

MARKETING'S MISSING MILLIONS

**The bottom line about AI and
brand language in 2020.**



Artificial intelligence.
Human language.
Awesome.

Enterprise marketers who focus on optimizing their brand language will maximize customer engagement and revenue

What brands say – and how they say it – is arguably more important today than ever before.

A marketing campaign that, at one time, would have evoked a positive emotion, such as excitement and anticipation, might be considered inconsiderate and out of touch today.

But as challenging as these waters are to navigate, they also present a unique opportunity for brands to connect and communicate with their customers in a targeted, educational, and empathetic way.

The result? Increased customer engagement and revenue – even in these difficult times.

We partnered with global online market research firm, Dynata, to poll 300 senior marketers for our Marketing Language Survey.

The purpose of our online survey was to:

- Highlight the increasingly important part that brand language plays in the current (COVID-19) climate.
- Outline the challenges that enterprise marketers are experiencing when creating high-quality branded content.
- Explore the growing role that cutting-edge technology – specifically, artificial intelligence (AI) – has in meeting these challenges.

We interviewed five marketers at some of the world's most innovative brands to get their unique perspective on (among other things):

- The positioning of language optimization on the leadership agenda.
- The transition of brand language since the start of COVID-19.
- The challenges of authentic, accountable, and audacious customer communications in the current climate.

Key interview takeaways:

Enterprise marketers seeking to leverage language optimization to maximize customer engagement and revenue, particularly during the COVID-19 era, should:

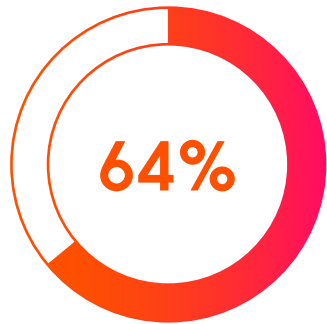
- Acknowledge the environment. Adjust brand communications to recognize the environment customers are living and working in. This could even mean removing entire categories of communications that may otherwise appear insensitive or tone-deaf.
- Prioritize customers' needs. Move away from sales-focused, transactional brand language towards more helpful, empathetic messaging. Avoid the "hard sell."
- Explore the potential of AI. Weigh-up the pros and cons of employing AI technology and automation to consistently create brand language at scale.



Welcome to Marketing's Missing Millions!

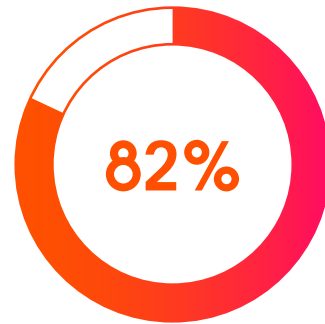
Key survey findings

Marketers feel brand language has never been more important



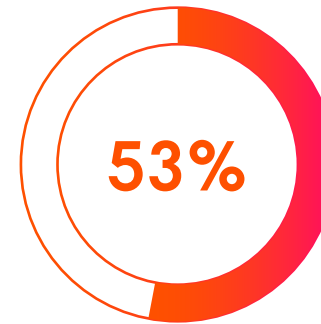
of marketers report that COVID-19 has made language more important than ever in helping them connect with customers.

Overall, marketers struggle to achieve a high level of copywriting quality



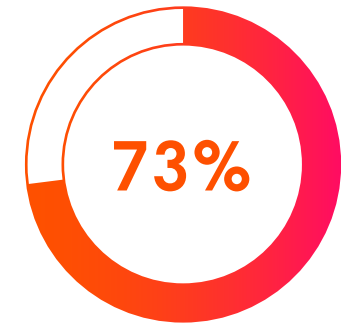
of marketers struggle to create high-quality branded content.

Many marketers are looking to invest in technology but are not confident in their technology-management capabilities



of marketers believe that technology in marketing should have some form of human oversight.

AI will play a role in marketers' technology investment



of marketers plan to invest in AI technology to support marketing initiatives in the next 18 months.

Evolution of brand language: "It's not just about the COVID-19 crisis"

Once upon a time, Uber was all about movement.

Originally a ride-hailing app, the technology platform now empowers consumers to "earn more, eat, commute, get a ride, simplify business travel, and more." Today, the global brand is coming to terms with movement of another kind – the transition of brand language in the COVID-19 climate.

According to Marty Ellis, the Senior Director Global CRM at Uber, "COVID-19 has **fundamentally changed the way people live their lives**. Brands have had to adapt their language to this. For example, to acknowledge that, when their brand involves person-to-person contact, 'business-as-usual' can't work. Talking about safety and how people are protecting each other from the spread of the virus has become top-of-mind for brand conversations."

But, according to Ellis, "it's not just about the COVID-19 crisis." He continues: "There's a lot going on in the world right now. For brands to be aware of that and **communicate their awareness of the world is important**. In the US, in particular, we have a lot of discussion nationally about Black Lives Matter. Being a part of that and recognizing this context is important for the way brands talk at the moment."

Ellis believes that "it's never been easy" for a brand's customer communications to be authentic, accountable, and audacious in any era – let alone this one.

"**Brands that recognize the current context have an advantage** provided they follow through on being authentic with their messages," he says.



