E-Commerce in 2020: A Brave New World

Measuring an Unprecedented Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic came out of nowhere and reshaped every conversation happening in 2020. The year of the digital-first brand quickly turned into the year of the digital-only brand, as businesses across the country were forced to close physical locations and scrambled to meet their customers on the internet. Not every company has been able to make it through, and not every vertical was affected the same.

To figure out the impact COVID-19 had on consumer preferences and shopping patterns, the AdRoll research team surveyed 2,006 consumers in the U.S. We asked them how they allocated their digital spending across categories, how their spending had changed, how likely it was to change further in the future, and how they found and connected with the brands they chose to buy from.

What we found were some interesting insights into how habits change in the face of an unprecedented crisis. Most surprisingly, what we found was that the large majority of consumers weren't interested in subscribing right away to "the new normal." That despite much of our buying habits changing during the pandemic, many of these changes don't appear to be very "sticky," and that many consumers are waiting patiently for life to return to normal, rather than boldly striding into a bright digital future.

For brands, then, the big question becomes: how do we keep the consumers that we gained during this crisis, and how do we foster a faster transition towards more digital spending in our categories?

The Way Things Were

In many ways, 2019 was a pivotal year for e-commerce. The world saw the explosion of direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands, a growth in "digital-first" approaches from traditional brands, and a growing movement to digitize everything, from buying groceries to exercising. It was the year of Peloton and Instacart and Uber and Amazon one-day delivery (and even same-day delivery).

But headlines and customer behavior aren't always as perfectly aligned as marketers might like to think. Before evaluating how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the digital landscape, AdRoll needed to get a baseline of customer behavior.

Overall Digital Spending

As a whole, our data shows that Americans did about **44%** of their spending online in 2019. According to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the average consumer unit[1] spent $62,438 from July of 2018 through June of 2019. That puts the average online spending in 2019 at **$27,472**. Keep in mind that these are average numbers, and suffer all the faults of an average — they can be easily distorted up or down based on extreme outliers, and are an imperfect measure of what reality looks like for many consumers.

This percentage stays surprisingly consistent across age categories, with the one notable exception that respondents in the highest age category spent significantly less online:

Age Range	18 - 29	30 - 44	45 - 60	> 60
% of Spend Online	46%	49%	44%	34%

[1] According to the BLS, a "consumer unit" is a family, an individual living alone or as part of a household that they are financially independent from, or two or more people who share major expenses.

What We Bought in 2019

The AdRoll research team identified seven key categories to track. These verticals were chosen because they are consumer-facing, common, and represent some of the fastest growth in the D2C space.

Consumers were asked to rank what percentage of their online shopping budget went to each category. Those responses were then compiled into a Vertical Activity Score (VAS) that allows us to compare overall consumer interest in each category, and across time.

The VAS is a score between zero and 100 that tells us, in a rough sense, about what percentage of online budgets are going to any specific vertical. This isn't a perfect snapshot — not every shopper spends in every category — but this is a pretty good look at what the average digital shopper might look like, if you built an "average shopper" out of all of our responses.

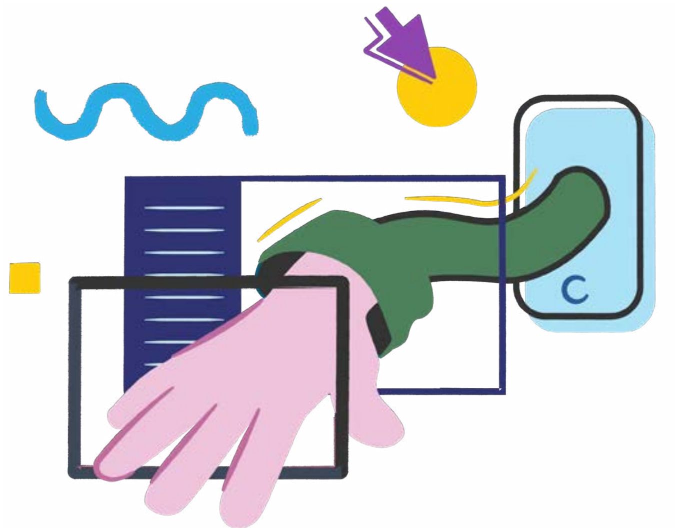
How Shoppers Prioritized Their Spend

Vertical	Description	VAS
1. **Apparel and Accessories**	Apparel and accessories brands sell things people wear. From long-time favorites Everlane and Warby Parker to upstarts like Bombas. It also includes a host of legacy brands that are slowly transitioning to a digital-first approach.	19.4
2. **Finance and Insurance**	Finance and insurance includes the growing field of financial technology (FinTech) including press darlings like Robinhood, Brix, and Oscar. These include companies that allow consumers to buy or sell stock, get credit, invest for their future, and protect that future with insurance.	16.0
3. **Grocery and Food Delivery**	From Uber Eats to Instacart to Hello Fresh, grocery and food delivery companies bring deliciousness directly to consumers' doors. This growing category has seen some turmoil in recent years, and is coalescing around a few large players.	15.0
4. **Health and Wellness**	Health and wellness companies provide products that help consumers get and stay healthy. These include fitness services like Peloton, supplement brands like Care/of, and healthy living companies like ClassPass. This category covers anything that helps people live fitter, healthier, more balanced lives.	14.9
5. **Beauty and Cosmetics**	Makeup, skincare, shampoos, scrubs, and anything to help consumers feel better about the way they look fits in this category. Notable brands include Glossier, ColourPop, and Lush.	13.9
6. **Home and Garden**	The home and garden vertical covers brands that sell furniture and decor, like Article, home care and improvement items like Clare, and plants and gardening supplies like Horti. Anything that helps consumers spruce up their homes goes here.	12
7. **Education**	Education covers a wide variety of services. This category includes continuing education companies like Udacity, test prep companies like Ready4, and tutoring services like Magoosh. Some teach skills for hobbyists, just for fun, while others are built to be career launchpads.	10.7

The biggest takeaway from the 2019 numbers is how far people have come in trusting their shopping to the internet. Consumers feel comfortable buying most services online now, and don't restrict their purchases to any single category.

