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Internal Guidelines for All Content During the COVID-19 Outbreak

As we follow new developments surrounding the COVID-19 epidemic, we are adhering to, and actively updating, the following internal guidelines. All Persado Campaign Managers, Copywriters, Quality Assurance Specialists, and Content Intelligence Managers need to take all the guidelines below into account as they curate the output of Persado's platform and finalize content for experiments. Note that certain wording listed in the examples below may be preferred by Persado customers as a creative decision; in this case, we can flag the content for the customer to review if needed, but ultimately the control message is our compass when fine-tuning and finalizing content.

Do not use—no exceptions:

1. Puns or jokes about the COVID-19 outbreak and the current climate, e.g. "The antidote to boredom," "We have the cure," "Wash your hands before opening this email," "Germ-free guaranteed."
2. The words/phrases: "Breaking/Urgent/etc. news," (and any reference to "news," as explained below), "Important," "Crucial," "Vital," "Warning," "Advisory," "Critical," "Dangerous," "Serious," "Immediate attention," "Pressing," "SOS," "High priority," "Caution," "Be advised," "Stay/Be alert" and any other language that may be perceived as alarming, especially in email subject lines. (List to-be-updated as needed.)
3. References to "updates," "news," "developments" and so on, even when seemingly neutral or positive, e.g. "A happy update," "Monday updates," "We have great news," "Good news, finally," "Latest developments."
4. Phrases like "Attention all travelers," "Attention all shoppers," etc., which can be perceived as serious notices at this time even if intended as playful.

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Avoid or use contextually, carefully & only when appropriate based on the content provided by the customer:

1. The words/phrases: “Announcement,” “Urgent,” “Alert,” “Action required/needed,” “Do not ignore,” “Special message,” “Notice” (only appropriate for triggers & account notifications). (List to-be-updated as needed.)
2. Imperatives, including negative imperatives, meaning language encouraging an action, decision, experience, aspiration and so on, whether directly relevant to the current situation or not, e.g. “Start shopping,” “Dream big,” “Don’t miss out.”
3. Explicit or indirect references to the situation in playful ways that may be perceived as using the social context as a marketing opportunity, e.g. “So, nothing to do at home?” “Self quarantine essentials,” “Since you have nothing else to do.”
4. Language about “staying local” or “staying inside”—making commentary, hints, suggestions or prescribing actions or next steps in direct reference to the situation.
5. Language that tells the customer to “stock up.”
6. Positive or negative references to specific days, e.g. “Happy Friday,” “A good day,” “It’s your lucky day.” These can be perceived as commenting on the collective mood, which is problematic in and of itself, not to mention that because this changes so dramatically on a daily/hourly basis, it’s impossible to predict the timeliness of these references.
7. Variations of the phrase “It’s time,” e.g. “Time for a pick-me-up,” “It’s time to do a little shopping,” “Never been a better time to <verb>.”
8. Mentions of cultural events and celebratory language surrounding holidays, e.g. “Welcome to March Madness,” “Happy St. Patrick’s Day,” “Hello, April,” “Are you prepared for Mother’s Day?” These can appear to minimize more pressing situations.
9. Variations of the phrase “You need,” e.g. “You need this right now,” “You need a distraction,” “This is exactly what you need.”
10. Intentionally vague language, especially in email subject lines, that doesn’t reveal what the product or core message is and can cause confusion, discomfort, or

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alarm due to its lack of up-front information, e.g. “The answer to all your problems,” “You’re going to thank us for this,” “Oooh, what’s this?”

Be very mindful of / fine-tune based on the control message:

1. Intentional capitalization that calls attention to any element of the message, e.g. “FIFTY PERCENT OFF,” “SURPRISE,” “SPECIAL OFFER.”
2. The words and phrases “ASAP,” “Your attention please,” “Confirmed/Confirmation,” “Enclosed.”
3. Superlatives and enthusiastic adjectives, e.g. “The best,” “Fantastic,” “The most awesome.”
4. Hyperbolic language, e.g. “You cannot live without this,” “This is big,” “You have to see this ASAP,” “You won’t believe this.”
5. Assumptive language that suggests the customer will feel a certain way or comments on one’s state of mind and emotional well-being, e.g. “A real mood booster,” “This will make you feel good,” “Get ready to get excited,” “Lucky you.”
6. Language that is so positive that it can appear to minimize the situation or make light of it, e.g. “On the bright side,” “Happiness ahead,” “Now here’s something to get excited about,” “Positive thoughts only,” “A happy ending,” “Silver lining.”
7. Language that adds pressure or generates urgency in vague terms; offer expiration is OK when valid, e.g. use “Ends tomorrow,” “This weekend only,” “2 days left,” but don’t use “Hurry,” “Time is running out,” “Tick tock...”
8. The use of dynamic location variables, which can send the wrong message to affected areas.
9. Red and/or visually alarming imagery and formatting including emojis like 
10. Finally, the overall tone of the message—as always, the control message is our input and we need to be using it as our “brief”/guide to determine the boundaries of the communication. This is not so much about being alarming or misleading;

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we should generally avoid being overly exclamatory or intense even with positive emotions, to be in tune with the times. As an example, “best Monday ever” is neither alarming nor misleading, yet it can read as insensitive and tone-deaf.