

How to adapt your marketing during a crisis

Force24™
Marketing Automation

Contents

1 Background

2 Introduction

3 Don’t align yourself to the pandemic

4 The importance of what you do now

5 Reporting and metrics during the pandemic

6 The tide of media messaging

7 Preparing for the boom

8 Summary

Force24™ | Marketing **Automation**

1 Background

To first understand how we should act during this period we need to be able to shed some light on how the next six to twelve months will unfold. Obviously, we don't have a crystal ball and we can't predict the future, but one thing that I can certainly assure you of is this: the world will return to normal.

Just like the changing of the tides, it's an inevitability that consumers will spend money and businesses will deliver services to support that need. It's impossible to hold this back.

Some enterprises have already been fortunate enough to be enjoying a 'boom' as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic – for example, organisations providing remote working solutions. On the other hand, some businesses that are unable to support their customers with their core product offering should feel the boom when thing return to relative normality. The government stimulus packages have been centred around making cash available, so while the bottom-line profit and loss (P&L) may get hit, the cash reserves should be strong. At this point, there will be a mass scramble for brands to get in first and start to unlock the revenue that's sat in their customers' pockets. This will generate an economic boom and strong commercial offers, enhanced marketing efforts and solid dialogue with customers and prospects alike, will be required.

While the following statement is contrary to my own advice, I feel it's worth sharing my hypothesis:

At some point within the next number of weeks, the UK government will announce a release strategy. This may well be convoluted and phased, but it will be a release strategy, nonetheless.

Adam Oldfield
Managing Director of Force24



1 Background (continued)

Businesses will begin to return to empty offices where essential in-house services should start to kick back into life. The insurance industries, office supplies and financial services are just a few sectors that I'm banking on will be among those that see the first wave of the boom. Although, this is clearly not an exhaustive list.

They will most likely be followed by all other B2B (business to business) propositions. However, the boom will not necessarily come at the point of release, it will perhaps be felt as companies start to think about their return. Pre-bookings, trading and enquiries will commence – and at a potentially strong rate – before the release date, and most likely at the point the release date is announced.

In parallel to the consumer world, as we become more mobile, the retail and hospitality industries will start to encourage consumers back into their stores and properties. Whilst the release strategy will be phased, these national brands make sure their voice is heard across the country well in advance.

This boom will be the only way to recover lost revenue during the government-imposed lockdown. Therefore, brands must be positioned and ready with their strategies to maximise their return during this period.

The boom may not actually feel like it to many consumers because nothing fundamentally is different. However, we know that's not how it works and it's the positivity that will inspire individuals to get back to normal quickly. The boom may only be short-lived, and it's important to not forget the lessons we've learned during this period.

But at least when this feeling subsides, we should return to an even playing field, where businesses have the opportunity to generate revenue in a fair environment.

Throughout all this, it's critical that you act now – and begin to plan for this period!

2 Introduction

Our role during this phase must be 50% focused on the communications we are producing and distributing today, and 50% on preparing for the boom.

