April but now it’s increased by 19%. Going for walks had declined but now is up 10%.

We’ve also gotten crafty and creative…
Crafts are up 88%. Creative projects are up 76%.
ACTIVITY ADAPTATION: THE OLD DOG IS LEARNING NEW TRICKS

What’s amazing beyond the increases is the sheer number of people who are now actually engaging in these activities. One-third are getting crafty! Nearly one-half are buying take out/delivery! Just over half are reading books! And nearly half are playing video games! Plus, gambling has also jumped pretty significantly. We may not be willing to risk exposure to a virus but we will risk a game of chance.

What’s encouraging about this burst of activities is that they are more representative of higher levels on Maslow’s Hierarchy. We’re adapting to our new situation and making the best of it. People are still struggling with finding food, but we are reaching a place where we can let creative activities re-emerge as we weather this storm. It helps make the unrecognizable seem a little more familiar, which helps us cross to the other side of the Uncanny Valley.

“...It’s insane. Insane how bored we are now. I noticed my parents, they’ve been trying to get into [video] games too. They were always against that. They never played games and then they saw me and my sister play...and then my dad started playing games with us. So I’m like ‘oh, okay’ like I guess this is really happening where even my parents are getting involved in this. And then my dad was like, “Hey, let’s go buy a console.” And then they bought a console, the new Xbox one. And I’m like “I’ve been playing for years and no one’s ever offered to play with me, but okay.” But now, since they’re bored, now that’s all they wanna do.”

– Marco, 20, student and part-time Home Depot employee, Sacramento, CA (April 13)
There remains a lot of suffering in the world. The pandemic and its effects are just starting to be felt. As our situation changes, the way we are communicated to, and what we are in the mood to see, hear and feel changes as well.

At the beginning of April, the tone people wanted was mostly helpful and informative. The elevated anxiety and uncertainty left people seeking information and reassurance. Advertisers delivered in an eerie, almost uncannily familiar way, as this compilation piece humorously shows.

“Helpful” remains the preferred tone but for the right category. There are other options too, as nostalgic is trending up along with an optimistic tone of looking toward the future. Funny or light-hearted toned messaging is volatile but also seems to be inching up. (data thru 4/28/20)

We noticed several categories where the trend lines were showing an increase in interest in hearing from them. While funny or light-hearted was overall a winner, with these categories, consumers are looking for something else.

**Desired Tone in Messaging, Measured Daily**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serious tone</th>
<th>Funny or light-hearted tone</th>
<th>Optimistic/looking to future</th>
<th>Nostalgic/looking back to times gone by</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
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<td>36%</td>
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<tr>
<td>44%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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**Messaging Tone Desired in Select Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Banks</th>
<th>Explaining brands/product or service features</th>
<th>Serious tone</th>
<th>Nostalgic/looking back to times gone</th>
<th>Empathetic tone</th>
<th>Some other style or tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home or car insurance providers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fuel and energy providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soft drinks brands/manufacturers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Software brands/manufacturers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel and tourism companies, travel agencies, tour operators or vacation destinations</td>
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Given our slow move from pandemic lockdown to attempting to get the economy going, and given the number of people out of work, a shift in tone for banks and insurance companies as well as energy providers to a more serious, empathetic approach is desired. Consumers also seek information explaining the features of products and services.

**THOUGHT STARTER FOR YOUR BUSINESS OR BRAND**

Know your category and the type of message tone that will resonate with your audience. Everyone may be doing funny, but it may just never work for your business. Know thyself and apply it to your marketing.
A TALE OF TWO JENNIFERS

“We are so just done. I want to get out of this house. I want to go and eat someplace else, not my house. I don’t care what it is. I would probably even go to McDonald’s right now, and I loathe McDonald’s.” – Jennifer, 41, stay at home mom, rural South Carolina (April 24)

“You can’t just wait! If the whole country would just suck it up for two months, maybe three months and yes, I get there’s people that are unemployed people that can’t eat. I get that, maybe I’m in a position where I’m okay right now and there’s some people that aren’t and need to get back to work. I get that need but at the same time, if you rush that and you go back to work, it’s impossible that there’s not going to be second wave if that’s what we do now. It’s going to happen. They haven’t tested everyone and they’re still going to go back to these environments where not everyone’s going to be wearing masks and gloves. People are going to re-infect each other. That’s what I think. I think it’s not very wise, especially when you have Fauci and all these virologists that, that’s what they do, they studied this and they’re saying it’s not okay, not yet. And everyone’s so rushed to get back. I get it, everyone wants to get back, but is it smart? Because in the long run, if you get back too soon then it’s going to be worse. Then we’re going to go through this all over again. It’s going to be like a cycle. A hamster wheel.” – Jennifer, 40, unemployed event planner, New York City (April 22)

Those two quotes pretty well sum up what we keep hearing from people. Some are so frustrated, bored, and tired of being pent up, they are ready to get out and do things. And not without some caution and social distancing, however they just need to get outside and start to resume their normal life. Others are not willing to take the chance just yet. Regardless of their employment status, they are acting out of an abundance of caution and not wanting to make things worse.

