the marketing centre
Supercharged Fractional Marketing

How Marketing Helps Businesses Weather Economic Uncertainty

Why cutting marketing in tough times is the wrong instinct for South African businesses

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Marketing in interesting times

The early decades of this century have delivered a steady run of upheaval: political and economic turmoil, a global pandemic, supply chain disruption, load shedding, currency volatility and the return of inflation.

For most South African businesses, uncertainty is not an occasional event. It is the climate you operate in.

When money feels tight, the instinct is to cut marketing first. It looks like the safe, responsible choice.

It is usually the wrong one, and the businesses that understand why tend to come out of every downturn stronger than they went in.

Look after the customers you already have

The cheapest growth available in a downturn is the customers already paying you.

They cost nothing to find, they already trust you, and they are far more likely to buy again than a stranger is to buy for the first time.

The catch is that their needs shift fast when times are hard, so you have to keep listening. And you have to listen responsibly.

Under POPIA, respecting privacy and permission is both the law and simply good practice. Businesses that keep talking to their customers through a downturn, and keep paying attention to what has changed, protect their most valuable asset while competitors go quiet.

Why discounting is a trap

When budgets tighten, the reflex is to drop prices. It feels like action, but it trains your customers to value you less, and that is very hard to reverse once the pressure eases.

The stronger move is to hold your price and make your value impossible to miss.

Consistent, clearly communicated value beats a race to the bottom every time, because a race to the bottom has only one winner and it is rarely the business that started it.

Downturns reward the brands that stay visible

A downturn is when weak brands fade and strong ones take ground, precisely because so many competitors pull back and go silent. Staying visible, keeping your people motivated and holding a clear position in the market is how you win share while others retreat.

Brand, people and positioning are not luxuries you can only afford in the good times. They are the core of a business that holds its nerve, and they are exactly what buyers, customers and staff look to when everything else feels shaky.

Letting go of fear

Fear is what drives the cut-everything reflex, and fear makes for poor decisions.

The antidote is a clear plan and the confidence to keep investing where it genuinely counts, rather than freezing and hoping the storm passes.

That confidence is much easier to hold when you have experienced marketing judgement in the room, someone who has steered businesses through uncertainty before and knows which spend protects the future and which is safe to pause.

Where fractional marketing comes in

Uncertain times are exactly when senior marketing judgement matters most and a full-time executive salary feels riskiest. That tension is the strongest argument there is for fractional marketing.

In South Africa, The Marketing Centre gives businesses access to experienced marketing leaders, fractional marketing directors, managers and digital experts, on a part-time basis.

They help you protect your customers, hold your value and keep growing through the wobbles, without carrying a heavy fixed cost while the ground is still moving.

Supercharged Fractional Marketing Managers

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Proven marketing leaders.
Real business results.

For more insight on marketing and what it can do for your business, subscribe to our newsletter at themarketingcentre.co.za

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