Understand your place in the world

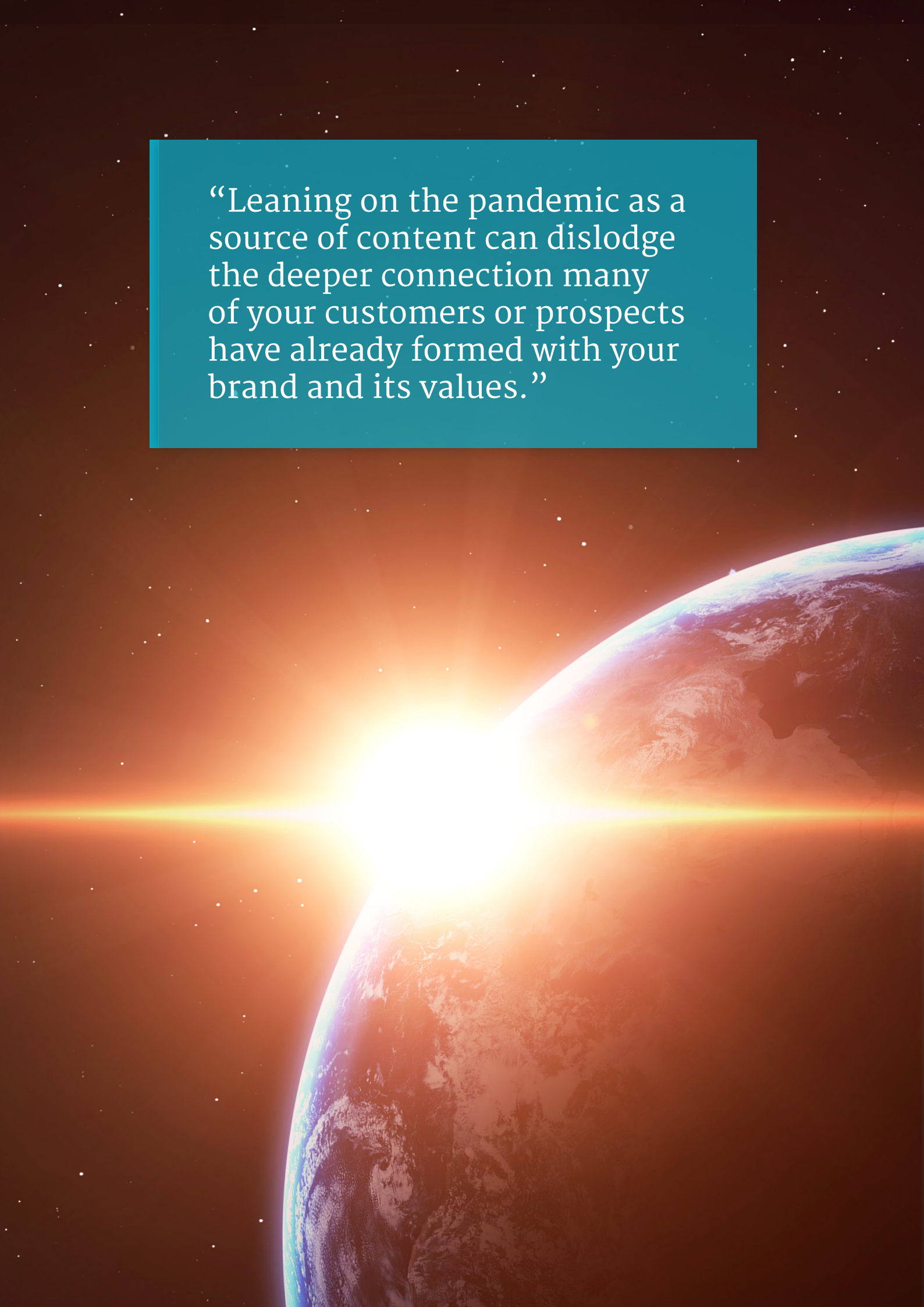
If, like me, you're not a global leader in virus control or a leading light in managing the pandemic, but you're a marketeer focused on the products that we sell – and the businesses we work for.

Our industry needs to understand that our audiences are begging for information and, while the pandemic may be tempting to use as content, we understand that all we can do is replay the news – or create our own view – because this is simply our own conjecture. However, this is a dangerous move.

We as marketeers must 'stick to our knitting' and talk only about what we know and truly understand. This may, however, cross into the world of comms during the pandemic and is in fact perfectly feasible to discuss how your product or service can help during this time.

We'll cover more on this later.

> "Our role during this phase must be 50% focused on the communications we are producing and distributing today, and 50% on preparing for the boom."



> “Leaning on the pandemic as a source of content can dislodge the deeper connection many of your customers or prospects have already formed with your brand and its values.”