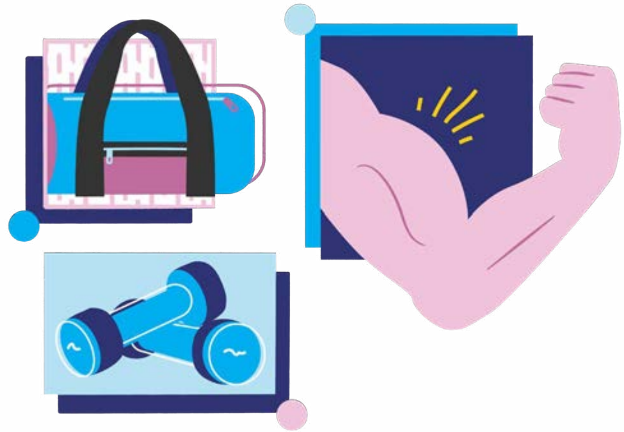
This is especially apparent in the way Americans shop for clothes and financial services, but extends throughout the list. Few categories stand out, and the shopping mix is diverse. In many ways, the most striking thing about this distribution is how closely it resembles **average spending overall**.

The big outlier here is online education, which remains a low priority and largely out of step with how consumers spend money offline. It's possible that online education companies haven't presented a strong value proposition to consumers yet, and haven't been able to make a case for their service. It's also possible that years of low-value for-profit online schools have soured Americans on the idea of higher education in a digital space.



What We're Buying Now

Vertical	VAS 2019	VAS 2020	Change in Spend
Apparel and Accessories	19.4	17.8	▼ 9%
Finance and Insurance	16.0	14.9	▼ 7%
Health and Wellness	14.9	15.6	▲ 5%
Grocery and Food Delivery	15.0	17.8	▲ 19%
Beauty and Cosmetics	13.9	13.7	▼ 2%
Home and Garden	12.0	12.3	▲ 3%
Education	10.7	10.3	▼ 4%



It's not surprising that priorities and online spending shifted after lockdown orders started going into place across the country. How things have shifted tells an important story about business under quarantine.

By the time this survey was in the field, seasonally adjusted unemployment numbers showed that about 23 million Americans were out of work. With the economy in an uncertain place, consumers began to pull back on non-essential services.

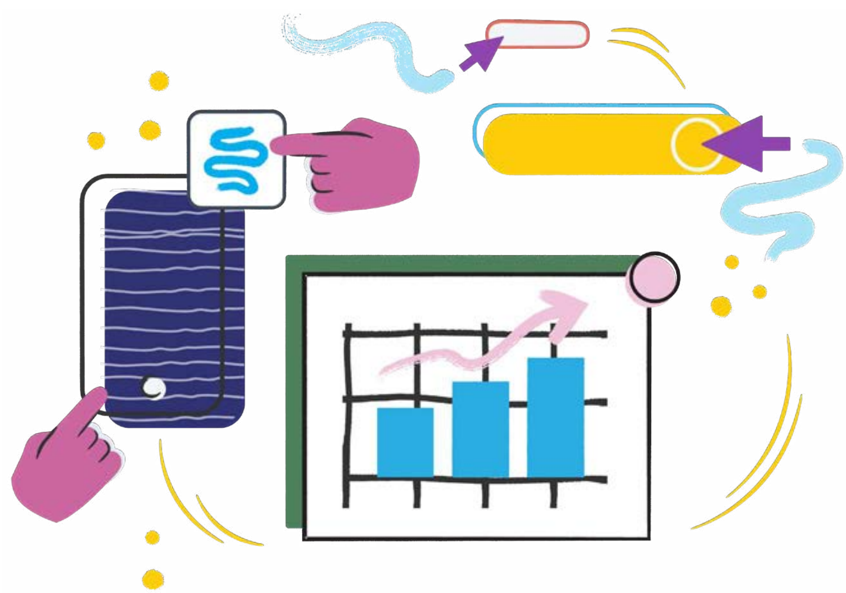
However, rather than pulling back across the board, or drastically changing spending in one or two categories, consumers instead have made small adjustments to the way they allocate budgets.

Instead of reacting with a radical reprioritization, consumers seemed to take a more moderate approach. As restaurants closed, food and grocery delivery spending went up. With gyms shut down, Americans turned to the internet for health and wellness. With so much time spent at home, consumers began to spruce up their living spaces.

The data paints a pretty clear picture: people are doing what they can to maintain as much normalcy as possible. Consumers aren't so much falling into a "new normal," as countless advertising campaigns have led us to believe, but are trying their best to recreate their old normal with some caveats.

Take apparel and accessories, for example. At a nearly 10% decline in spending, it represents the biggest drop since the start of COVID-19. However, it also still maintains the largest share of consumer spending. With nowhere to go, it makes sense that consumers would spend less on "going out" outfits. But at the same time, purchases of sweatpants and other comfy casual wear **increased**, as shoppers decided to make themselves feel at home. A lot of the reduction can be explained by shoppers changing priorities from expensive work and socializing outfits to more affordable home outfits.