Inevitably, all 50 states will relax their stay-at-home requirements and we will be given the option to mingle, dine out, gather in venues large and small. While it’s still early in that process, we asked respondents when they would eat at a restaurant, do take out/delivery, and/or cook/bake from scratch.

It seems that people are growing ever more eager to do take out and delivery while dining in is an interest, it’s not advancing in a positive direction. Probably due to limited number of places opening up just yet.

It’s hard for people to imagine what it will be like. It seems like there’s an interest or desire to cook more at home. Time will tell how that sticks once more places open up. We’re setting up the data to look at just the open states to see how the data compares and what, if any, reset might arise. More to come on that.

Thought Starter for Your Business or Brand

People are craving connection but there seems to be hesitancy in long engagements or being around a lot of other people. How can you offer take out or delivery in your own way that lets you engage with your customer but lets them retain the sense of being safe?

Many are doing this through promises of ‘no contact’ delivery and leave-at-your-doorstep convenience. Consider other ways to ensure safety such as communicating disinfecting and hygiene protocols, the promise of sealed packaging that assures no tampering, or other visible cues that reduce fear and anxiety around virus contagion.
FINAL THOUGHTS

And let’s not forget haircuts!

Many people are clamoring to get their hair cut, colored, corrected. Of the four major regions in the United States, can you guess which region had the most responses of “right away” for going to a hairdresser? Which region was more likely to indicate “not in the near future”? The answers are below.

Coming out of the Uncanny Valley, the unrecognizable will start to take shape again. Puppies will be allowed to say hello to strangers. Cityscapes will be filled with people and modes of transport (and all the noise and air pollution that accompanies it). Or will some of us stay in shelter-in-place long enough that the uncanny becomes the familiar, and what was normal puts us into a new Uncanny Valley.

RIGHT AWAY!
The West 16%
followed by the Northeast at 12%

NOT IN THE NEAR FUTURE?
The Northeast 21%
followed by the south at 19%

Before you go, meet our respondents on the following pages.

Thank you for taking the time to read this latest installment of Navigating to a New Normal. We know you have a lot on your plates right now and have a lot of information coming at you. Hopefully we’ve shed some light on new ways of thinking and adapting to the new normal.

Chapter 3: Now, Next, Future… will be presented first as a webinar in conjunction with Quirk’s on Thursday, May 14 at 12 E/9 P.

We’d love for you to join us.
“I DON’T WANT TO HEAR CORONAVIRUS. I JUST WANT TO SHOP. I JUST WANT TO GO OUT. I WANT TO GO TO THE MOVIES. I WANT TO RESUME LIFE. NORMAL LIFE, NOT LIFE AFTER CORONA. NO, I WANT MY NORMAL LIFE BACK. I’M JUST DONE.”

– JENNIFER, APRIL 24, 5 WEEKS SHELTER IN PLACE

JENNIFER
Rural South Carolina, 41 years old, married mother of 3 with her disabled father living with her family.

“It really was that week when Disney and Universal… all of a sudden they’re like, ‘We’re closing the parks.’ And we’re going, ‘Disney’s closing.’ It’s huge. That’s when it really starts to hit you. When you think about this big massive operation that’s going to close. And the same day we start hearing from Scouts, ‘Oh we’re stopping meetings.’ I’m seeing friends over in Italy and in Britain saying, ‘You guys need to start taking this seriously. Y’all need to stock up.’ So we said, ‘Okay.’”

“My husband and I went to the grocery store on [March] 22nd. We went to a Walmart, and I felt like I had walked into a grocery store in Russia back during the Cold War.”

“And then this last drop where [Disney’s] like, ‘We’re closed indefinitely.’ That, when they did that, that was just such a huge blow to me.”

Jennifer, a travel agent specializing in Disney trips, immediately went to work rebooking and refunding her client’s long-planned vacations. “I’m kind of an empath where I’m feeling it with them because not only did they put a lot of work into planning, but I’ve put a lot of work into planning it for them… So that was kind of hard. I told my husband, I’ve got to get out of the house, come with me. And we walked up the road and we went on a three mile walk and I’ve got to get it out. I’ve got to get away from this. I got to get away from my computer.

A planner, Jennifer laid out all of her food in the house. She planned meals for 4 weeks of shelter-in-place.

Adorable baby goats began arriving by our second interview. The 26 kids are for shows or breeding. Rumors of a meat shortage in the fall has forced her to consider saving the less desirable males for meat.

Rural living means being, “cut off from town. When we come home, it’s just us, that’s it.” A low case count in their county and normal traffic on their rural road makes her yearn for her normal life again.

“I’m getting so sick of certain things that I had planned for four weeks ago. It’s like Chopped, I’m like, what can I make with [this] that’s not my normal?”

– JENNIFER
“HOW CAN I TELL SOMEONE WHO’S FAMILY IS DYING… HAVE FAITH? WHAT I DO SAY IS GIVE HIM A CHANCE, TELL HIM EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO. YELL AT HIM. GET EVERYTHING OUT AND ASK HIM TO FILL YOU WITH PEACE.”

