

# Waze exec on OOH advertising, being nimble, and how consumer shopping behavior has shifted

## ARTICLE |

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**C**onsumer shopping habits have changed significantly in the past year. Having the right data to monitor these changes (and being flexible) will be key for most brands, according to Andrew Kendall, head of sales for North America at Waze.

We recently spoke with Kendall about the pandemic's impact on the company, what he's learned, and his predictions for this year.

### **How has the pandemic affected Waze?**

We had to be flexible with customers. I've spent 20 years in ad sales and when business goes down, people tend to go into panic mode or wonder what's wrong and be combative. But you can't do that in a moment like this. You have to understand that your partners are in triage mode, as well. The most critical thing is understanding and examining what your unique value proposition is and leaning into that.

We're fortunate because we're a bridge between the digital and physical world. Amid the pandemic, we've rolled out new products

like location personalities, which tell customers whether they can pick up curbside or, if [needed], at a drive-thru.

**That's interesting. We've noticed more retailers are offering contactless pick-up options. You must be looking at a lot of data to inform your business decisions. What's stood out in recent months?**

People [tend to] make multiple stops in a journey. But now, they're more sure of where they're going. Marketers need to convince people to come to their location. They don't peruse [like they used to].

**Given that more consumers are sheltering in place, has that become a challenge for Waze and the brands it works with?**

Yes, people went into survival mode as COVID-19 spread. You have to determine your success and value by when folks return and advertise on your platform. Companies like Google, Facebook, and Amazon are thriving in this moment. And we, along those lines, have also come back very strong because of the value proposition.

Everyone from small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) to enterprise companies are re-examining. It's like a wildfire where there's regrowth. The areas that grow and thrive are a good indication.

**Waze is a big player in the out-of-home (OOH) space. What's the strategy there given that people are spending more time at home?**

There was a notion in a couple markets to make people aware that we're here to help them get through the new world and that we really understand new patterns as they're exploring. I don't know about you, but I've lost a little bit of confidence in knowing exactly where to go and where new stores are, and I'm shopping in different places I never did [before]. And my patterns are all broken. As someone who loves to drive and is kind of competitive about routes and understanding the world around me, it was important to make people feel comfortable.

## **How are you convincing marketers that OOH matters and is an important component within their marketing portfolio?**

People used to drive to places because they had to just get there. And they would make decisions once they were at the retail location. It's not as safe to do that anymore. So OOH, whether it's digital or billboards, has become super prescient, even more so than before.

Savvy marketers are using that inflection point in the car ... this is the last chance they have get someone to come to their store. Someone's not going to walk down the street and stop by. OOH, both in digital and in the physical space, has become more critical in a moment like this.

If I imagined going shopping a year ago, I might go to an outlet mall or a place with four or five different stores. I'd be on my phone walking around and checking things out. I would sort of have an idea of where I want to go, but then I'm looking at what styles are available at different stores. I'm not doing that anymore. When I go into the grocery store, I don't browse around. I have a hard list, and I'd decide what I'm going to buy the second I exit my car.

## **You mentioned your habits aren't the same as last year. I'm sure others feel that way. What should that tell marketers? Should they pivot and readjust their efforts accordingly?**

Marketers got to see a new type of behavior in customers and if they were doing their homework, they got to understand something different about them. Maybe it was in an abnormal moment, but they saw the different ways people acted. The marketers that did best were flexible; they explored, listened to their customers, and used it as an opportunity to learn. There will be a return to normalcy, but there will be an evolved customer that sees the world differently.

## **We're at the beginning of 2021. What are your predictions?**

Overall, the notion of flexibility that's required from a media and advertiser perspective will become more prescient, and I hope it continues. A good relationship between media partners and marketers allows for that, so they can engage better with customers. And I think that sticks around more versus the classic model.

Also, people making decisions before they go places will remain. We're all mildly scarred by the world, but making that decision before leaving the car has caused a lot of efficiencies in how people use their time. I noticed that I spend less wasted time wandering around, and I try to make lemonade by spending more time with my kids at home and making more thoughtful journeys per se.