



Marketing During a Crisis for Software + Tech Companies

A six-step guide to adjusting your strategy and tactics



Introduction

Welcome to 2020—the year of a global pandemic, work-from-home mandates and a crippling recession.

(Not quite the way you thought the new decade would start out during the ball drop on New Year's Eve, huh?)

That said, at the risk of sounding like a cheesy motivational poster, we all know that during a crisis there are only two things you can control: your attitude and your actions.

In our experience, we've seen B2B software and tech companies go down one of three paths when hard times hit. They either:

- immediately panic and cut budgets;
- pause and step back to plan for better days; or
- forge ahead with business as normal.

How is your tech company reacting during this unprecedented pandemic and recession?

In hopes of preventing you from choosing option #1 (totally freaking out), read on in this e-book to learn how to:

- adapt your messaging while staying true to your brand
- pause and tweak your content calendar
- plan for website traffic declines
- switch up your marketing tactics
- support your sales team
- use data to make faster decisions
- and...bonus...how to stay secure while working remotely



THREE PATHS FORWARD

Panic, Plan or Persevere?

When your tech company is “the panic-er”

When budgets at tech companies are cut, one of the first things to get the axe is marketing. (In 2008, 60% of large companies cut their marketing budget, according to MarketingSherpa.)

Internal staff is reduced. Agency relationships are severed. Paid tactics like PPC and tradeshow are paused. And that’s all because executives have traditionally viewed the marketing department as a cost center vs. a profit center.

What the executive team thinks:

“Our top priority needs to be conserving funds. Marketing is ultimately a cost center, so we need to cut back as much as possible, as fast as possible. This includes cutting external spend and lowering the headcount within our internal department.”

How that affects the marketing department:

“The executive team has cut our budget and we need to make some hard choices. Not only do we have to lay off some of our fellow team members, whom we all consider friends, we also need to fire our marketing agency, too. My boss expects the remaining barebones staff to handle all of this extra work on top of their normal jobs, even though it’s outside of our areas of expertise. To make matters worse, we can only stick to ‘free’ tactics—our entire paid media budget has been axed.”

Long-term implications:

While budget cuts to marketing might seem necessary in the short-term, they often have unintended long-term consequences. When you reduce your marketing efforts to basically nothing, that means your pipeline dries up. Without new customers to replace normal churn, your business will decline. This leaves the door wide open for competitors who have continued to position themselves as a strong industry leader during the crisis.

As a popular adage says, “When times are good you should advertise. When times are bad you must advertise.”



When your tech company is the “plan ahead-er”

What the executive team thinks:

“The timing isn’t right to launch any big new initiatives, but we should use this slow time to plan for the future. That way, when the crisis does die down, we’ll be ready to hit the ground running right away.”

How that affects the marketing department:

“We might need to temporarily hit ‘pause’ on some of our upcoming campaigns, but this is a nice opportunity to step back and reassess our priorities for later in the year. We can do a comprehensive SEO audit, reexamine our buyer personas and other behind-the-scenes items that we’ve honestly been putting off for too long.”

Long-term implications:

Allowing employees the chance to use downtime time to prepare for when the crisis ends is commendable. When other tech companies are laying off staff, your team members will be dedicated and hard at work preparing for brighter days.

But remember...planning for the future doesn’t mean you can ignore today. Be sure to keep up with your day-to-day marketing activities while simultaneously doing more strategic, long-term planning.

After all, a study by American Business Press and Meldrum & Fewsmith showed that “sales and profits can be maintained and increased in recession years and in the years immediately following by those who are willing to maintain an aggressive marketing posture, while others adopt the philosophy of cutting back on promotional efforts when sales appear to be harder to get.” (Source: [F&I.](#))



When your tech company is “the persevere-er”

What the executive team thinks:

“We recognize that cutting back on marketing can have disastrous long-term ramifications, so we’re going to go against the grain and continue on as normal. We may have to adjust our messaging and tactics a bit to stay relevant, but pulling back is not an option. In fact, this might be the perfect opportunity to gain on our competitors who are being more conservative.”

How that affects the marketing department:

“Hallelujah...our leadership recognizes the importance of marketing! Yes, it sucks to have to tweak our content calendar and campaigns, but that just means we have the liberty to get creative. This is a great opportunity to try out more paid social, double down on webinars and experiment with other awesome digital techniques.”

Long-term implications:

Continuing to invest in marketing will ultimately give tech companies a competitive edge over others who are slow to react. After all...