There's a lot going on in the world right now. For brands to be aware of that and communicate their awareness of the world is important.



"Take Uber, for example. It's a ride business, which involves person-to-person contact. We take a strong stance on how we maintain a critical service of getting people around while still recognizing that we have to be extra careful. We're talking about policies such as 'no mask, no ride.'
It's not just language. It's not just in our communications. It's an ethos."

For Ellis, brands that "recognize the context, boldly make clear statements about how they are responding to that context, and follow through on them have a real opportunity to stand out in these times."

Leading with empathy is key, says Ellis. "To be empathetic to the larger societal context is always the right thing to do and is an effective way to drive business performance. When a brand has dissonance with that context, its performance can be jeopardized.

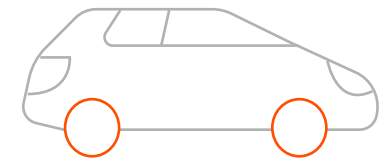
"In today's world, consumers want to engage with brands that they not only feel have an understanding of the world they live in, but are also playing an active part in it. **It's more than just a transactional relationship.** If a brand can authentically build this position with its customers, **it will develop a lot of loyalty** and that loyalty will inevitably translate into value."

And what role does AI play in the evolution of brand language? "I believe that the way forward is a **combination of humans and AI**," says Ellis. "Each has its place and each does certain things well. But humans are still learning to trust what AI does well.

"In my experience, the performance of language generated by AI can – when done properly – **outperform the human-generated versions in every case.**"

Ellis says there's one caveat to this, however. And that is around the quality of the AI in play. "**Not all AI is the same**, and that's a really important factor to note when considering the technology you deploy. There are certain implementations out there that perform poorly and don't live up to expectations beyond early campaigns."

"When AI is done well, **it can win against the human every time**, but it's got to prove its power and performance over the long-term."



To be empathetic to the larger societal context is always the right thing to do and is an effective way to drive business performance.



Many marketers are looking to invest in technology but are not confident in their technology-management capabilities

The path forward: Enterprises seeking to leverage language optimization to maximize customer engagement and revenue, particularly during the COVID-19 era, should:

Acknowledge the environment:

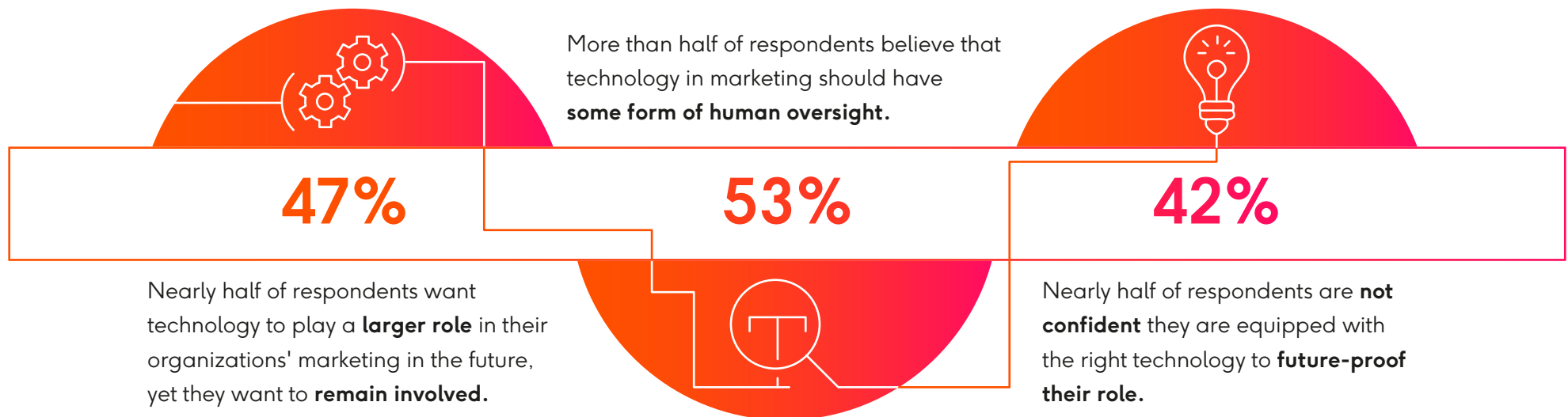
Adjust brand communications to recognize the environment customers are living and working in. This could even mean removing entire categories of communications that may otherwise appear insensitive or tone-deaf.

Prioritize customers' needs:

Move away from sales-focused, transactional brand language towards more helpful, empathetic messaging. Avoid the "hard sell."

Explore the potential of AI:

Weigh up the pros and cons of employing AI technology and automation to consistently create brand language at scale.



Language optimization: FARFETCH debunks three myths about AI-Powered Copywriting

FARFETCH is no stranger to weathering the storm of a global crisis.

