




**JOLTZ**

**zimmerman**

# FINDING THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

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**EIGHT WAYS IN WHICH CLOSING OUR DOORS  
OPENED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH**



Relentlessly pursue  
the client's goal,  
but never rest in the glory.  
-Jordan

## **PURPOSE:**

**SINCE MARCH 11, 2020, WHEN THE WORLD WAS OFFICIALLY CAST INTO THE SHADOW OF COVID-19, BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN FORCED TO NAVIGATE IN THE DARKNESS OF UNCERTAINTY.**

**AS WE NOW BEGIN TO SEE THE LIGHT COMING IN, THIS DOCUMENT HIGHLIGHTS THE LESSONS LEARNED TO CREATE LASTING CHANGE IN BUSINESS PRACTICES, ACCELERATING FUTURE GROWTH.**

# INSIGHTS POWERED BY:



**4 WAVES OF PROPRIETARY, NATIONALLY REPRESENTATIVE, RESEARCH TO UNDERSTAND CONSUMER NEEDS AND INTENT THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC**



**INTERVIEWS AMONG INDUSTRY LEADERS AND STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS MAJOR RETAIL SECTORS**



**ZIMMERMAN CLIENT INTERVIEWS TO AUDIT BEST PRACTICE AND STRATEGIC THOUGHT LEADERSHIP APPLICATION**



**3RD PARTY RESEARCH, CATEGORY ANALYSIS, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL REPORTING**



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# 8 WAYS IN WHICH BRANDS HAVE **FOUND LIGHT** IN THE DARKNESS

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After thorough analysis of consolidated inputs, Zimmerman has honed in on a curated view of major themes that shine the spotlight on lessons learned and business process improvements through the pandemic, which are allowing brands to **treat the recovery with the same agility found in the decline.**

## BRANDS HAVE:

- 1 FOUND LIGHT IN  
ACCELERATED DIGITIZATION**
- 2 FOUND LIGHT IN  
UNEXPECTED PARTNERSHIPS**
- 3 FOUND LIGHT IN  
TOGETHERNESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY**
- 4 FOUND LIGHT IN  
STANDING FOR SOMETHING VS. STANDING BY**
- 5 FOUND LIGHT IN  
EXPLORATION WITHOUT LIMITATION**
- 6 FOUND LIGHT IN  
THE AMPLIFICATION OF SERVICE**
- 7 FOUND LIGHT IN  
PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST**
- 8 FOUND LIGHT IN  
THE POWER OF AGILITY**

# LIGHT IN: ACCELERATED DIGITIZATION



## What we observed:

Overwhelmingly, consumers shifted transactions to e-comm and delivery services for both essential and non-essential goods, prompting brands to meet the demand through new CX models across platforms.

Brands that were ahead in their digital efforts realized the benefits, while brands that were behind have realized the urgency of meeting the changing needs of consumer shopping behavior.

Even older demos are now using digital shopping as a go-to means for purchase.

## What we heard:

*"In fact, I'm grateful that we didn't have as much time to think. Often, we just complicate things at the end of the day and the Coronavirus provided us with the ability to accelerate plans with collaborative agility. We can be thankful for that." - Specialty Retail*

*"Everybody has birthdays still. Everybody's still having anniversaries. So they need to celebrate virtually. Okay. Sounds easy. But most people have no idea how to set up a virtual party." - Specialty Retail*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Brands should prioritize their digital pipelines and integrate sales channels as consumer shopping habits have become more reliant on e-comm, reaching a larger percentage of consumers.
- ➔ Brands should seek to improve the portability of virtual brand experiences to extend beyond the traditional four walls of retail.
- ➔ Evaluate CX mapping as a function of strategic connection planning to leverage digital channels and optimize sales.



# LIGHT IN: UNEXPECTED PARTNERSHIPS



## What we observed:

Brands have found that they are not alone in the pandemic and strategic partnerships offer a viable pathway to enhance otherwise dormant or un-utilized assets and resources.

Creative brand partnerships and brand integrations provide greater utility and allow more seamless connection with consumers for mutual gain.