3 Don't align yourself to the pandemic

The brands that we all represent have taken, very often, years of hard work from many different individuals to create. Leaning on the pandemic as a source of content can dislodge the deeper connection many of your customers or prospects have already formed with your brand and its values.

Whilst the human disposition naturally leans towards reading about negativity, we as marketeers must understand it's very difficult to turn this into profit. So, labouring on the negativity will only serve to align negativity to our brand.

Instead our brand must become a beacon of hope and an inspiration within our particular field.

Not all businesses understand their brand values, but those that do should make sure they align to those values. For example, the Force24 brand embodies the following:

- **We love and support all of our clients**
- **We are proud of our integrity**
- **We do what we say we are going to do**
- **We are for the long-term, not the short-term**
- **We help people do amazing things**
- **We aim to be exceptional and inspiring**

Over the last few weeks we have observed a number of communications from brands simply stating that they will no longer be taking orders or service will be disrupted as a result of COVID-19. Obviously, this kind of transactional communication may well be necessary, but they cannot be the only kind of messaging your brand is outputting at this time.

Instead, even when there is no commercial incentive – and we physically cannot transact with customers at this stage – I have been enthused at the number of brands talking instead about the good work they're doing either within the local community or perhaps business improvements they've been making internally. In some cases, even repurposing their team to provide educational webinars to customers to help them in the future.

More about this, in just a moment.

> "Instead our brand must become a beacon of hope and an inspiration within our particular field."



“ Force24 has seen a 180% increase in digital engagement during this pandemic and there are many reasons for this increasing engagement.”

4 The importance of what you do now

Even though the possibility of generating profit may have been impacted, the world keeps on turning – and it's a certainty it will return to normal in a fairly short space of time.

Therefore, how we act now is imperative. Force24 has seen a 180% increase in digital engagement during this pandemic and there are many reasons for this increasing engagement.

The increase in traffic is academic because it merely serves to demonstrate the actions of the marketeer to represent their brand are being listened to, and observed.

We can't solely talk about the pessimistic angle. We've actually observed many businesses adapting and thriving during such difficult times where they've looked for opportunities within their client base and adapted or offered new services.



4 The importance of what you do now (continued)

This increase in traffic gives you an opportunity to begin to talk to people that perhaps were not interested in your service proposition before, or may not have had the time to engage with you previously.

The Force24 approach has been to align with our brand values of being exceptional and inspiring – helping people do amazing things and being for the long-term, not short-term. To that extent we created a series of free webinars assisting marketeers across the country to hone their skills, update their knowledge and understand of new technology, and introduce new concepts that may help them be more effective when they return to work.

The resulting effect was thousands of marketeers – that we didn't already know – signed up to be a part of the live webinars, and downloaded our webinars and takeaway guides and collateral.

The groundwork we've laid during this period has now opened the door for us to help them to prepare for the boom.

Again, aligning to our brand value of being for the long-term, this initiative – which has been resource-intensive – will probably not result in short-term profit, but a long-term gain.

> This increase in traffic gives you an opportunity to begin to talk to people that perhaps were not interested in your service proposition before, or may not have had the time to engage with you previously.



5 Reporting and metrics during the pandemic

Whilst this is the one and only time I will say this, reporting metrics in this time simply do not matter. I certainly don't advocate not recording metrics, but there is no benefit at this stage trying to establish an optimum open rate or comparing your marketing performance to a normal environment.

The stats that you gain now are dramatically warped and will serve very little to help you optimise. That said, obviously paid-for channels that are not performing at this time should be suspended in favour of more effective communications such as email, social media, display, outbound and potentially DM (direct mail).

Instead of investing time in reporting, marketeers should focus on creating the content to align with their brand and support their customers and prospects.

When the dust settles, I do also think that the reports generated during this period will make for some interesting reading.

The general principle here is to divert this effort so you can produce worthy content and maintain timely communications.