Less competition = more affordable leads

As other tech companies stop writing blogs, it will be easier for your organization to rank higher in Google. When the competition pauses their PPC campaigns, you can benefit from a lower cost-per-click. You get the pattern...even if your spending stays the same, your ROI will be much greater during a recession due to decreased competition. Use this “buyer’s market” to your advantage as the cost of advertising drops!

Coopers & Lybrand and Business Science International concluded the following, “Businesses that maintain aggressive marketing programs during a recession, outperform companies that rely more on cost-cutting measures. A strong marketing program enables a firm to solidify its customer base, take business away from less aggressive competitors, and position itself for future growth during the recovery.”

Out of sight = out of mind

If competitors stop posting on social media or sending out nurturing emails, they will soon be forgotten. If you continue to produce helpful content during a crisis, you’ll stay top of mind even if prospects aren’t ready to buy immediately. Enjoy this temporary period of reduced “noise” in the tech marketing space to showcase your message.

Continued communication = strong brand

Going dark signals to employees, customers and prospects that you're in financial trouble. By contrast, continuing to communicate on a regular basis will project an image of corporate stability and strong leadership. Instead of emerging from a recession battered and bruised, you can establish your place as a thought leader...starting now.

Continued communication = strong brand

It's inevitable...customers will churn. And while it's always easier to keep a current customer than get a new one, you need to have a back-up plan. Turn off marketing and your pipeline dries up. Without a continual flow of new leads to replace exiting customers, your tech business is guaranteed to shrink.

So yes, while it seems counterintuitive to keep investing in marketing when your prospects are less likely to buy, it really is the best path for B2B tech companies. After all, a study by McGraw-Hill showed that "businesses that maintained or increased their ad spending during the recession averaged higher sales growth during the recession and in the following three years." (Source: [F&I](#).)



Moral of the story? Adopt a forward-looking attitude toward marketing instead of being blinded by the current crisis... and **here's a step-by-step guide of how to do exactly that.**



STEP #1

Adapt Your Messaging, But Stay True To Your Brand

The way your tech company communicates during the unfolding Coronavirus crisis can either make or break your brand. If you ignore the topic entirely, you'll come off as irrelevant. But if your tech company doesn't use the right messaging, you could come off as tone deaf or opportunistic. Here are five tips to strike the right balance in your brand messaging during a crisis.

Update Your Buyer Personas

With a largely remote workforce and impending recession, your target customer has experienced a drastic shift in mindset over the last several weeks. To communicate with these prospects in a way that's relevant today—and not last month—consider tweaking your buyer personas.

For example, your buyer is probably spending a lot more time on social media getting news updates. They aren't at a physical office anymore, so direct mail campaigns are out the window. And just like you, they're more distracted more than normal during business hours. Adjusting your buyer persona to this new reality will make sure that your brand messaging stays on track even during a crisis.

Know Your Brand Voice

By now, your inbox is probably inundated with messages from restaurants, retail stores and other companies detailing how they're responding to the Coronavirus crisis. **The problem? They all sound like form letters.** Just because your outreach is dealing with a serious topic doesn't mean it's time to communicate like a robot. Sure, you should avoid a sarcastic or insensitive tone, but don't abandon the core qualities of your brand voice. Talk openly and honestly about your unique approach to the situation in a way your prospects and customers are used to hearing.

Stay Relevant

Yesterday's news is just that...old news. Now's the time to examine your pre-scheduled blog posts or social media posts from even a week or two ago to see if they're still applicable. If you have an email sequence launching soon about a now-cancelled trade show, get that paused ASAP. Are your sales people offering a diagnostic assessment that's called a "health check"? Maybe it's time to rename that.



Use Humor and Positivity

If you have a normally playful and personable brand, it's okay to continue with content that's lighthearted at times. The current landscape is overflowing with news of doom and gloom...providing a bit of (appropriate!) levity for distraction can be a welcome change. That said, please be sure you're not being too optimistic and downplaying the current reality of the situation...you don't want to be "that person" who keeps posting about turning lemons into lemonade.

Be the Leader

This can not be stressed enough: **COVID-19 is not a marketing opportunity. It is a brand communication opportunity.** If you use the crisis to push your product, you'll diminish the integrity of your brand over the long haul. By contrast, if you use this time to embrace the well-known content marketing philosophy of simply being helpful, you'll emerge as a leader in the space. And in times of uncertainty, that's really what your audience wants from your tech brand: strong leadership in the face of the unknown.

Things are changing daily, and tech companies need to be on their toes to ensure that their message remains relevant and appropriate. Even though the intensity of the crisis may lessen in the future, companies should revisit how they addressed the crisis management challenge to improve and update their strategy to remain prepared.



