

General Mills' marketing strategy at time of COVID-19

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General Mills, the food manufacturer, is ensuring that its marketing strikes an “appropriate tone” in response to COVID-19, and believes that a continued media presence can provide a much-needed feeling of normality for consumers.

“It’s a unique time,” Jeff Harmening, chairman/chief executive officer of General Mills, which owns brands including Cheerios cereal, Häagen-Dazs ice cream and Yoplait yoghurt, said **on a conference call with investors** (<https://investors.generalmills.com/financial-information/quarterly-results/default.aspx>).

“And we need to make sure – whether we’re talking about our brands on social media or we’re doing it through broad scale like TV – first of all, [that] our messages have to be appropriate for the time. I can tell you we have done that worldwide and we feel like it is [achieving that goal].”

One key element of the company’s strategy in response to Coronavirus is to avoid the temptation of simply driving short-term revenue.

“Part of the appropriateness of that message, I think, includes not talking about stocking up and that kind of thing. We see consumers doing that already,” said Harmening.

If playing into that behaviour might hold the potential of delivering an immediate spike in sales, General Mills has a perspective that looks much further out.

“For us, brand building is a long-term investment. It’s not only what we do this quarter. So, we will continue to build our brands in appropriate ways, because the impact is not only for now, but it’s three months from now, and six months from now,” Harmening said.

Many of General Mills’ brands enjoy high levels of familiarity and trust among consumers, who regard them as a source of “comfort” in difficult times, added Harmening. And its marketing aims to achieve a similar goal.

“This is only one man’s opinion with very little data to back it up, but I think it also can [provide] a sense of normalcy for people as their lives are anything but normal in many parts of the world,” he said.

“And, so, for us, we think we have a responsibility to do that – whether it’s delivering our products or whether it’s advertising Cinnamon Toast Crunch.”

General Mills; additional content by WARC staff

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