

The COUNTER COVID Customer-Centric Business Framework to Fuel Post-Pandemic Growth

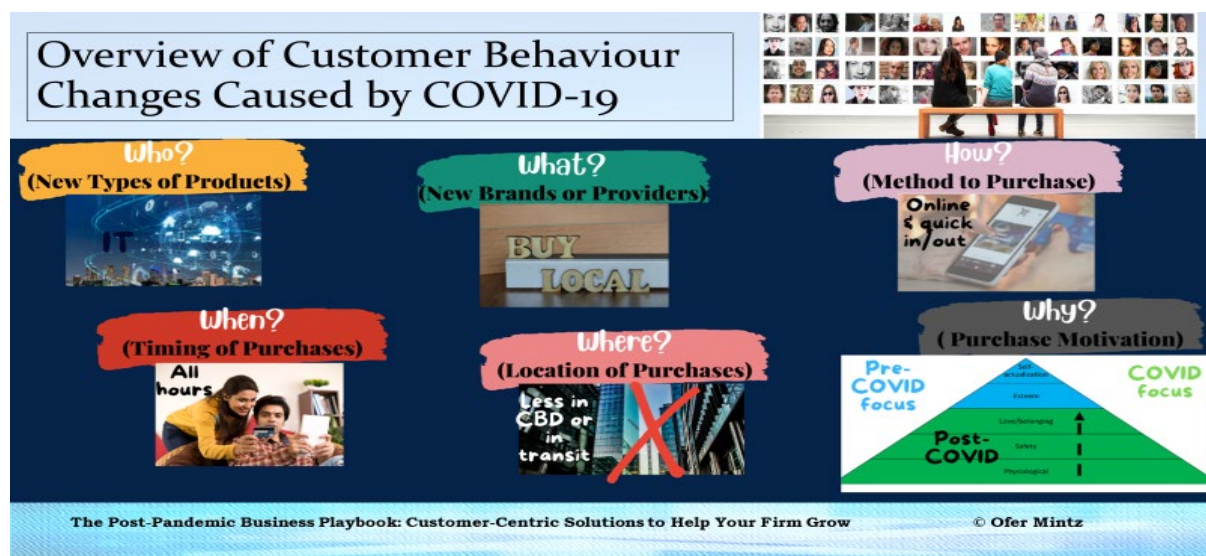
By Ofer Mintz, PhD., University of Technology Sydney

The present post-pandemic (or at least less pandemic dominated) economy offers firms around the world an unprecedented opportunity to grow and prosper, despite persistent severe health and financial challenges.

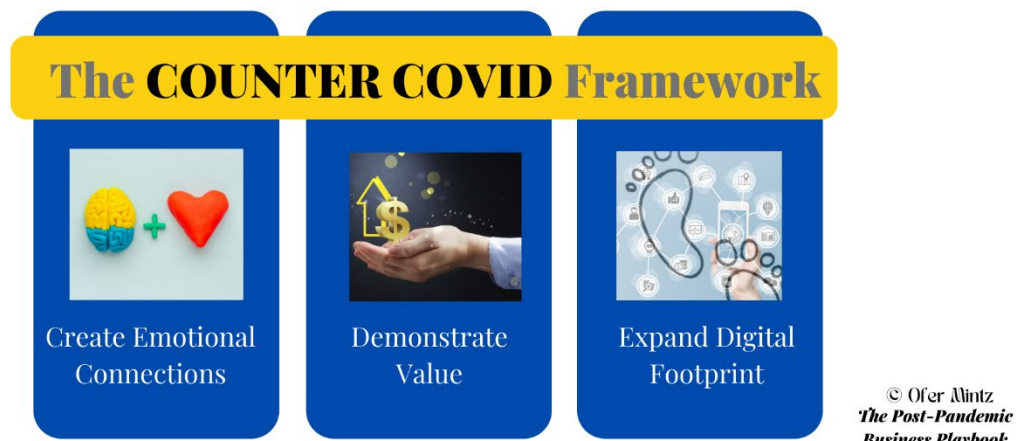
For my new book '[The Post-Pandemic Business Playbook](#),' I analyzed hundreds of best business practices from six continents, interviewed dozens of customers and managers located in 20 different countries, and examined thousands of academic empirical studies. My research revealed firms have tremendous growth opportunities to acquire new customers and reset relations with existing customers because customers long-standing norms have changed.