STEP #2

Pause and Tweak Your Content Calendar

As the ever-diligent tech marketer, you've probably spent weeks of your life crafting the perfect content calendar. Your team has written several blog posts, all ready to publish at the push of a button. They've pre-scheduled social posts on all the major platforms. They've assembled thoughtful workflows to nurture incoming leads. And then the Coronavirus crisis hit and your plan was blown to bits. (We know, it sucks.)

Your first option is to stick with the status quo. (Spoiler alert: that's not a good idea.) At best, all your great content will be skipped over because people have other things on their minds. At worst, your content could come off as irrelevant or insensitive.

After you've tweaked your buyer personas and vowed to stay true to your brand voice, the better option is to adjust your content calendar to match the needs of the current climate...ASAP. Here's how:

- Pause all pre-scheduled or automatic content, like blog posts, social posts, workflows, sequences, text messages, etc.
- Update your channel mix to match your new buyer personas and be more relevant to the ongoing crisis (e.g., remote workforce = paid social media, no direct mail, more videos, etc.)
- Audit the now-paused content and sort into one of three categories:
 - Still relevant today as-is
 - Needs to be tweaked, but can be salvaged
 - Not relevant at all...save for a much later date, but don't delete
- Identify any previously published content that can be updated or repurposed to address the current situation
- Plug existing content into a customer journey map or calendar view to identify gaps where you'll need new content
- Create new content and/or tweak existing content
- Publish your crisis-approved content and pat yourself on the back for a job well done under pressure!

It's hard to plan very far out in these uncertain times—you will need to reassess and rework things often. But by being diligent and paying attention, you can make your messages heard above the noise. Your brand will earn positive points by being up to date and helpful.

STEP #3

Plan for Website Traffic Declines

During a recession, some industries will obviously be hit harder than others, but every industry will see some impact—and marketers will be able to see the direct results via Google Analytics and other web traffic measurement tools.

[According to SEO blogger Neil Patel](#), traffic to websites in industries such as finance, food, healthcare, and media has grown substantially since the onset of COVID-19. However, industries such as advertising, construction, manufacturing, transportation and travel are seeing huge drops. In the case of travel, traffic has fallen by nearly 50%. The good news? **Technology has only experienced a traffic decline of around 6%.**

Even though the software and technology sectors have not been hit nearly as hard as others, traffic is likely to continue to decline. So, other than panicking and eating all the Coronavirus snacks you've hoarded, what can you do?