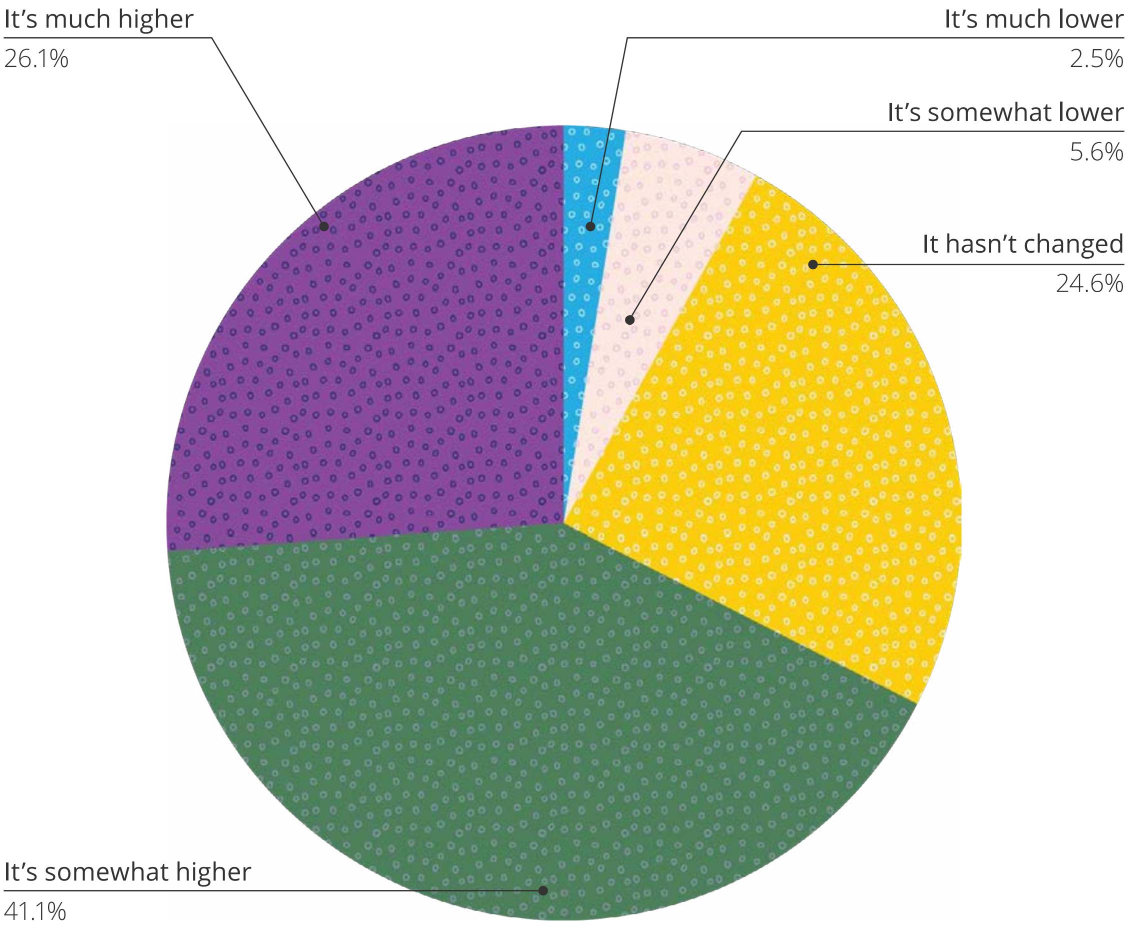
What these numbers suggest isn't a radical shift in the way consumers interact with digital brands. Instead, the data coming out indicates that many of these gains may be temporary — a reaction to immediate events that could evaporate once the economy reopens. There is already some indication that **this is happening**. Brands should keep that in mind at all times while planning their COVID-19 marketing. Gains made now need to be nurtured and solidified if they are to turn into consistent growth.



Consumers Are Spending More Money in Different Places

Even as consumers deprioritized some spending categories, people reported spending more online overall. **67% of respondents** said that their online spending has been either somewhat higher or much higher since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only about 8% said that their spending was down, with the rest responding that it was about the same.

How has your online spending changed since COVID-19?



The important thing to note is that the Vertical Activity Score doesn't say whether overall online spending is up or down, just how consumers prioritize specific categories. So even if a piece of the pie has shrunk (like apparel and accessories, for example) the overall pie has gotten bigger.

With retail, restaurants, gyms, and other activities closed, consumers have had to move more of their budgets online. The big challenge for brands during and immediately after the pandemic will be convincing customers that buying goods digitally is better than returning to physical stores when the economy reopens.

What's Next for Digital Engagement

Making a brand stickier requires a thorough understanding of how consumers find and engage with the digital brands they choose to buy from. These responses aren't specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, but give insight into what makes customers click "Buy," and what makes consumers connect with brands after they find them.

We asked consumers how they found the digital brands they shop from, and what characteristics they look for in brands they choose to shop with. The responses helped dispel some of the hype around the latest and greatest marketing tactics of the last year.

Influencers Out, Advertising In

Influencer marketing has been the hottest trend in digital marketing of the last year or two. But when we asked consumers, "Which of these most closely describes how you learned about the digital brands you buy from?", social media came in at a not-very-close fourth place. Respondents were allowed to pick three options.