—FRANCIA

“EVERYDAY, AS I TELL MY DAUGHTER, WE ARE ONE DAY CLOSER TO THIS BEING OVER.”

—FRANCIA

FRANCIA

Minneapolis suburbs, working mother, finishing school, also the caretaker for her husband.

“I always thought that if you went to an evangelical church you would have to wear long skirts, you wouldn’t be able to wear make-up. When I went for the first time, they were just university students and you could see how happy they all were, and I said, ‘This is where I need to be.’”

Originally from Colombia, Francia’s grandmother wasn’t happy about her leaving the Catholic church. Here mom told all of Francia’s cousins not to hang out with her, that she had gone crazy.

“I started praying in [my walk-in] closet because it was a place without distractions...Now, when I’m in a bad mood, my husband says to me, Francia, go pray, you’re getting crabby, go to the closet!...I cannot live without my faith.”

After her father-in-law [a hospital worker] told her that this will peak in June and probably last for another 12 months she said, “I started to feel hopeless, like in a dead end street, but I know if I become hopeless so will my daughter so I needed to talk to God and tell him I need help, I need peace, I need strength, and need to know that this will end and everything will be the same.”

Grocery shopping is strange. Before, she would smile at the people she passed. But now, people can’t see her smile because of her mask.

Francia never felt like she had time between work, school and home. Now she misses her rushed mornings and actually going to work.

An avid cook, Francia is making more comfort foods. She is using a fancy pressure cooker she’d bought years ago and had never taken out of the box.

"EVERYDAY, AS I TELL MY DAUGHTER, WE ARE ONE DAY CLOSER TO THIS BEING OVER.”

—FRANCIA
“There’s a different quality of conversations at 6 ft. than at 3. If I feel like I’m shouting at you, I’m not likely to be as intimate. It changes what we talk about and the way we talk.”

–Barb, April 3rd

Barb
San Antonio (recently moved from northern California), 68 years old, Living with her husband and two cats

“We recently moved to San Antonio. We have a son and three granddaughters here and we just thought it would be good to be near them. We were just working really hard to get to know the area where we live – taking drives, going to different events, going to different towns nearby. A lot of that has changed. We have a couple of neighbors that we have been getting to know and we have lunch with them every other Friday. I’m missing that and exploring. This town has the Riverwalk and all the museums downtown – I was looking forward to exploring that.”

“It feels like I’m not engaged with the calendar the way I might have been in the past. [On Easter] I’m a person who traditionally over the years would have made a big dinner, but I didn’t even go to the store. It was a weird holiday in that kind of way for me. I’m a [retired] pastor and holy week has been a big part of my life for many years and I didn’t even participate online until yesterday.”

“It’s ominous…it’s not gonna go away anytime soon. That means the social distancing and the rigmarole of putting on a mask and all that stuff isn’t going to go away anytime soon. Or we’re just gonna quit all that and accept the fact that we are going to get sick and the people we care about are going to get sick.”

“We’re RV-ers at least part of the time. We’ve been in all 49 states in the last four years. We’d normally be leaving in June and be gone for several months, but we don’t have a plan. You just can’t plan now.”

–Barb
"I’ve just always felt very much like an international citizen. Travel has always been really important to me…connecting with places and people that are different.” Adventure is Kelsey’s motto. She studied in China and managed the U.S. ski team’s logistics in the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics. She was a cook for a professional sports team, and also bartends.

"My last night at work was the day before they found the first community spread. It was in (two) bar workers, just up the street from where I work. So I think I got that early – “Alright, get your head in the game, because it’s here, and it’s close.”

"I love grocery shopping. (Pre-virus) if I was in an area near a grocery store, I’d be like ‘Oh I’ll just stop in, to see if there’s anything good…just for fun.’ Yesterday, my boyfriend wanted to go to the grocery store. I was like ‘Hang on, I have to make a plan.’ If I do a trip, we’re going to do it all in one day, and then I’m going to come home and bathe myself. It’s going to be an undertaking…so that’s been really hard.”

"I’ve always been a person who likes to do things. I don’t love technology…I just use it because that’s how I can talk to people. That’s how I can catch up on the world. That’s the only way I can get books right now. There’s a lot of technology in that. It’s just not a way that I like to live, really. I don’t enjoy being tied to that.”

Though her boyfriend who lives with her is working, Kelsey has been furloughed. She wonders what her career might look like if/when she can return.

Trips for groceries are stressful. With family in medicine, she follows close protocols. A nightly shower puts her mind at ease before rest.

An avid cook, Kelsey enjoys cooking, and turns using what’s on hand into a challenge to make it enjoyable. Good meats and wheat flour are hard to find!

“I think we’re connecting differently. I think of that as simpler too. We’re all in the family together now…because everyone’s going through it. People are trying to help… I don’t know, I think there’s a lot of good happening

—KELSEY