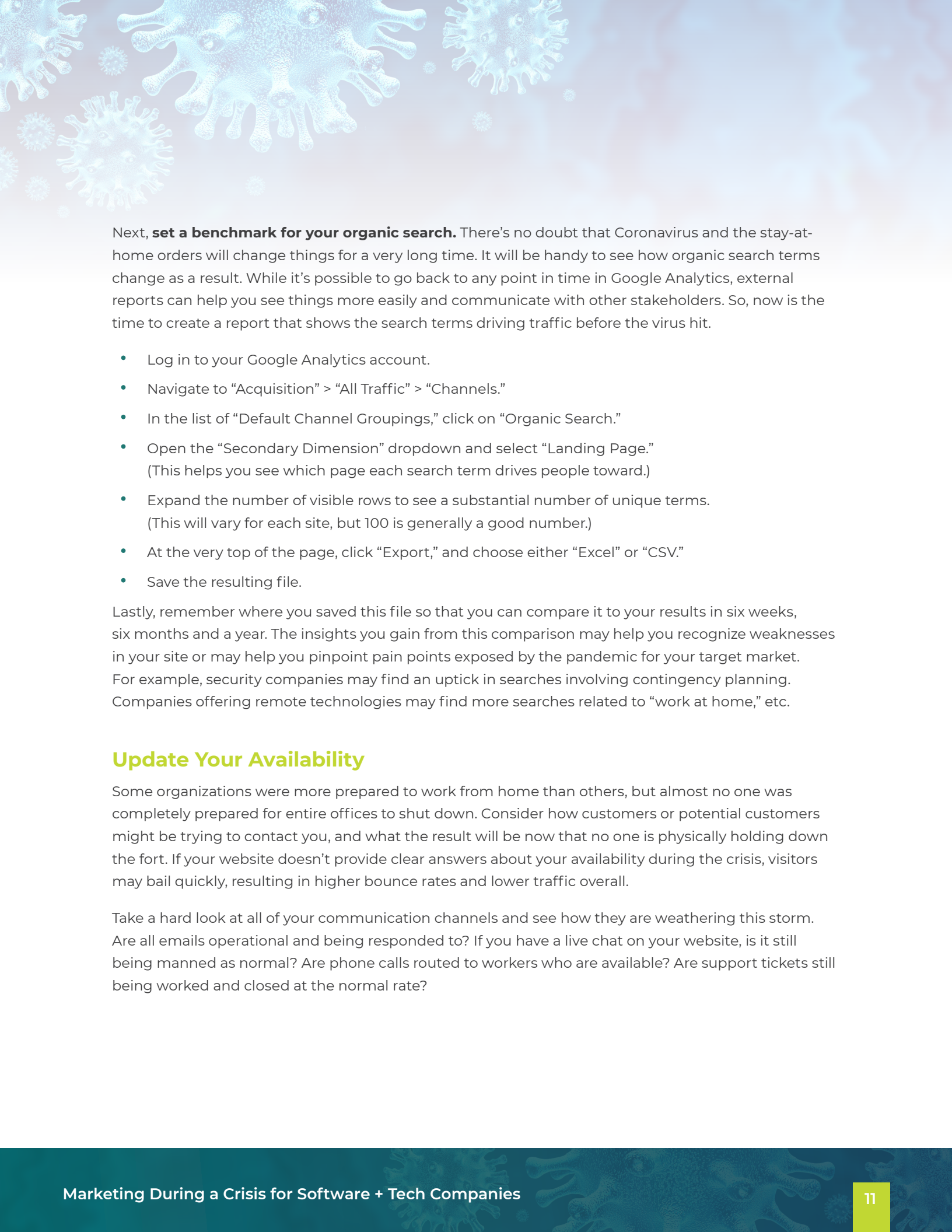
Prepare Tracking

Assuming you're using Google Analytics, the very first thing you should do is **create an annotation**. A year from now, you won't remember the exact dates the virus outbreak happened, but if you're doing data comparisons, you'll want to have an explanation for the sudden drops you're seeing.

Creating an annotation is really simple:

- Log into your Google Analytics account.
- In the bottom left corner, click the “cog” icon to access the Admin page.
- In the “View” column (the last one on the right), click on “Annotations.”
- Click the “New Annotation” button.
- Set the date. You may want to use January 21, 2020, which is the date the first US case was confirmed. You could use February 20, 2020, which is when cases seemed to begin spreading in the US. Or, you could use the date on which you started to see traffic declining.
- In the “Text” field, enter a note that explains the reason for the annotation, such as “Coronavirus pandemic began.”
- Depending on your permissions in the GA account, you may be able to set the “Visibility” to “Shared,” meaning all account users can see it. That's preferred, but “Private” will suffice.
- Click “Create Annotation.”





Next, **set a benchmark for your organic search.** There's no doubt that Coronavirus and the stay-at-home orders will change things for a very long time. It will be handy to see how organic search terms change as a result. While it's possible to go back to any point in time in Google Analytics, external reports can help you see things more easily and communicate with other stakeholders. So, now is the time to create a report that shows the search terms driving traffic before the virus hit.