I had a need and I searched for it	**57%**
I saw an ad online (e.g. search ad, on a website, etc.)	**32%**
A friend or acquaintance recommended them to me	**29%**
I saw a social media story or ad on social media	**23%**
I got an offer I was interested in by email	**18%**
A friend or acquaintance shared a social post I was interested in	**15%**
I read a news story about them	**13%**
I saw a traditional advertisement on tv or in a print publication	**13%**
Don't remember / Not sure	**12%**

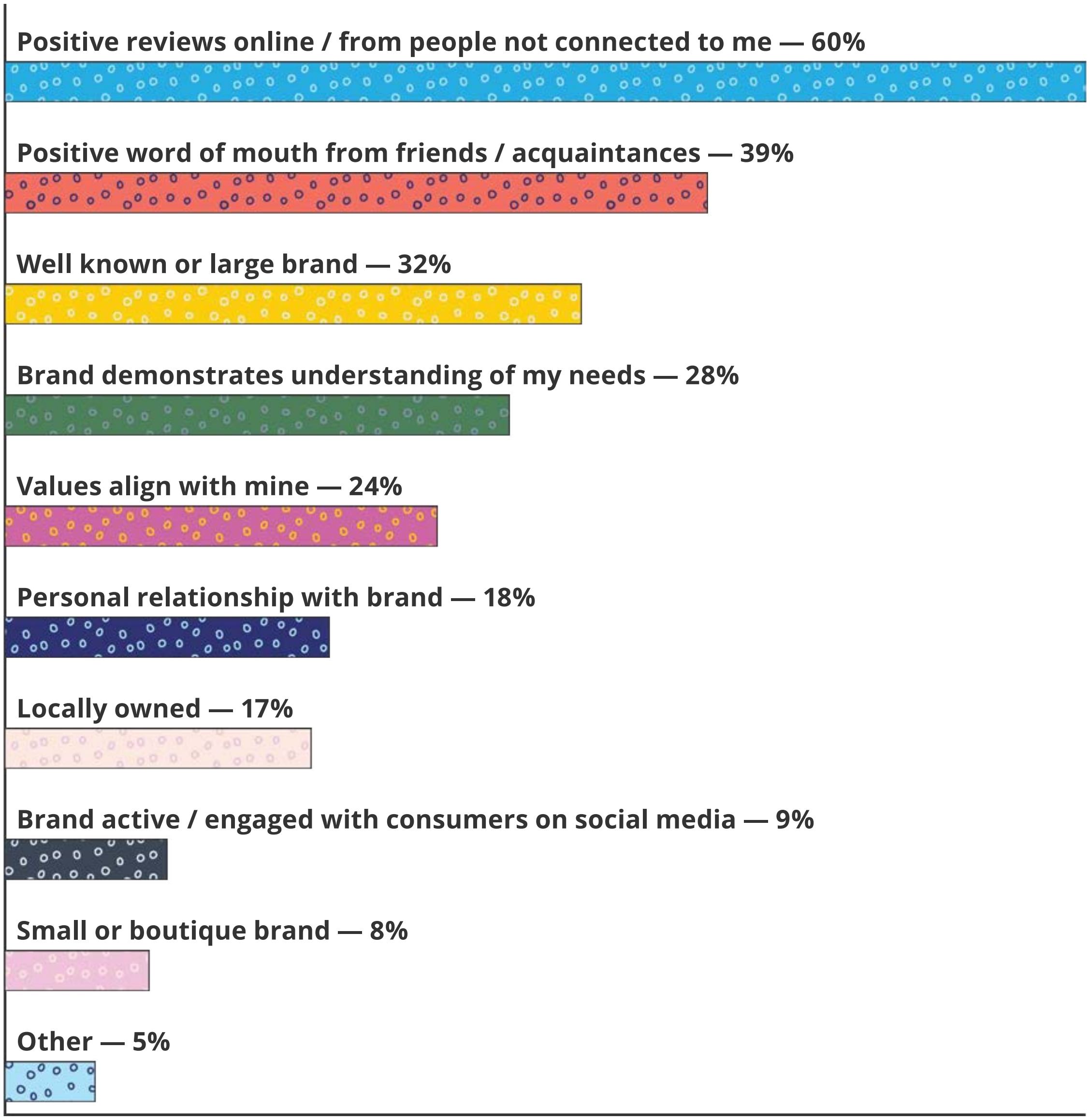
Search remains king, with over half of all survey respondents saying that they mostly find the brands they're interested in by looking for something specific that they need. Consumers still prefer to take charge of and initiate their own customer journeys. This means that brands should make sure they double down on SEO strategies to ensure they're meeting their customers where they're looking for them — Google. SEO is critical to driving more traffic so investing in an SEO expert on your team, or even partnering with an agency that specializes in SEO, is well worth it.

Digital advertising came in at a strong second. Despite rumors to the contrary, consumers don't appear to be immune to the powers of a well-placed ad. What's more, younger millennial and Gen Z consumers, those in the 18 - 29 bracket, are just as, if not more susceptible to ads than older consumers, with almost 34% saying they had found brands they bought from through an ad. This contradicts a long line of gurus claiming that the digital native generation ignores all advertising online and means marketers should continue to funnel money into digital ad strategies. The data also shows there is no real risk in experimenting with different ads — A/B test a few, switch up the message and the creative, and see which ads resonate more across your audiences.

Younger millennials and zoomers were much more likely to respond to social ads and influencers, however. Even though "I saw a social media story or ad on social media" came in fourth overall, younger consumers were much more likely to be swayed by social stories and ads, with 31% saying it had led them to a brand they ended up buying from. Likewise, they were much more likely to respond to social media posts by friends or acquaintances (20%) vs. the rest of the survey respondents. The learning here? Don't put all your budget into one social channel. It might look like the sexiest and easiest option from the outside, but the data shows a more well-rounded digital campaign is the way to get in order to reach consumers across the average 56 touch points they need before a purchase.

What Consumers *Really* Care About

Consumers don't just buy the first product they find, no matter how they find it. To identify what drives buying decisions, AdRoll asked, "What characteristics do you look for in the online brands you purchase from?" Up to three responses were allowed.