Consider the following customer behavior changes:

- **What products to purchase**: Customers are more willing to purchase new types of products than ever before (60-70% of global customers have purchased new types of products since the pandemic's onset)ⁱ
- **Who to purchase products from**: Customers are more willing to purchase from different brands for similar products than before the pandemic (and the vast majority of customers keep purchasing from the new brands)ⁱⁱ
- **Where to purchase**: Customers have changed locations of purchase; switching from central business districts, tradeshows, and in-transit to more local and online productsⁱⁱⁱ
- **When to purchase**: Work from home has led B2C customers to purchase more throughout the day and B2B customers to purchase more before and after traditional working hours^{iv}
- **How to purchase**: Customers are more reliant on online shopping than ever before; and in-store purchases have become more direct to get certain products^v
- **Why purchase**: Customers are more focused on products that fulfil comfort and value than they did pre-pandemic^{vi}



Firms should capitalize on this unprecedented growth opportunity by adapting to new customer behaviors. My research-based recommendation is to employ a three-principle customer-centric COUNTER COVID Framework.



The first COUNTER COVID principle: create emotional connections with customers. Throughout the pandemic, many customers and firms engaged in transactional-based relationships that no longer provided perceived mutual two-way reciprocal connections. However, as many customers re-emerge from pandemic-era health-based constraints, they are increasingly seeking to re-establish societal connections that expand on pandemic-forced desires to be comforted from health-based concerns. Hence, firms have an opportunity as well as a need to authentically connect with customers, which can be accomplished by sharing stories of their founders, employees, customers, and suppliers while making the vision of their firms' clear.

Camilla, an Australian and US-based luxury fashion retailer, cultivated passionate customer devotion by organizing constant social group interactions between customers and employees and hosting virtual event parties that were enhanced by sending customers event-paired wines. Kinu Coaching, a Chilean online wellness firm, grew exponentially across a number of Latin American countries once it focused on building customer trust by creating marketing strategies that shared the personal story and expertise of its principal wellness coach. HAPPYBOND, a US-based pet supplement firm, created instant connections with dog owners by emphasizing its founder created the firm "to help her dog skateboard again" and by developing an involved customer-based dog wellness community. *Thus, your customers are excited to go be a part of a community again; authentically connect with them so they can become a part of your community.*

The second COUNTER COVID principle: demonstrate product value. Customers have demonstrated a willingness to purchase a variety of products over the last two years, as long as products provide direct value, even when customers have suffered devastating financial losses and face increasing inflationary costs. My research recommends firms to demonstrate product value through providing customer testimonials, case studies, referrals, and authenticating typical returns on investments, and not just focus on price-related value.

Cover-More Group, a global travel insurance leader with brands such as Cover-More, Travelex, Halo, Blue, and Universal Assistance, provides two successful non-price-based methods other firms can emulate: creating emotional value through advertisements highlighting how travel insurance enables "moments that matter" and catering to customers'

value-based uncertainty by allowing customers to purchase a “cancel for any reason” option. Head for the Cure, a US-based non-profit dedicated to increasing brain cancer awareness, emphasized to its donor-customers how donations provided specific value to its well known, local beneficiary organizations. *Hence, inflationary and additional financial concerns are forcing many customers to consider the value of your products; make sure you clearly communicate how your products specifically provide those customers financial and/or psychological value.*

The third, and final, COUNTER COVID principle: extend your digital footprint. Customers’ acceleration of digital adoption, of course, means that firms also need to accelerate their digital transformation efforts. Fortunately, digital platforms and marketing tools have become so advanced that firms can easily target the right customer with the right message on the right medium at the right time.

Ikea ran an effective targeted B2B digital marketing campaign across multiple platforms in the UK, Spain, and Japan to help re-establish itself as the retailer of choice for small business furniture.^{vii} Bata, a footwear retailer, proactively reached its Indian customers by introducing a WhatsApp-based text, phone, and video service that matched the digital service most its customers were reliant upon for their daily activities. Further, after initial success in India, Bata then extended these services to 71 additional countries. The Shanghai Guanfu Museum hosted a livestream that provided customers direct engagements with expert curators and a “see-now-buy-option,” which led to a 460% increase in shop sales in just one session.^{viii} *Thus, your customers are increasingly using digital technologies for various tasks in their shopping journey (even if not always purchasing this way); be proactive and go to them on those technologies.*

Taken together, businesses need to adapt to post-pandemic customer behavior to take advantage of an opportunity to acquire new customers and reset relations with current customers unlike ever before. My research-based recommendation is to employ the customer-centric COUNTER COVID Framework by creating emotional connections, demonstrating product value, and extending their digital footprint (C[ount]E[r] CO + V[i] + D).

About the author:



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ⁱ Source: [McKinsey & Company](#)

ⁱⁱ Source: [McKinsey & Company](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Sources: [Roy Morgan Research](#), [Earnest Research](#), and [Opportunity Insights](#)

^{iv} Source: [Author interviews](#)

^v Sources: [Reserve Bank of Australia](#), [Earnest Research](#) and [author interviews](#)

^{vi} Sources: [Ipsos](#) and [author interviews](#)

^{vii} Source: [WARC](#)

^{viii} Source: [JD](#)