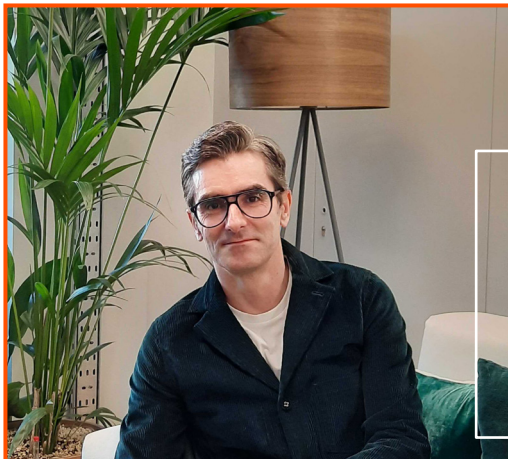
The 190+ country platform for the luxury fashion industry was founded in 2007 and launched a year later amidst the collapse of Lehman Brothers, which Ben Bernanke – then chair of the US Federal Reserve – called "the worst financial crisis in global history."

According to Gareth Jones, Global Chief Marketing Officer at FARFETCH, the brand's readiness to respond to COVID-19, was etched into its DNA from the very beginning.

"We were lucky that we were capable of a **genuinely authentic response** to the coronavirus crisis," he says. "FARFETCH launched around the same time as the Lehman Brothers crash. We were founded in a crisis."

Incidentally, after more than 4.5 years at eBay, Jones joined FARFETCH at the start of the lockdown. He believes that, "a brand's 'behavior' during this humanitarian crisis – the messages conveyed and tone adopted – will be remembered and will have a **deterministic impact on their success** when they come out of the crisis."

In the face of the virus, FARFETCH has been fortunate in that it hasn't had to make much of an adjustment to its brand language. "Our language hasn't needed to change to become COVID-19-specific," says Jones. "From the top of the business, **our commitment is that our communications will reflect our values at all times**. So, being open and empathetic from the get-go has meant that **continuity and clarity of communications was our primary focus**."



The fact that AI technology can generate copy in your brand voice and write better than a human, while sounding like a human, is a powerful combination.



Jones points out that the FARFETCH brand stands for **empathy that goes way beyond words and translates into meaningful action**. When COVID-19 struck, FARFETCH featured boutique owners – predominantly small, family-run businesses – on its homepage, in its social posts, and even in its pay-per-click ad copy.

"Supporting our boutique partners has always been part of the FARFETCH DNA," he says. "When the pandemic hit, it felt natural for us to launch the #SupportBoutiques campaign. Given that many of our boutiques were forced to close their physical stores, **FARFETCH provided a lifeline** for many. Boutiques were able to sell stock, drive velocity online in a safe and credible way, and **reach customers in over 190 countries**. People were motivated to shop on our platform to **support the small businesses we partner with**.

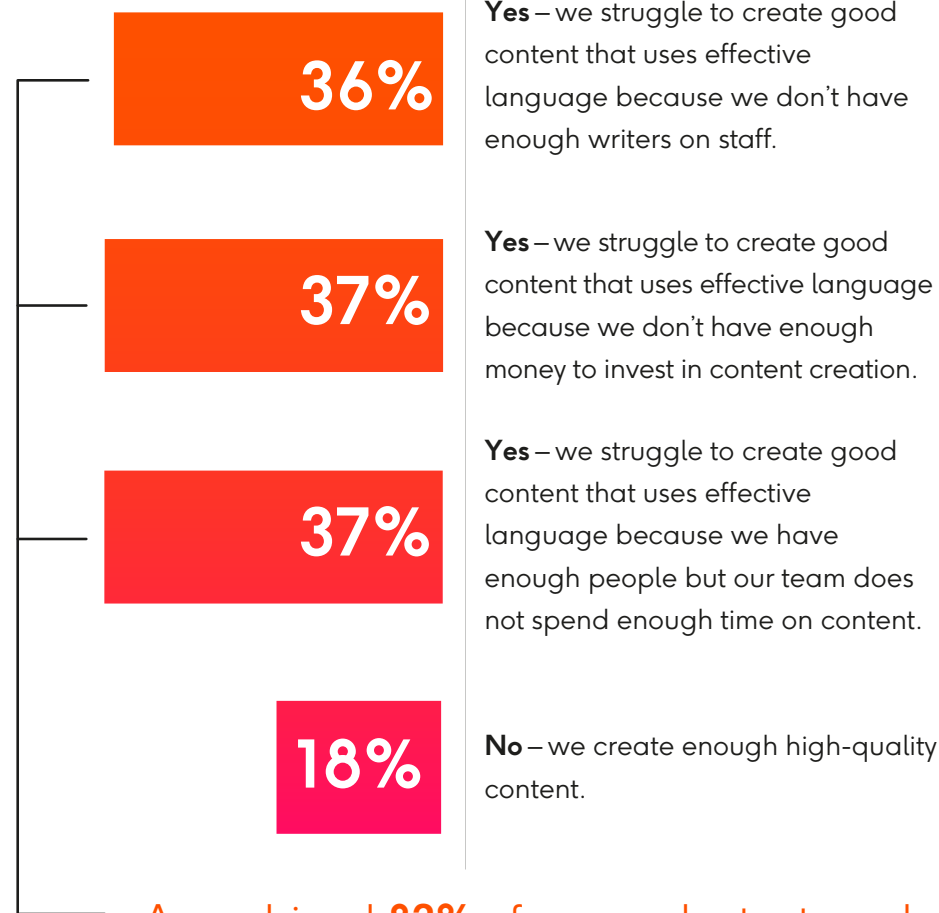
"Shining a light on the small business owners whose livelihoods were affected by the crisis allowed us to **form an emotional connection with our customers**, educate them about FARFETCH's brand proposition, bring them closer to our mission and **give them a tangible way to positively help** a community in need."