Not surprisingly, positive reviews came in on top. More surprisingly, consumers were more willing to trust the reviews of strangers on the internet than of friends and acquaintances, and by a large margin. As shopping moves online, and the variety of products available increases exponentially, consumers may be having a harder time finding friends and acquaintances familiar with any given brand or product. That makes online reviews even more powerful for brands that are leveraging them. While marketers can't control all reviews, there are strategies to help drive positive ones and get the volume up so consumers have more to go off. Companies like Yotpo and G2 Crowd focus specifically on reviews and are excellent resources and partners for those who have work to do. App reviews are key, too. For example, reviews are critical to the Shopify store, so ensuring you have insight into how your brand is performing within that platform is key.

Recognizing a brand was also an important signal to consumers. This validates a lot of the more difficult-to-quantify impact of marketing activities like top-of-funnel brand awareness campaigns. Simply being recognized as a legitimate company is a strong trust signal to consumers that makes it easier for them to buy. Dynamic display ads are great for this — they're long lasting strategies that constantly remind consumers of who you are. Not the most clickable, but definitely the most beneficial when it comes to brand awareness.

As with finding a brand, younger consumers are much more likely to look to social media — 18-29 year olds are much more likely (10%) to purchase from a brand if they engage with customers on social media. On the other hand, older consumers are more likely (23%) to buy from a brand that they have a personal relationship with than any other age group. The key here is build the relationship. Whether that's having someone on your team focus on social engagement, or merely creating personalized emails and handwritten notes for packages, the extra customer touch goes a long way and makes consumers feel heard and appreciated.

Vertical Insights

So, how do brands get sticky? That's going to depend largely on which of our tracked verticals they belong to. Each one has their own challenges and opportunities, and all differ in how likely consumers are going to "snap back" to pre-pandemic spending patterns.

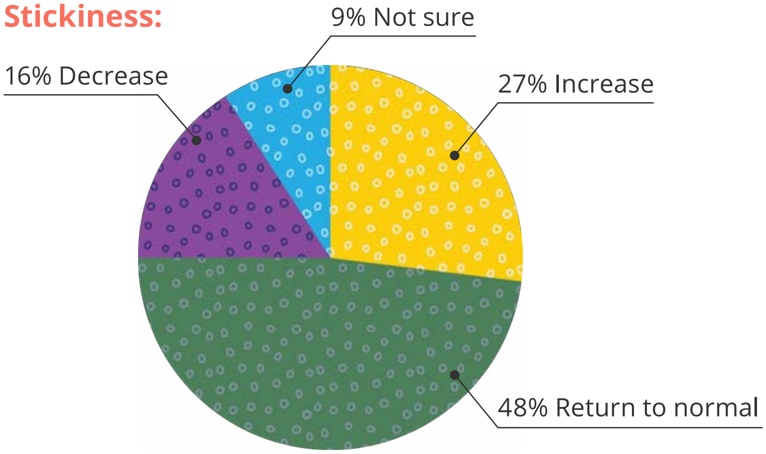
To gauge the new spending patterns, we asked consumers how their spending on each category was going to change after stay-at-home orders are lifted, relative to their spending last year: will it increase, return to pre-pandemic levels, decrease, or "I'm not sure"?

Apparel and Accessories

Pre-COVID Vertical Activity Score: 19.4

COVID Vertical Activity Score: 17.8

Stickiness:



Apparel and accessories had the biggest drop in VAS out of all of our tracked verticals, 20%. However it remains one of the highest priority categories for consumers, and our forecast indicates it will have the biggest rebound post-COVID.

1. *Respond to changing tastes*

The clothes people are buying now aren't the clothes they were buying 6 months ago. Traditional workwear is out, comfort is in. This might continue after the pandemic, as companies figure out how to incorporate more remote work into their operations. This will continue to be a major fashion driver for at least the rest of this year. Tweak your campaigns to match these changing tastes. Try messages that speak to the new lifestyles people are living, try using photos that show your products in the home — meet your consumers where they are and relate to them and see if that drives purchasing.

2. *Create a deadstock plan*

One of the byproducts of this pandemic is a backlog of inventory, especially for apparel and accessories sellers. Inventory that isn't moving only takes up space, and clearing it out is critical to being ready for the next phase. This might mean having to run steep discounts, but it's better than sitting on merchandise that isn't moving. Consider creating COVID-specific promos with your digital ads to catch readers' eye and get them to act now.

3. *Plan early, win early*

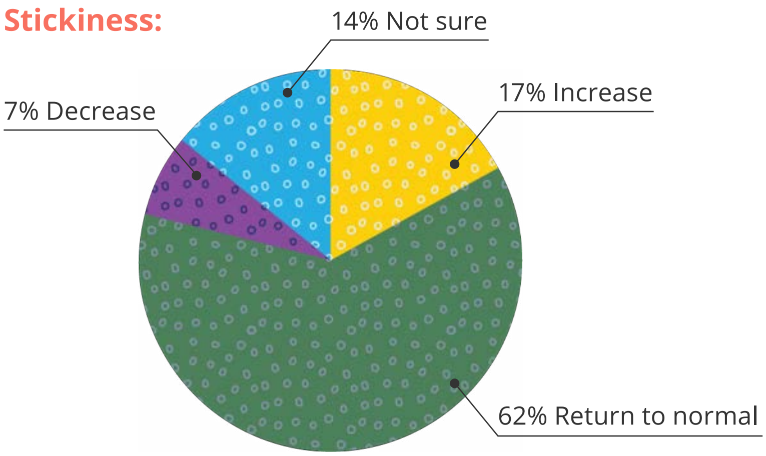
With pent up demand so high, and such a low number of snap-back consumers, apparel and accessories companies need to start preparing and executing on their "reopening" campaigns now. Getting in front of consumers early will be the difference between brands that ride the reopening wave and those that get crushed by it. Consider tactics like pre-order campaigns too. At AdRoll we've seen that "Book Now" or "Order Now" create strong call to actions for consumers, and could be a way to get a pulse for what people are looking forward to and wanting to buy so you can plan your inventory accordingly.