"Paid-for channels that are not performing at this time should be suspended in favour of more effective communications such as email, social media, display, outbound and potentially DM"

6 The tide of media messaging

Whilst it can be extremely depressing to focus on the news outlets at such a time, it's essential to consume information from trusted media sources to not only keep you appraised with current updates, but help you to understand the government strategy.

By understanding the various stages of the government strategy, we can begin to plan for when we can expect the boom to occur. Additionally, we can acknowledge how changes in the legislation – or the situation – may play to the strengths of our company's products and services.

The initial stages of the government strategy have typically been to incite fear into the general population to ensure people comply with their requirements. And it's been extremely clever in how they've approached this. For example, the messaging has largely been around concern for the vulnerable and generating worry around our NHS's ability to cope with unprecedented demands.

As I write this document in April 2020, I firmly believe we are some weeks away from the government being able to step away from the 'fear' style message. And, I expect some very significant trauma as we see many more deaths in the short-term as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next stage of the government's strategy will be to transition to positivity – this will be very slow and begin to be mixed in with the fear message. You will be able to observe this in the media very gradually where you start to observe 'green shoots' style comments emerging from the government and more talk around the release strategy.

The transition messages will start to intensify over coming weeks too.

The final stage of the government strategy will be entirely around positivity. This will be implemented as an attempt to drive economic growth and potentially commence following our release from the UK lockdown. Additionally, it will be largely centred around how businesses have begun to recover, focusing on a number of success stories and delivering messages about how the government support packages have helped them during this time – ultimately leaving behind reports of new COVID-19 cases.

As a marketeer, from observing the strategy shifts we can adopt similar style messages during the transition and positivity phases.


“Just picking up from where you left off isn’t going to work.”

7 Preparing for the boom

The other 50% of my time should be spent in preparing for the boom. In this section of the guide, we've listed some of the things that we believe you should be doing to help you maximise the boom time – and help your business to recover.

Identify new opportunities

Even though the boom will bring about a natural stimulation in the economy, we still need to be sympathetic of people's plights. The aim of identifying new opportunities is to understand if there are new areas where our products or services can help our customers or prospects as they transition back into a state of normality.

Just picking up from where you left off isn't going to work. If your marketing team are furloughed right now, the day the government starts to move to the transition phase, you'll need to bring them back! It will take time for your employees to pick things up straight away in preparation for the boom.

As marketeers, we can project forwards and empathise with what it will be like for our customers as they return to work. How can we help them? What more can we do? What will they be asking for?

Understand your campaign calendar in advance

Once we understand where our new opportunities lie, we will need to develop new messaging to align with how our product can help them during this difficult time. Again, just rehashing old content or picking up where you left off simply will not be good enough. Adequate resource must be allocated to ensure your message is clear and concise.

As soon as the transition period begins – and the swing of messaging is more towards positivity – and the release strategies are announced, it will become very busy, very quickly! Businesses not allowing their marketeers adequate time to build a quality output will be forced to send ad-hoc, knee-jerk campaigns. Therefore, during a time where all brands are fighting to recover lost revenue, this voice will simply be lost.

By building a campaign calendar detailing the audience types, how you can help them and when you plan to execute your communications you can you plan resource accordingly.

7 Preparing for the boom (continued)

Invest in quality output

During the initial phases of the COVID-19 outbreak, Force24 observed significant increases in email volume through its mail servers, as did all email service providers across the globe. The resulting impact was a significant increase in spam filtering and delivery delays. The mail servers continue to do this to protect their customers from an increase in unwanted unsolicited email. This heightened level of spam filtering was observed across the board too.

And, there has also been a spam filters clampdown on the words commonly used throughout this additional email volume. The words that we observed causing filtering issues contained some of the following:

- **COVID-19**
- **Coronavirus**
- **Our business will be shut**
- **Pandemic**

During the most recent weeks, we have seen mail server volumes return to a normal level, and improvements in spam filtering and delivery delays.