To connect with its customers on such a visceral level, **language optimization was key** for FARFETCH which, according to Jones, "relates to engineering the language you use to have maximum appeal to your customer."

"Customers are busy," he says. "They have lives to lead. As marketers, our job is to **use language that resonates quickly**." Jones, who sits on the FARFETCH leadership team, says that language is "absolutely a priority." As such, "**embracing technology to optimize our marketing language has emerged as a must-have**," he says.

For FARFETCH, AI-Powered Copywriting holds particular appeal.

Whether organization struggles to create enough branded content (Total respondents, multiple responses)



A combined **82%** of respondents struggle to create enough branded content

"It's the use of technology to generate language that is **more compelling than a copywriter can write** alone, and which learns over time, so the **performance of your marketing just gets better and better**," says Jones. "We use AI-Powered Copywriting to generate the subject lines for our email campaigns. I've been a champion of this 'narrow' use of AI for many years and, during my time at eBay, **it was transformative.**"

Jones highlights two immediate benefits of AI-Powered Copywriting: increased customer engagement and a high ROI.

Increased customer engagement

"At FARFETCH, we're seeing high levels of customer engagement with record numbers of new customers driving increased year-over-year transactions. Language optimization plays a key role in this consumer journey – generating more opens, clicks, and conversions across the board," says Jones.

High ROI

Due to its higher levels of customer engagement, AI-Powered Copywriting can increase a brand's bottom line exponentially.

Jones recalls, "when I arrived at FARFETCH, the technology was always going to be a priority within our marketing stack because of its potential impact on revenue delivered through our email channel."

He goes on to debunk three popular myths about AI-Powered Copywriting technology.



Myth #1: "AI will remove control."

"Machines can't be wildly unleashed," says Jones. "They need to be balanced with human intervention. Our marketing is increasingly powered by machines, but our success involves having a world-class team directing the machine and helping to shape what it's focused on."

Jones continues: "FARFETCH markets to a large, global customer base and we can't pretend to predict the behaviors of millions of users based on human instinct alone. Handing over such a visible part of our brand expression to a machine definitely felt uncomfortable for some. The key has been to provide strict tone of voice guidance and more human supervision at the start."

Myth #2: "AI will remove copywriters."

By optimizing language at scale, AI-Powered Copywriting doesn't remove copywriters from the equation. Rather, "it actually makes their jobs more interesting," says Jones.

With the repetitive, high-volume aspects of their work being handled by a machine, copywriters can engage more in content ideation, content strategy, and innovative campaigns.

Myth #3: "AI will compromise a brand's voice."

One overarching concern that some marketers have is that AI will take the humanity out of copywriting and, therefore, out of a brand's voice, which would adversely affect brand perception. "On paper, it's arguably high-risk to entrust AI technology to short-form copy. But it works and it amplifies, rather than compromises, the FARFETCH brand voice that is so important to us and our customers," says Jones.

"The fact that AI technology can generate copy in your brand voice and write better than a human, while sounding like a human, is a powerful combination."

Gabrielle Stafford, Vice President of Global Marketing, Groupon



Brand language: Groupon on the power of pivoting during COVID-19

Groupon has long prided itself on being an "experiences marketplace."

So, what happened when one of the "UK's most beloved and well-known consumer brands" could no longer offer customers its signature experiences outside the home?

This question was answered when COVID-19 struck.

Gabrielle Stafford, Vice President of Global Marketing at Groupon, walks us through the brand's customer communications journey at the onset of the coronavirus—and beyond.

Stafford describes Groupon's 'buyer persona'—a representation of the brand's ideal customer. "Traditionally, our customer is the hub of her family or social network," she says. "She likes to find great things for her friends and family to do."

But COVID-19 changed all that, says Stafford. "When the virus hit, we saw her becoming focused on caring, care-giving, and staying connected," she says.

At the height of the pandemic, Groupon mirrored its customers' shift in priorities by **using brand language that focused on help and caring.**

"We're an experiences marketplace," says Stafford. "We were trading at a time when it was difficult for customers to get out of their homes to experience things. So, we talked about self-care, family-care, keeping kids occupied, and things to do and learn at home."



COVID-19 has heightened the awareness of the language we use at the highest levels of the company.



GROUPON®



In addition to what Stafford calls the more "obvious" customer purchases during lockdown, such as cook-at-home and meal delivery services, products and services that weren't previously on customers' radars became a part of their lockdown lexicon. Examples include "things as simple as the latest fashion mask or getting your home office set up," she says. "**Pivoting our brand language** to focus on the definition of 'experience,' so it included these sorts of things, was an **important tool for customer engagement and retention** during COVID-19."

Language optimization has always been high on Groupon's leadership agenda, but "COVID-19 has heightened the awareness of the language we use at the highest levels of the company," says Stafford.

