

You've Got (Too Much) Mail

An analyst's view on COVID-19 and the influx of brand emails

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As Americans across the country prepare for major social distancing measures to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic, pantries—and inboxes—have never been so full.

Social media users circulated jokes about the pandemic as “GDPR 2.0,” marveling that every brand they had ever done business with was writing them to talk about COVID-19 and what those brands were doing to help. Email marketers do seem to have sent these messages to every address they have permission to use—but you can’t really blame them for spreading these messages as far and wide as possible.

In our current state, spouses who usually spend 8 hours apart each day have to learn to share workspaces in homes that may now feel crowded, with kids home from school as well. Communities must come together to help vulnerable populations stay safe and equipped with necessities. “Cooperation” and “understanding” are the watchwords of the month. So, if you roll your eyes at that next email, try to remember that it’s probably important to someone else who’s wondering whether a product or service they regularly use is going to be available—or potentially endangering workers and consumers.

I may not have cared about each of the 100-odd marketer emails I received about the pandemic over the past week or so, but there were some I was waiting for anxiously: word from the Lyric Opera that Wagner’s “Ring” cycle will no longer be performed, and from RXBAR

(an important part of my pantry stash) that the company would be having most employees work from home but didn't anticipate disruptions in its ability to supply customers with product. I didn't need to hear from Sherwin-Williams that my neighborhood store would be offering curbside pickup for safety—but I know there are workers in my community who did need that message.

It's a challenging moment, and many companies have had to make tough choices about whether to continue operating and how, with email marketers challenged in turn to get those messages to customers at the right time, with the right words.

Look at it this way: There is an influx of brand emails being sent, but at least you have plenty of time at home to clean out your inbox.