## What we heard:

*“Not being in it alone has really been a Godsend in many ways because every company out there is also feeling the same pain, increasing their receptivity to partnerships.” - Event-Based Retail*

*“In a month we’ve gotten more partnerships with travel partners across the line with new, unique deals, and software customers, presumably than we did in the previous years combined.” - Travel Industry*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Pick up the phone (better yet, schedule a video conference) with brands that align with your needs in order to accelerate change more quickly.
- ➔ Consider ways to mobilize operations through underutilized resources in order to get goods and services into the homes and hands of consumers more quickly.
- ➔ Explore brand integrations and partnerships that can serve to provide a more compelling offering to consumers.

# LIGHT IN: TOGETHERNESS THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

# 3

## What we observed:

Use of technology has brought people closer together in separation, both internally and externally, born out of necessity.

Previously underutilized technologies have enabled brands to humanize their consumer interactions by creating face to face virtual engagement.

Internal work streams have not only accelerated, but have improved productivity through greater collaboration.

## What we heard:

*"We've always been about location-based entertainment. How can you conduct business when there's nowhere for your customers to go? We had to take it to them." - Experiential Retail*

*"In this whole environment, we've tried to create something special about the fact that people are now connecting face to face, even if it's digitally with people that they haven't seen in a long time and now they're able to. We have shifted our service model to include more video conferencing."  
- Insurance Provider*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Brands should leverage technology to deepen consumer engagement through virtual assistance, consultation, sales and support.
- ➔ Examine ways in which technology can broaden the footprint and reach of your brand, allowing more opportunities to connect with more consumers in more places.
- ➔ Continue to leverage technology internally and externally in order to increase connectivity and the number of touch-points made possible through its application.

# LIGHT IN: STANDING FOR SOMETHING VS. STANDING BY



## What we observed:

Brands with clearly defined vision and mission have adapted more quickly, while other brands have been forced to look inward to find their voice and their purpose in the pandemic.

Brands have invested in purpose-driven brand narrative in order to remain relevant and “stand out” while others simply “stood by.”

Many brands are playing the long-game by investing in consumer relief opportunities or extending financial relief to attract and retain customers.

## What we heard:

*“Our whole brand purpose is to inspire love in the world, which put our mission to the test. How can you show someone love when you can’t buy? We felt we needed to remind consumers that love is unstoppable - maybe more now than ever. We had to look inward in order to look forward.” - Discretionary Retailer*

*“We were able to provide purchase incentives through longer payment plans and lower (or no) interest charges in order to show consumers that we intend to meet their needs - now and in the future.” - Automotive Retail*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Brands should invest in promoting their purpose and commitment to their mission in order to promote goodwill among consumers and employees alike.
- ➔ Explore options to attract new customers by extending buy-now, pay-later models as a means to stimulate transactions.
- ➔ Consider ways to inspire immediate and long-term brand advocacy by demonstrating your core values through action, not just messaging.



# LIGHT IN: EXPLORATION WITH LIMITATION

# 5

## What we observed:

Essential retail, grocery, mass discounters, and professional services were among the only categories almost immune to the effects of COVID-19.

Some brands have used the pandemic as an opportunity to explore new models without fear of failure and place bets on initiatives otherwise overlooked during business as usual.

Other brands took the opportunity to double-down on their investment strategies, betting on the come, in order to increase share of mind for future share of wallet.

## What we heard:

*"The pandemic has given us permission to innovate in new ways and be a little bit bolder because there's less of a fear of what you might lose if you're wrong. And more of the upside of what you might get if you're right." - Service Retail*

*"Even with partial closings, we saw an opportunity to attack the market and increase media investment. We went on as though nothing changed and it worked." - Furniture Retail*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Look forward, not backward. Competitive sets have all been negatively impacted. Taking a forward view with a focus on creative solutions will help brands accelerate recovery.
- ➔ First-movers will win. Media inventory is still valued below traditional norms. Consider increasing your media investment ahead of the recovery to increase share of voice vs. competitors.
- ➔ The demand will be there. As consumers dig out of quarantine, pent-up, un-met consumer needs will be acted upon and brands should be ready.