Finance and Insurance

Pre-COVID Vertical Activity Score: 16.0

COVID Vertical Activity Score: 14.9

Stickiness:



Finance and insurance is a mixed bag — on the one hand, it has the lowest number of respondents who plan to decrease spending; on the other, it has the highest number that intends to return to where they were, and the highest number of people who just aren't sure.

1. ***Sell stability***

   Consumers are nervous. The markets are all over the place, COVID numbers are changing by the day, and the world seems to have gone crazy. More than ever, selling financial services will need to be about selling the idea that things will get better, and that investing now will lead to safety and stability later. Help your consumers understand what's happening, be as transparent as you can about your own business, give them tips for the now so they can plan for the future. You don't need to go quiet because eyeballs are down, use this quiet as an opportunity to build your voice and connection with consumers now, regardless of whether or not they buy.

2. Respond with empathy

Almost 30 million people have lost their jobs, so finance and insurance companies need to be especially cognizant about messages that emphasize wealth or the growing disparity between those who are riding out this recession and those who aren't. Avoid excessive messaging on ROI and focus on responding with empathy first. Consider content that helps people plan for their future and budget now. Be a resource for consumers so that they feel you're a trusted voice now — and then when they're ready to invest again, you'll be top of mind.

3. Sell to smaller customers

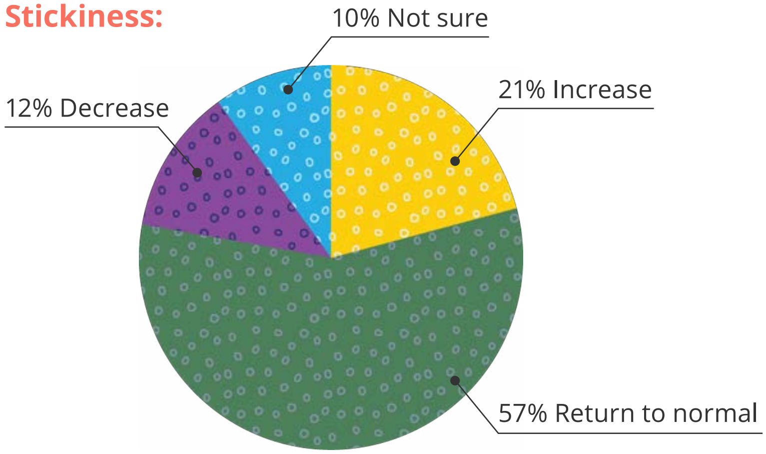
Younger consumers and those with incomes under $75,000 have the largest share of uncertainty about future spending in this category. These consumers may feel like they don't have enough to buy financial products, but represent the largest long-term growth potential. Structure messaging around "every little bit counts" and educate consumers about the long-term security that even small contributions can provide.

Health and Wellness

Pre-COVID Vertical Activity Score: 14.9

COVID Vertical Activity Score: 15.6

Stickiness:



Widespread closures led to a rise in VAS for health and wellness, one of the few categories to see an increase. Our forecast also shows strong potential for growth, but a significant amount of snap-back as well.

1. ***Start building habits now***

   Experiment with messaging and delivery options that get consumers into a routine, and tailor these approaches to individuals so that every routine feels "perfect." Now is the time to use historical data to identify customers most in danger of dropping out and find ways to get them invested.

2. ***Anticipate changing behavior***

   With the economy opening up, consumer wellness habits are going to change. Prepare messaging to deal with shifting schedules now. Use data from before the pandemic to identify customers likely to change up their routines. These shifts will necessitate a change in cadence and timing in marketing, or else risk seeing a large drop in ROI.

3. ***Remind people why they liked digital health and wellness in the first place***

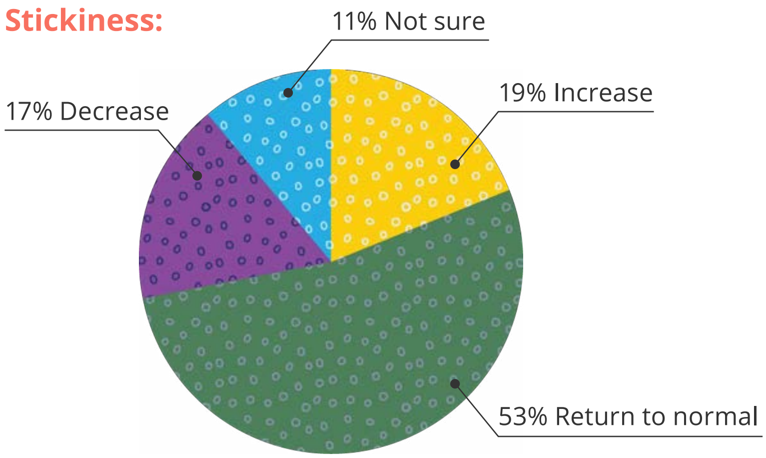
   It's easy to write off growth in this vertical as a result of circumstance, but it's important to note that consumers weren't thrilled with traditional options. Remind customers why the digital-first approach made sense for them — less punishing membership plans, added flexibility, convenience, and trust.

Home and Garden

Pre-COVID Vertical Activity Score: 12.0

COVID Vertical Activity Score: 12.3

Stickiness:



With consumers stuck at home, it's not surprising that the home and garden vertical saw an increase in activity. But it's also the least sticky vertical, with more people anticipating a future decrease in spending than any other vertical.

1. *Overcome classic objectives*

As lockdowns began, online retailers made a number of concessions to spur business, like reductions in shipping costs, faster fulfilment timelines, and more shippable options with better packaging. As the economy picks up, home and garden providers will need to resist the urge to cut back, or risk losing customers to brick and mortar stores. Lean in now and keep the momentum going, and then find ways — whether with ads or content — to continue to push the importance of maintaining and improving your home and garden spaces.

