



With all the challenges facing the world today – war, violence, political upheaval, a changing climate creating more frequent and intense natural disasters – the problems of marketers don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. People over fifty will get that reference.

Still, our challenges as marketers are driven by the times in which we live, and they much reflect those global problems, writ small.

Pandemic and war – and governments' responses to those human tragedies – have created or exacerbated shortages of energy, food, raw materials and finished goods. The American economy has been whipsawed by a pandemic-driven switch from services to goods, from entertainment to staying home, from trips to the store to contactless delivery, then a rapid swing back in the other direction. Supply chain disruptions have driven up the cost of world trade. One ship stuck in a canal half-way around the world reminded us of how fragile is the structure we've built, how vulnerable to disruption.

And those disruptions – and again, governments' policies for dealing with them – create consumer uncertainty and anxiety. The biggest concern for many Americans isn't the tragedies mentioned above, but their effect: inflation. Most adults today have never experienced serious inflation before, and it is scary. (I may not have walked to school barefoot, uphill, in the snow, but I did have a home mortgage at 13.75%.) Psychologically and practically, the price of gasoline and groceries drives the mood of the American people, and ultimately, the health of the economy.

OK, enough macro-economics, which is hardly my field of expertise.

My point, of course, is how important loyalty and customer engagement are when economic and social forces make customers more vulnerable to switching. How can loyalty help? First, in supporting customers with meaningful value, and savings that

are more important than ever. An example is the major supermarket programs that deliver savings on food and fuel. Giant Eagle announced last week that they are enhancing their loyalty program, delivering more perks and savings to loyal customers. That's a reminder for retailers in categories like energy, groceries, QSRs and others to take a hard look at their programs, and be willing to invest as necessary in keeping their customers.

Another proven way a robust program is essential for success in challenging times is to engage customers with services and recognition that make them think twice about switching brands. I've seen programs reduce attrition by as much as 25% during difficulties like labor disruptions; the same could prove true during our current supply disruptions.

Finally, times like these are major opportunities for innovation and creativity. What new ways could you engage and deliver value to customers? How can you make your brand more integral to consumers' lives? How can you provide greater utility to customers? What under-leveraged assets does your company have that can uniquely enhance the customer experience?

How is your enterprise responding to today's challenges? [Your thoughts?](#)

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