"This past weekend, I had two conversations with C-Suite leaders about the appropriateness of two subject lines. If you think about the scale of emails we send globally – we're talking billions a month – the fact that our C-Suite are scanning subject lines to ensure that we're being appropriate is **testament to how important language has become for us.**"

Stafford says that, ultimately, Groupon's ability to change course quickly was not only beneficial to its customers, but it also **positively impacted its performance.**

Phrasee's research shows that marketers feel brand language has never been more important



"Selling things that could help customers during the lockdown worked for them and helped keep us relevant," she says. "Staying relevant meant contextualizing what we do in terms of what is happening to our customers in any given location. We do it not only because it's the right thing to do, but it's also driven performance."

According to Stafford, Groupon's **customer-centric approach** meant that its communications could remain authentic, even in a difficult climate.

"The key was to turn up for our customers in a way that made sense to them and this involved turning off whole sections of what we offer. That was the only way we could be authentic," she says. By Groupon prioritizing customers' needs in its product and service offering, this also meant that it **couldn't afford its brand language to appear insensitive** or out-of-touch.

"With experiences like axe-throwing, for example, we had to stop them overnight in order not to appear tone-deaf," says Stafford.

"We removed whole inventories of categories from our communications. In fact, we removed anything that appeared not to take into consideration what people were going through."

In doing so, Stafford says Groupon moved away from its traditional "transaction-focused messaging" – particularly in its push and email channels where the aim was for customers to buy deals – to "specific at-home use cases," for example, how to relieve boredom.

Groupon's brand language became less transactional and more emotional, says Stafford. Fortunately, the brand had already embarked on this language journey pre-COVID-19.

"This process was evolving throughout 2019 because we wanted to reduce our transactional focus and **introduce more emotive language**," she says. "It was about ensuring that we weren't [in]appropriate because, in the current climate, so much of what we do could appear that way."

"We were leaning into this, but the dial has turned up to 'high' since COVID-19, which forced us down this path much faster than we planned. But luckily, it was a path we were already on. **We didn't have a playbook. So, we had to create one.**"

Consequently, says Stafford, "there's unlikely to be much hard sell" in Groupon's messaging today. "**It's become less transactional, more problem-solving**. It's all about care and things to get out and do safely."

But using **consistent brand language at scale** is no mean feat. Stafford was previously responsible for Groupon's international email and now covers its international marketing channels. So, she's familiar with the challenges involved.

"When you operate at the scale we do globally – across eight or nine languages and 13 or 14 markets – **the only way you can consistently do this is by using technology** and automation," she says.

"We use a combination of in-house and external third-party marketing technology, which facilitated consistent language implementation across our channels. But there are times, like at the start of COVID-19, **when you need to pivot quickly**. This is when technology and automation have to be taken out of the equation a little bit and **a more hybrid approach is required** – involving more manual intervention.

"Our emails had to become more engaging and informative – fast. We did this by **reducing automation and increasing manual intervention**."

Nevertheless, Stafford underscores the role that AI plays in Groupon's language optimization: "We need rich, contextual language that is **relevant and appropriate for each customer** – especially in our email and push notification channels. **We can't do this without technology.**"



What AI helps us to do is create and scale relevant and engaging language in a way that we couldn't otherwise do.



But integrating AI into Groupon's customer communications toolkit didn't come without objections. "There was fear of the unknown," says Stafford. "It was difficult to get adoption but what we found, very quickly, was that **AI technology consistently proved itself**. The more we used it, the better we learned how to integrate it into our existing marketing processes and technology eco-systems.

"We've continued to scale across all channels and we now use AI-driven language in push and emails across all our markets. In the future, we're hoping to **expand its application to other use cases**, such as paid and onsite."



The importance of language in the year 2020

The urgency of the pandemic combined with the increased importance of digital communication has marketers in the financial services industry more focused on their marketing language.

David Partain, CMO of FlexShares, knows that right now is a sensitive time for marketing. "How do you strike a **balance between empathy and performance** in a way that respects the larger context? That's the question of the day. In our world, 70% of exchange-traded funds (ETFs) are sold **without any interaction with the fund company itself**. So that leaves you with 30% of the people that you have to 'sell to' – when they come to do the research, you have to draw them in. The stats are overwhelming on **how many marketing messages we're exposed to** everyday; you have to get in front of people 10-12 times before they even take a look and go wait, what's that again?"

Partain continues: "You're only going to get so many shots nowadays. And so, you really need to have language that speaks to customers at the point of contact. And so, I think marketers are looking at that to figure out **what language can draw them in and turn their head** because we're all so inundated with advertising and marketing messages all the time."

As financial services marketers try to produce better language at scale, is AI a part of the equation? Other verticals like retail have been looking to AI for years to optimize everything from inventory to product recommendations to marketing language, **with awesome results**. But the financial services sector has moved a bit more slowly.