2. *Value and values*

Consumers that increased their spending in this vertical were more positively correlated with prioritizing brands whose values matched their own. Younger consumers especially are looking for home and garden companies that follow sustainable practices more than legacy brands. But they are also looking for value, making this a fine line to walk. Much of this group is likely new to your space and brand, so find ways to educate and inform them, and get them excited, not overwhelmed.

3. *Viable growth*

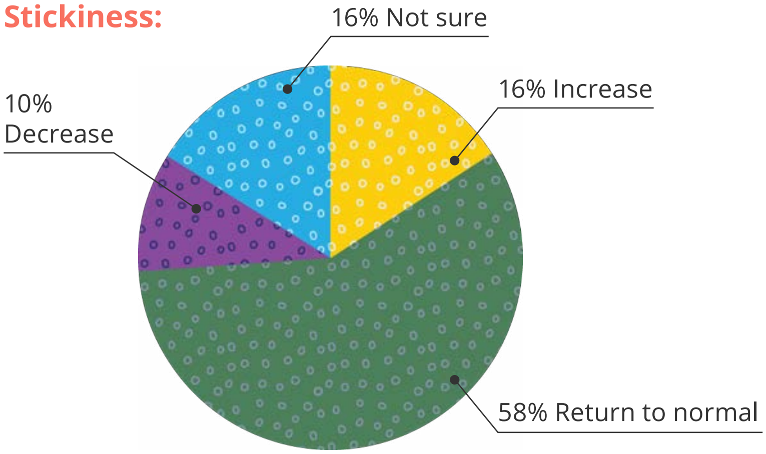
Home and garden still represents one of the lowest VAS scores in our survey, leaving a lot of opportunity for improvement. Consumers in this space tend to be much more social media-oriented, so brands looking to grow will need to master the art of Instagram if they want to take advantage of this potential. Leverage DIY videos, Instagram Live, reshare plant memes — there's a whole community out there, tap into them and tweak some of your content to match what's getting positive engagement and support.

Education and Continuing Education

Pre-COVID Vertical Activity Score: 10.7

COVID Vertical Activity Score: 10.3

Stickiness:



Consumers are still not sold on online education, and the pandemic has surprisingly not helped much — perhaps because consumers feel like they are already forced to do too much online. This vertical has the highest future uncertainty, representing a challenge but also an opportunity.

1. ***Beware of sticker shock***

   For online education services that have been giving out free or highly discounted lessons or curricula during the pandemic, it's critical to consider now how customers will react when prices return to normal. Consider a phased return to normal prices, with plenty of communication throughout.

2. ***Identifying new opportunities***

   With children out of schools, parents are looking for resources to enrich their lives. Millennial parents, especially, are in a group that is familiar with edtech and saw the smallest drop in their VAS over the pandemic — less than a 1% decline for 30-45 year olds. This demographic is growing their buying power quickly and will become a key target in the next few years. Consider retargeting strategies and keep this group in mind with your communication. Continue to meet this group where they are so you're there when they're ready to make a purchase.

3. ***Moving past the past***

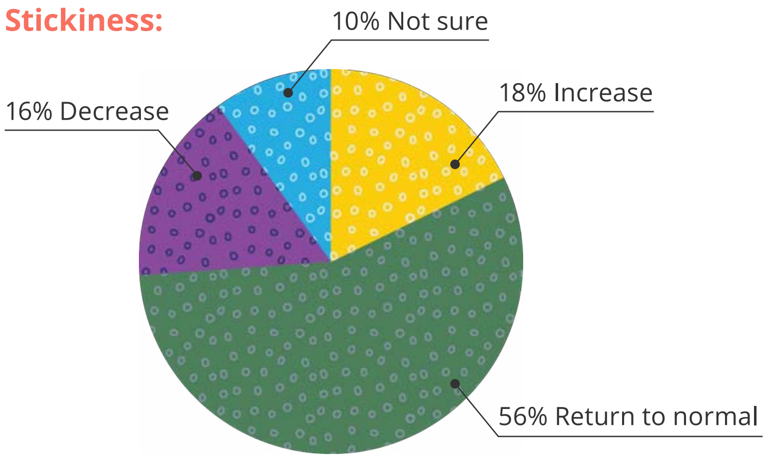
   Online education still carries a significant stigma from the days when online schools were equated with for-profit diploma mills. The biggest challenge for education brands coming out of COVID-19 is demonstrating that modern edtech is not the same as the old online schools by focusing on educational results as a primary selling point and strong brand building efforts.

Beauty and Cosmetics

Pre-COVID Vertical Activity Score: 13.9

COVID Vertical Activity Score: 13.7

Stickiness:



Beauty and cosmetics can be seen as a bellwether for the economy — it's changed the least, and represents the median for post-COVID spending predictions. Consumers seem to have clung on to this vertical as a way to find normalcy, replacing outsourced beauty regimens with at-home alternatives, but are also eager to resume their normal routines.

1. ***Create confidence***

   Consumers are continuing to buy cosmetics, but shopping for beauty supplies online is different than buying them in person. As retail stores reopen, digital brands will need to work to bring in on-the-fence customers. A solid return policy is a good start, as is offering sampler packs for customers to try out products that they may not be sure about.

2. ***Bring experiences home***

   18-29 year olds were the only demographic that are more likely to decrease spending below pre-COVID levels than increase it. They also prefer experiential spending over accumulative spending.

Brands in this space will need to figure out how to turn buying beauty supplies online into an experience to recapture this market.