This is important to understand as the same will apply during the boom – businesses saying the same repetitive things, with unimaginative messaging, will be subject to the same increased spam filtering and delivery delays.

It is critical to make sure that we understand our role in email deliverability if we intend to have our message received, and heard, by our recipients.

This includes the obvious checks of making sure that my domain is properly bound to my email server (SPF, DKIM etc) and all the technical considerations about my email are dealt with. If there were concerns around email deliverability before, you must absolutely address them now.

> It is critical to make sure that we understand our role in email deliverability if we intend to have our message received, and heard, by our recipients.



"Ensure you are segmenting your data appropriately! If possible, send emails first to those that have shown signs of engagement over the past two weeks"

7 Preparing for the boom (continued)

Invest in quality output (continued)

The second is to ensure you attempt to break the norm and speak directly about how your product and service can help the recipient. And you should avoid what may possibly become spam key phrases again such as:

(*the below are designed to be suggestions of what the majority of marketeers will be using in their emails, and is not an exhaustive list*)

- **COVID-19**
- **Coronavirus**
- **We are opening on xx/xx**
- **Pandemic is over!**
- **Freedom!**
- **Back to normal**
- **COVID-19 savings**

Ensure you are segmenting your data appropriately! If possible, send emails first to those that have shown signs of engagement over the past two weeks, and deliver very slowly to those contacts that have not engaged with you much over the last six months.

It is our advice to be very careful in sending to anybody that has not opened an email in the last six months. The mail servers will be looking to reward responsible senders during this period too.

Automate

Automation is key to enable savvy marketeers to preload months' worth of content into the automation platform and trigger as the government begins to transition to positivity.

Attempting to execute during the campaign strategies manually will mean your message is lost to those brands that have embraced automation – and are proving to be successful at optimal times.

Automation can handle the data segmentation on your behalf and make decisions on how quickly, or slowly, email should be delivered to certain customer groups.

Automation allows you to capitalise on the potential downtime your marketing department may be facing, and build strong and engaging content to support you in the boom time.

> "Automation is key to enable savvy marketeers to preload months' worth of content into the automation platform and trigger as the government begins to transition to positivity."



“Automation allows you to capitalise on the potential downtime your marketing department may be facing, and build strong and engaging content to support you in the boom time.”

8 Summary

Don't worry, as I've said before, the world will return to normal soon. The government will do all it can to reduce the economic impact on businesses and will announce a release date in advance. This announcement will mark the shift to the media trends of positivity, in an effort to create an economic boom.

The resulting boom can be your opportunity to recover as quickly as possible. But, a word of warning, if you're not ready for this, your chance to turn things around may be lost.

You need your marketing team primed, prepped and ready – and all with the strong focus covering how they will maximise the return during the boom. It may only last a couple of weeks or months, so once it begins… You will have no time to act.

How can Force24 help?

Not only does Force24 own and operate one of the UK's most powerful marketing automation platforms, it also has a large team of marketing automation support experts, ready to assist you.

These consultants are here to dispense free training and support to your team for life. Our 2-minute SLA means your team can access a wealth of assistance and knowledge when they need it the most, in an instant.

And our team is supported by savvy campaign service professionals that can help you with artwork, copywriting and, most importantly, strategy.

If this message resonates with you, and you agree that, firstly, a boom is due and, secondly, that you have a finite window to maximise your return, I would strongly recommend you speak to a member of the Force24 team. We can help you understand how our industry-leading technology is able to reduce the burden on your marketing team.

> Not only does Force24 own and operate one of the UK's most powerful marketing automation platforms, it also has a large team of marketing automation support experts, ready to assist you.



Get in touch

If you want to talk about your marketing call us **0845 272 5990** or email **info@force24.co.uk**

Force24™
Marketing Automation

Force24 Ltd, Office 2, Indigo Blu, 14 Crown Point Road, Leeds, LS10 1EL
0845 272 5990 - info@force24.co.uk