*You're only going to get so many shots nowadays.
And so you really need to have language that speaks to
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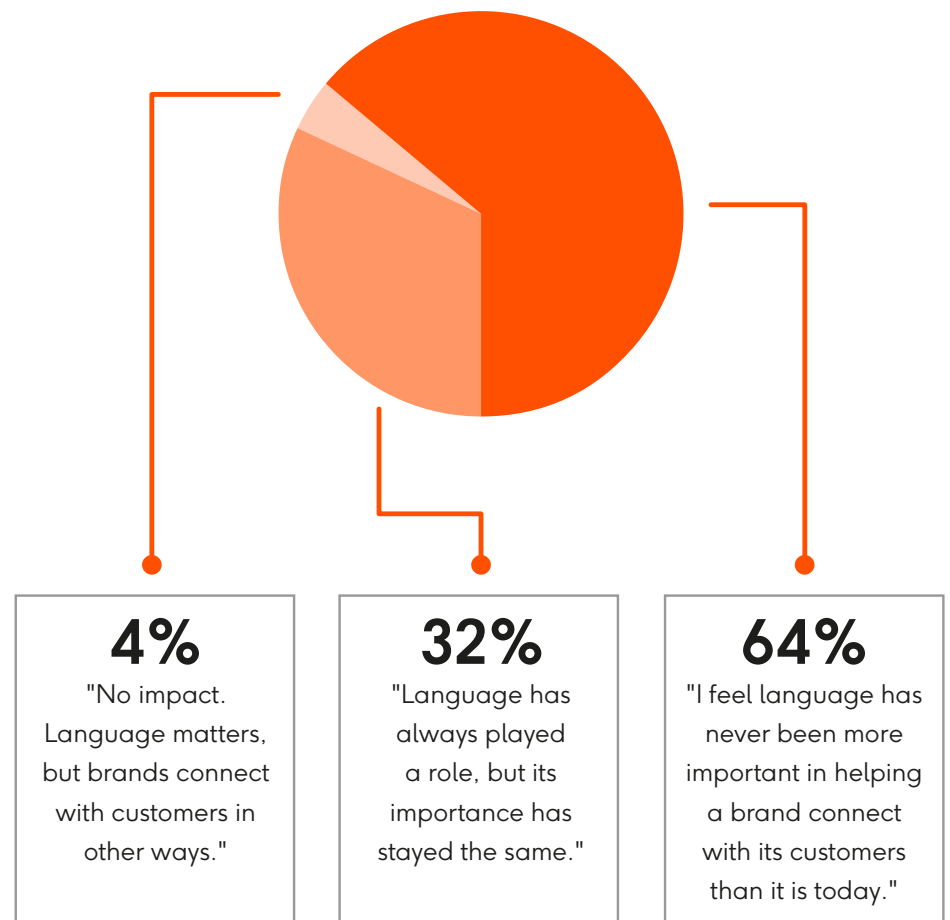
As Partain puts it, "You know, the financial services industry is not always the first to take up new tech, but I think it'll be interesting to see if AI takes off next year in our sphere. I mean, we're using AI now on the data side in terms of trying to figure out all the data points that we have, so for example, what would be the best ETF that an advisor would want to talk about? But in terms of AI for language, that's a relatively new concept for us. I think people will start to say hey, we're already doing this on the data side, **why don't we do it on the language side too?**"

Partain acknowledges, "It's not just marketing that has a role to play, but also the sales professionals and how they interact given what's going on. When our sales people, who live in their territories around the country, could not get in to see clients, we had to quickly come up with ways to give them something, a reason to call, so there were a variety of things we attempted to do and are still doing.

"As the market was going crazy at the start of the pandemic, we did a daily 15-minute call in the morning called 'Trader Talk' around what's going on in the markets, and it was strictly for advisors. We then also did a weekly 'Stronger Every Day' 15-minute webinar where we talked about **how advisors could improve their business**. We started a podcast called 'The Flexible Advisor', which covered how to prospect during this time." Without daily face-to-face contact, phone calls and digital contact became more important than ever. The company had to **rethink how it talked to both its clients and its clients' clients**. As Partain puts it, "When a shock like this happens, it kind of forces you to think outside that office bubble."

The financial services industry has a **clear opportunity to follow its peers** from other verticals into AI adoption and achieve the **improved conversion rates** that brands in other sectors have grown used to. But while financial services brands are focusing on how to get **better language at scale**, can they also rethink not just what they say, but how?

Impact of COVID-19 on importance of language (Total respondents)



Leighton L. Chun, Facebook Reality Labs CRM Leader, Facebook

Language optimization in the COVID-19 era: a leadership perspective

Facebook's mission is to "give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together."

Leighton L. Chun knows a thing or two about building a community.