3. *How the other side spends*

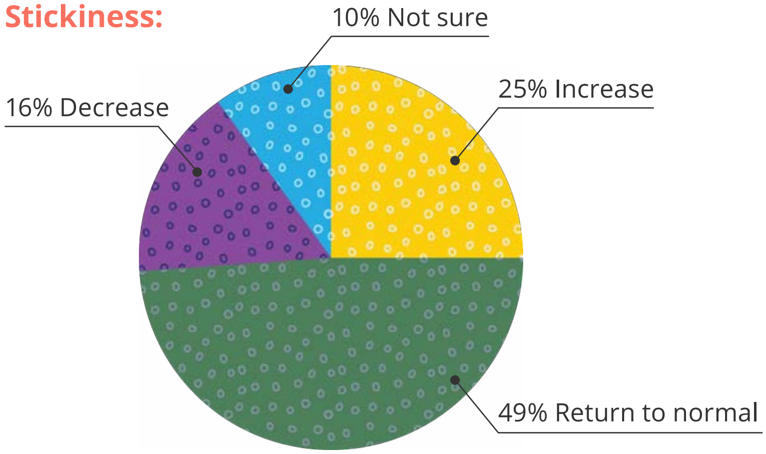
This vertical more than any other was split heavily by gender — 41% of men and 26% of women responded that they hadn't bought any beauty and cosmetics products online. Brands are slowly figuring out how to sell beauty products to men online, but there is still significant opportunity for growth.

Grocery and Food Delivery

Pre-COVID Vertical Activity Score: 15.0

COVID Vertical Activity Score: 17.8

Stickiness:



With long grocery lines, limited in-store capacity, and limited transportation to get to and from, delivery services have become a must have for many, not just a nice to have for consumers, resulting in grocery being the big winner out of all of our verticals. But this category still needs to overcome serious operational problems to meet the coming growth.

1. Momentum marketing

Almost a full quarter of consumers surveyed reported they were likely to increase their spending on these services after lockdowns are lifted. Almost 50% said they would keep their spending at current levels. However, marketers know that what consumers say and what they do can be two different things. Food delivery companies will need to continue building habits to keep customers from switching back to old routines.

2. Surprising holdouts

The most interesting insight from the grocery and food delivery category is where resistance is highest: younger consumers are more ready to return to the real world than any other group, with 18% saying their spending on online food delivery services was going to decrease after lockdowns ended. Additionally, consumers in higher income brackets (HHI: $125,000+) are anxious to stop ordering so much takeout and go sit down at a restaurant.

3. The elephant in the room

It would be irresponsible to talk about grocery and food delivery insights without addressing the issue of profitability and churn. Companies in this space are having difficulty finding a path to profit despite growth. Post-COVID-19, these companies will have to focus their marketing energy not on acquiring new customers, but on making sure existing customers stay happy and connected, and at the same time they will need to find ways to ensure that growing customer numbers don't just mean growing financial losses.

What's Next

It's difficult to predict where consumer buying habits will go once everything is said and done. There are convincing arguments to be made that the current pandemic will be the tipping point that moves consumers to prefer the digital economy to the physical one. On the other hand, it's also possible that after months of being cooped up, consumers will rush back to stores to feel a sense of normalcy.

The popular narrative in digital right now is that the pandemic will radically shift consumer preferences towards online shopping. The results of our survey don't back up that narrative and paint a different picture. While some categories are poised to continue the growth they saw during stay-at-home orders, most may find that they snap back to pre-COVID numbers faster than they anticipated. For brands trying to figure out their next steps, the results are very clear: it's important to be prepared, anticipate change, and leverage what we know about consumer behavior. Here are four key takeaways to help you navigate the next few months:

1. ***Build a strong brand presence with SEO + advertising***

   Customers still prefer to find things on their own terms when they have a need. That doesn't mean smart brands can't give them a hand, though. Supplement your SEO strategy with strong branded ads to build and reinforce brand recognition. Buying patterns may be in flux now, but you want to be top of mind when they return to normal, and taking advantage of cheap advertising now can result in big wins later.

2. ***Ask for referrals (and use them)***

   Almost half of all respondents found products they needed through word of mouth, either in person or through social media. Almost all had made the decision to purchase based on reviews. Coming out of the COVID recession, that kind of word of mouth will be invaluable. Use transactional engagement emails, or even full referral platforms, to beef up reviews and referrals now.

3. *Strengthen your e-commerce presence*

Right now, a whole lot of consumers are buying products online because they have to, not because they want to. As the economy reopens, that equation will change, and brands will need to provide a reason for customers to come to them. Update the e-commerce experience to eliminate friction — consider using heatmaps and click-tracking tools to identify how consumers use your digital storefront and make it as easy as possible.

4. *Build goodwill and reciprocity*

In conducting this survey and speaking to breakout brands in our tracked verticals, one thing kept popping out as critical to surviving the challenges of 2020: giving back to customers and your community. Whether that's through insightful and useful content, or by donating time and money to worthwhile causes, now is the time for brands to give back. In fact, two of the most sought-after demographic groups, young consumers and wealthy consumers, both highly rate "brand shares my values" and "brand understands my needs" as reasons why they choose some brands over others. Investing in content and "values" marketing now can help transition companies smoothly into the post-COVID economy.

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About AdRoll: AdRoll levels the playing field for ambitious direct-to-consumer (D2C) brands. More than just ads, the AdRoll Growth Marketing Platform includes email marketing, AI-driven product recommendations, and cross-channel measurement. The all-in-one platform serves as mission control for marketers—unifying their data, channels, and measurement—so they can reach the right customers with the right messages at the right times. More than 37,000 customers globally use AdRoll to grow their business while controlling their own destiny. To get started for free today, visit www.adroll.com. AdRoll is a division of NextRoll Inc. and is headquartered in San Francisco, with offices in Dublin, New York City, Salt Lake City, and Sydney.