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PART 1

## THE GREAT SWITCH: “FIVE YEARS IN FIVE MINUTES: THE ULTIMATE BRAND TEST”

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*“You gotta play until the end/The only difference between a winner and a loser is a winner plays until he wins...” — Big K.R.I.T.*

There has never been a brand acceleration moment like this in the history of marketing. I say this because the pandemic is not just a forcing function, but a shock factor in how consumers choose between brands—not just for today, but for all their brand tomorrows.

The experiences and choices made today will drive lasting, profound impact. Sadly driven by a global pandemic, the dynamic and unprecedented changes being imposed upon consumers cannot be ignored. Astute marketers know that choices made in times of life discontinuities can last a lifetime.

We have an extended period while this storm is overhead, a tempest which won't pass until rapid testing and antibody testing are available at scale. That could take us into 2022 by some estimates. During this era, brands must retool or face retirement by their customers. Those that both navigate well and artfully remind their customers of how well they performed during this vulnerable period will surely emerge with greater equity and subsequent higher market share; those that disappoint will almost certainly suffer a catastrophic loss of goodwill, confidence, and

ultimately the market share they once enjoyed.

There are three powerful new behaviors emerging from this crisis, all of which present immense opportunity or perhaps great peril. In this series, I'll take you through them one by one. They are:

### 1. THE GREAT SWITCH:

If their typically preferred products are unavailable, consumers will switch without a second thought (and potentially forever).

### 2. THE GREAT TRIAL:

There will be first-time customers for products that are either new or newly introduced to them.

### 3. THE GREAT LOYALTY:

Those that tangibly helped their customers face down this plague will win long-lasting brand loyalty.

And now we begin with **The Great Switch**.

The line between consumer goods and industrial/military-grade products has dissolved once and for all. Anxiety about the virus has led many people to seek “industrial-strength” solutions. Also, many familiar consumer products are not available on a regular basis today because of supply chain disruptions, hoarding, and government regulation—toilet paper, sanitizing wipes, paper towels, and cleaning products chief among them. Customers will now try a new brand and find it perfectly suitable, or even more appealing, because of cost, availability, or quality.

The line between home and office has similarly blurred. We remember how enterprise software design changed after consumers saw what was possible with retail software. “If I can have the same ease-of-use at home, then why is this user interface so clunky?” asked Millennials, so products like Zoom and Slack burst into the mainstream for use in the living room as well as the conference room.

While some things will return to “normal” after the pandemic loosens its grip, others simply won’t. From a messaging standpoint, if yours is a brand whose supply chain didn’t perform, you must quickly, genuinely apologize to consumers who depended on you and feel let down, or they might find satisfaction in commercial toilet paper and military wipes forever.

Understanding all this, what is our concrete advice for brands in a supply/demand

crunch? They should present messages like “We are shifting our mix of industrial and residential manufacturing to better serve our valued customers.” Also, they could point consumers to other options—including competitors—as a public service if they still cannot find what they want.

In short, don’t be a victim of the great switcheroo. Move swiftly, openly, and humbly. Or else.

Stay tuned for Part 2 of this series, “The Great Trial,” where we discuss the plethora of experiments consumers are juggling.

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