# LIGHT IN: AMPLIFICATION OF SERVICE



## What we observed:

Brands were forced to examine what existing resources they could leverage or those that needed to be added in order to find a channel to get their goods to consumers safely (delivery, drive thru and pick-up options lead the way).

Brands that didn't have delivery, pick-up or curbside protocols in place before the pandemic have now operationalized them.

Other brands retooled their product offerings with higher touch value adds through service enhancements.

## What we heard:

*"We had to look at how we deliver more services and not just stuff. We created how-to lists, revamped the site with free games, and worked with our merchants to create special kits, along with same-day delivery made possible through partnership, to put the whole thing in our customer's driveways." - Specialty Retail*

*"We knew that consumers may not be buying right now, but the need for regular service wasn't going to go away - it was just delayed. So we implemented opportunities to pay in advance at a discounted rate to keep things moving." - Automotive Retail*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Prioritize frictionless shopping options for consumers to allow for greater accessibility and delivery options.
- ➔ Delivery is here to stay. Consumers who have migrated to delivery services out of necessity are more likely to continue going forward.
- ➔ Add value to the consumer by layering additional curation or bundling services that streamline the shopping/buying experience.

# LIGHT IN: PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST



## What we observed:

Brands are making employee and customer safety a top priority, as consumers overwhelmingly prefer doing business with brands who value the safety of their employees.

Brands have been forced to operationalize safety protocols within the shopping experience to ensure safety internally and externally.

Consumers express greater intent to purchase and are more trusting of brands with known legacy, heritage, and reliability— as these triggers cue a greater emphasis on a people-first approach.

## What we heard:

*“Our number one job has been, and will remain, how do we make our customers feel as safe as possible? How do we introduce a layer of flexibility to accommodate changes in their plans? And how can we help people who may take a little longer to come back?” - Travel Industry*

*“We’re looking at every experience, product and service by our people and the extent to which it can enhance or diminish our ability to conduct business.” - QSR Retail*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Overcommunicate safety protocols internally and externally.
- ➔ Brands should tout their heritage and longevity stories as part of their brand narrative to appeal to consumers desire for safety.
- ➔ Understand that not all consumers will return at the same pace. Take measures to continue to communicate with your existing customer base in order to help them come back to you more confidently.

# LIGHT IN: THE POWER OF AGILITY



## What we observed:

Agility is the new normal. Brands have an increased focus on contingency planning and their ability to pivot on a dime.

12, 24 and 36-month planning cycles have given way to 30, 60, and 90 day outlooks.

Enhanced work streams have shortened project timelines and increased the expedience in which brands are making action even more actionable as means to capture shifting consumer demand in real-time.

## What we heard:

*“What I’m looking for from my team is a focus on how our customer behavior is changing. What do we see growing? And then how do we create solutions that fit customers new needs? If we can capture those early and reassure customers that we’re there for them, we can win.” - Membership-Based Retail*

*“The ability to be agile and pivot and look for new things, is something that we’ve always talked about. But I think the days of two and three year long projects are probably going to be behind us and I think we’ve pivoted more and been more creative in the last couple of months than ever before.” - Travel Sector*

## Actionable Takeaways

- ➔ Retail just got faster. Brands that have the ability to implement change more quickly have an in-market competitive advantage. This can be done by continuing to utilize the tools for communication, connectivity and real-time course correction as new SOP put forth during the pandemic.
- ➔ Change is inevitable. Brands should closely monitor increasing sales trajectory and be ready to amplify efforts quickly where there is movement.
- ➔ Brands can aggressively conquest new customers by creating urgency in demand and creating new purchase occasions with well-timed offers.

**LIFE DOESN'T  
HAPPEN TO US**

**IT  
HAPPENS  
FOR US**





# JOLTZ

Zimmerman's timely perspective and insights into economic, business, consumer and cultural shifts.

Born out of the need for our clients to pivot based on the ever-changing nature of how COVID-19 is impacting our world.





Zimmerman would like to thank its clients and those who participated in providing insights for this content.

# THANK YOU