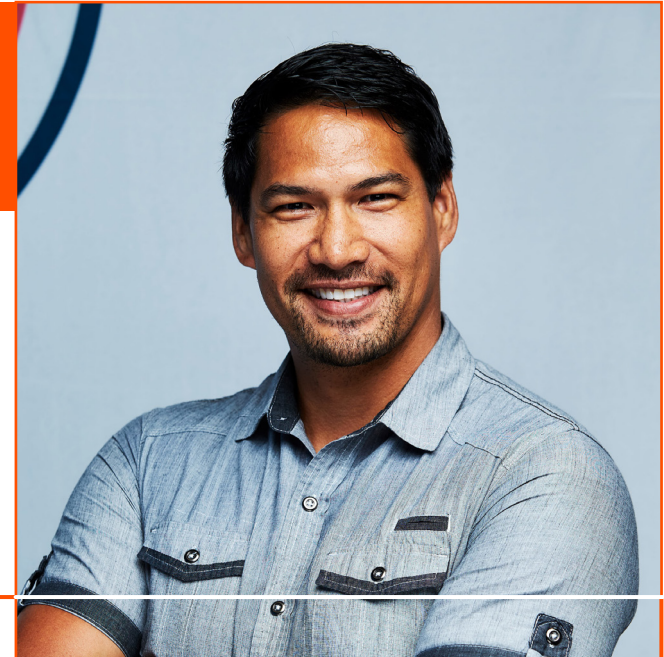
He's a **Facebook Reality Labs CRM Leader** at the Menlo Park-headquartered social network where he has "had the privilege of building Facebook's first consumer-facing CRM program."

Leighton has a diverse professional background with a rich mix of entrepreneurial endeavors and executive positions. In 2010, he co-founded a travel website and he has since held senior roles at global brands including Relationship Marketing Manager at eBay where he "created and implemented a multi-channel marketing strategy."

With a decade of CRM experience under his belt, Leighton has extensive know-how in email, affiliate, social, mobile, and search marketing. A self-described "data-driven marketer," he believes that "**data and innovation are the keys** to unlocking the true potential of digital marketing."

Speaking in a *personal capacity rather than on behalf of Facebook, Leighton surveys the technology industry and talks about (among other things):

- The positioning of language optimization on the leadership agenda;
- The transition of brand language since the start of COVID-19; and
- The challenges of authentic, accountable, and audacious customer communications in the current climate.

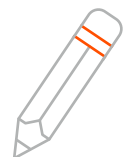


Language optimization has never been higher on companies' leadership agenda.



Experience:

Facebook	eBay
RetailMeNot, Inc	Buy.com
Man Crates	Travelgistics.com



This is what Leighton had to say...

In light of the coronavirus crisis, what a brand says, how it says it – and the public perception of it – has arguably never been more important than it is today. Looking at the broader landscape in the technology industry, does language optimization feature on companies' leadership agenda? If so, where do you think it ranks in the list of leadership priorities?

Leighton:

I'd say it's never been higher. There's certainly heightened sensitivity to a brand's language and voice. And we've all seen these shifts occur across the board from brands focused on consumer goods to industrial services. We're seeing language shifts and these will become more of a 'norm' as we see consumers continue to shift behaviors.

'Mindful messaging' refers to a new language that has emerged since the onset of COVID-19. It refers to how a brand communicates when whatever they say may be perceived as generic (at best) or tone-deaf (at worst). Citing examples, how exactly has brand language changed since the crisis started?

Leighton:

At this point, we've all heard very mindful messaging but, as you point out, I too have heard from consumers that it comes across as generic and, sometimes, less genuine than is intended.

In these moments, it's more critical than ever that an organization's messaging is agile, timely, and relevant to current societal challenges and an organization's mission. When these last two disconnect, the messages come across as forced and disingenuous.

In a recent campaign during an NBA game, which was run by Oculus [a virtual reality video game developer and subsidiary of Facebook], the team pivoted on our original message and removed all Oculus marketing language and leaned into a moment of solidarity to drive change through voting.

As a result of being agile, relevant and – most importantly – authentic, the message received greater coverage than anticipated because it was syndicated across other platforms by partner organizations and amplified through social media.

Dr. David Nabarro, Special Envoy for COVID-19 for the World Health Organization, was recently quoted as saying that, during the pandemic, "Brands must strive to be authentic, accountable, and audacious in their communications."

In the current climate, how feasible is it for companies' customer communications to be:

1. Authentic

Leighton:

Authenticity is becoming increasingly difficult as time passes in this current climate. Companies need to play to their strengths, identify moments that organically resonate with their business model or product, and not overreach.

2. Accountable

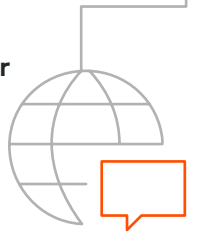
Leighton:

Accountability is easily overlooked when messages are well received, but will often come back to bite you when they're not.

3. Audacious

Leighton:

I'd say a cautious 'yes' to company communications being audacious. But some organizations will shy away from audacity because it leads to open interpretations, which are often as bifurcated as our current bipartisan atmosphere. From my perspective, this is a line that needs to be carefully and thoughtfully approached.



In March 2020, an Edelman survey of 12,000 consumers spanning 12 countries in the middle of fighting COVID-19 found that 54% said that, instead of focusing on hard-core selling, marketers should focus on connecting their products and services to solving crisis-related problems. Given that different brands have different product/service offerings, how feasible is this approach?

Leighton:

For some organizations, it's about solving these problems. It's about finding the connection of an organization's products to this moment in time and connecting the two. For those organizations that don't have an apparent connection, I'd reflect on the opportunity to create that connection. If there is no connection, opting out of the moment is a viable option and likely the right one.

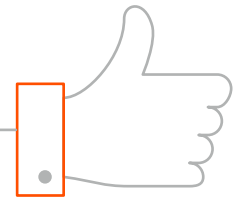
Inken Kuhlmann-Rhinow, EMEA Marketing Director at HubSpot, reportedly said: "With 44% more emails being sent than before the COVID-19 outbreak, getting an email strategy right is essential and marketers need to be targeted, educational, and empathetic."

Please share an example of a recent email campaign, which satisfies these three criteria.

Leighton:

We are in the process of updating an email journey. This journey serves a specific purpose with a specific goal, which is focused on the success of our consumers.

To date, this is one of the few mechanisms our marketing team has developed to meaningfully move the needle on long-term retention. Historically, this metric has been very challenging to move because the product naturally enjoys a very high retention rate. But through the use of timely, targeted, educational, and empathetic content, we have been able to move this needle.



According to BounceX, email open rates have risen by an average of 25% week-on-week since the lockdown started, reaching 40% on 14 April 2020.

How important is it for you to send customer-centric emails to build and strengthen your customer relationships?

Leighton:

We began our email journey as a customer-centric program, aligning our communication to the consumer purchase and product life cycle.

Through research and insights, we strive to resolve concerns before they become concerns, be there step-by-step through our customer decision process, and provide the necessary information to address each of their needs through the path to purchase.

Presenting the right language has only improved our programs. In one instance, we actually saw a 91% uplift in open rates through the use of Phrasee, which is AI-Powered Copywriting technology.

So, thank you to the Phrasee team for being a strong partner for our organization and really bringing the best of language optimization to our program!

**The opinions expressed in this interview are those of Leighton L. Chun and do not necessarily reflect the views of Facebook.*

Shawn Tian, Global CRM Lead, Google Store



Brand language: Google Store on its COVID-19 customer journey (from selling to helping)

How do you talk to customers in a smart way these days?

Google, just like many other large businesses, has had to grapple with this question. For Google Hardware, the answer is to focus on how its products are helpful to customers.

Shawn Tian, the Global CRM Lead at Google Store, can attest to this.

"Language optimization involves communicating with customers in a way that is **relevant and relatable**, but also consistent with the overall brand," he says.

"We've evolved our brand language from 'why' customers should buy our products to showing them 'how' our products can help them in ways that are relevant during COVID-19."

"When the coronavirus hit, we launched an email series that focused on helpful products and shared tips on how our customers could get more out of the products they already own – for example, how to adjust their settings to reduce Nest Cam bandwidth, how to maximize the effectiveness of their Google WiFi and so on," he says.

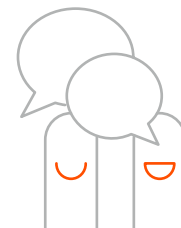
Tian says there's been "more leadership focus" on how Google Store "adapts its language to be more relevant, particularly in light of the coronavirus."



We've evolved our brand language from 'why' customers should buy our products to showing them 'how' our products can help.



The multi-colored Google logo.



He continues: "There was a concerted effort to be sensitive to our customers' mindsets and situations during these challenging times.

"In some cases, we paused or cancelled campaigns where we felt our content was less relevant. More importantly, **we pivoted away from promo-focused language** toward how our products could be helpful during these times."

For Tian, who was formerly the Global CRM Strategy and Mobile CRM Lead at eBay, this adaptation to consumer attitudes and behavior is part of a wider trend that he's observed in the technology industry in recent years of being extra sensitive to the larger social context.

Another trend Tian has noticed is that "the leading brands are **more focused on a consistent tone of voice** and what it means for them to be 'on brand' versus trying to apply best practices."

In the COVID-19 era, most companies have taken an ultra-conservative – if not outright prohibitive – stance on injecting humor into their consumer content, but Tian says that Google Store has adopted a more measured approach.

"We even launched a campaign to re-brand all of our products in witty ways that reflect how they are used in the context of the pandemic and working from home," he says.

The bottom line, according to Tian, is that it was "very important" for Google Store to send customer-centric emails to **build and strengthen its customer relationships**.

"The way customers use our devices changed during COVID-19," he says. "Beyond email, we worked with creatives to devise alternative, re-branded names for our devices that tie back to how they are being used in this new environment.

"For example, given the increase in food delivery during lockdown, our Nest Hello Doorbell with a camera became the Nest Pizza Detector."

While brands everywhere are pivoting their language, Tian sees this as a clear movement, not just a fad in the current climate. "These language shifts won't go away when COVID-19 ultimately does," he explained, "These changes are reflective of a more customer-centric trend when it comes to marketing language and I believe where the most progressive brands are concerned, **the laser focus on communications being relevant and relatable at all times is here to stay.**"



The leading brands are more focused on a consistent tone of voice and what it means for them to be 'on brand' versus trying to apply best practices.



In these times of heightened stress, what you say to your customers matters more than ever. But coming up with the right words for every channel is difficult; there's always more content to generate, always more change to adapt to.

Hiring an endless stream of copywriters simply isn't sustainable. AI is emerging as a powerful new tool to help marketers produce high-performing content at scale. Many major global brands have already embraced AI and seen amazing results - will you join them, or be left behind?

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