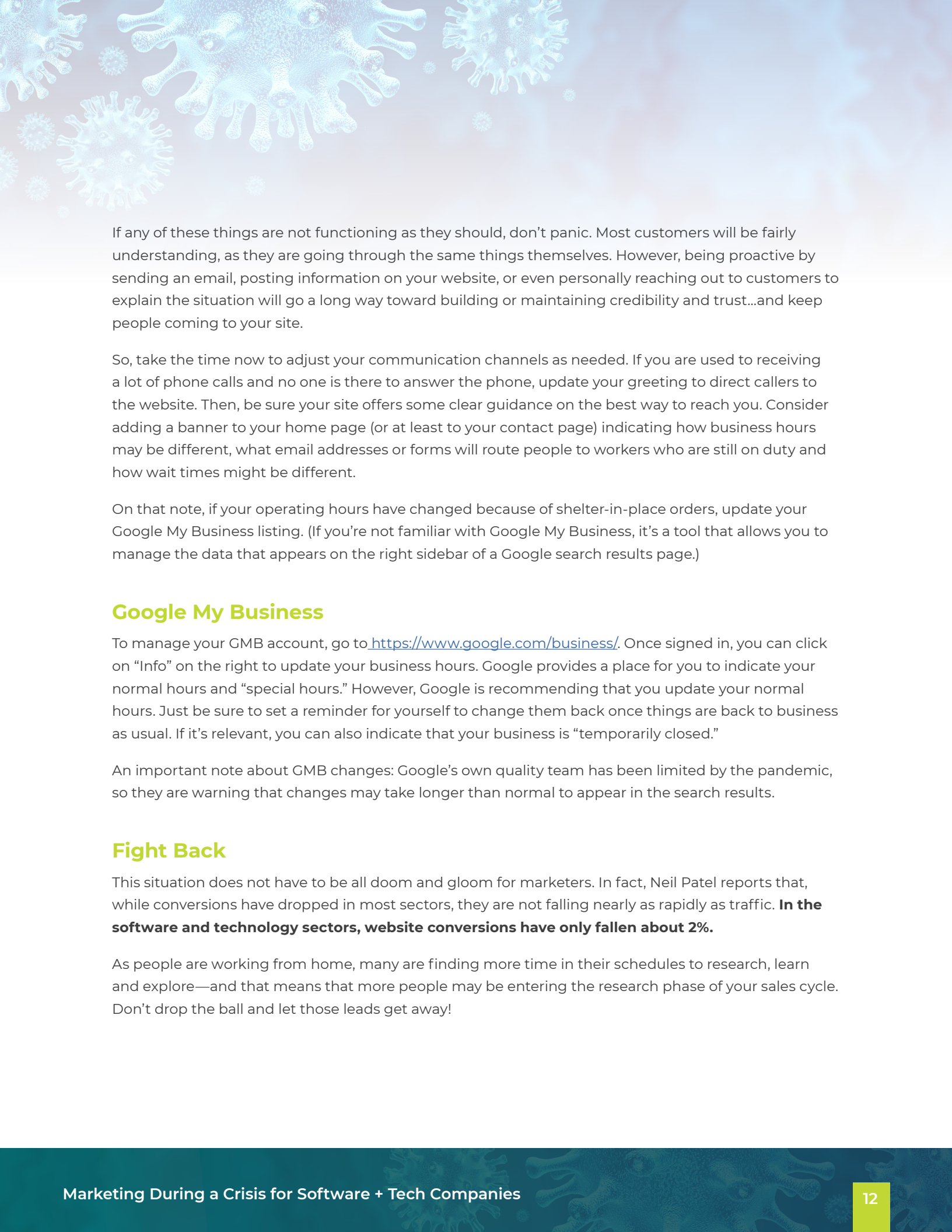
- Log in to your Google Analytics account.
- Navigate to "Acquisition" > "All Traffic" > "Channels."
- In the list of "Default Channel Groupings," click on "Organic Search."
- Open the "Secondary Dimension" dropdown and select "Landing Page."
(This helps you see which page each search term drives people toward.)
- Expand the number of visible rows to see a substantial number of unique terms.
(This will vary for each site, but 100 is generally a good number.)
- At the very top of the page, click "Export," and choose either "Excel" or "CSV."
- Save the resulting file.

Lastly, remember where you saved this file so that you can compare it to your results in six weeks, six months and a year. The insights you gain from this comparison may help you recognize weaknesses in your site or may help you pinpoint pain points exposed by the pandemic for your target market. For example, security companies may find an uptick in searches involving contingency planning. Companies offering remote technologies may find more searches related to "work at home," etc.

Update Your Availability

Some organizations were more prepared to work from home than others, but almost no one was completely prepared for entire offices to shut down. Consider how customers or potential customers might be trying to contact you, and what the result will be now that no one is physically holding down the fort. If your website doesn't provide clear answers about your availability during the crisis, visitors may bail quickly, resulting in higher bounce rates and lower traffic overall.

Take a hard look at all of your communication channels and see how they are weathering this storm. Are all emails operational and being responded to? If you have a live chat on your website, is it still being manned as normal? Are phone calls routed to workers who are available? Are support tickets still being worked and closed at the normal rate?



If any of these things are not functioning as they should, don't panic. Most customers will be fairly understanding, as they are going through the same things themselves. However, being proactive by sending an email, posting information on your website, or even personally reaching out to customers to explain the situation will go a long way toward building or maintaining credibility and trust...and keep people coming to your site.

So, take the time now to adjust your communication channels as needed. If you are used to receiving a lot of phone calls and no one is there to answer the phone, update your greeting to direct callers to the website. Then, be sure your site offers some clear guidance on the best way to reach you. Consider adding a banner to your home page (or at least to your contact page) indicating how business hours may be different, what email addresses or forms will route people to workers who are still on duty and how wait times might be different.

On that note, if your operating hours have changed because of shelter-in-place orders, update your Google My Business listing. (If you're not familiar with Google My Business, it's a tool that allows you to manage the data that appears on the right sidebar of a Google search results page.)

Google My Business

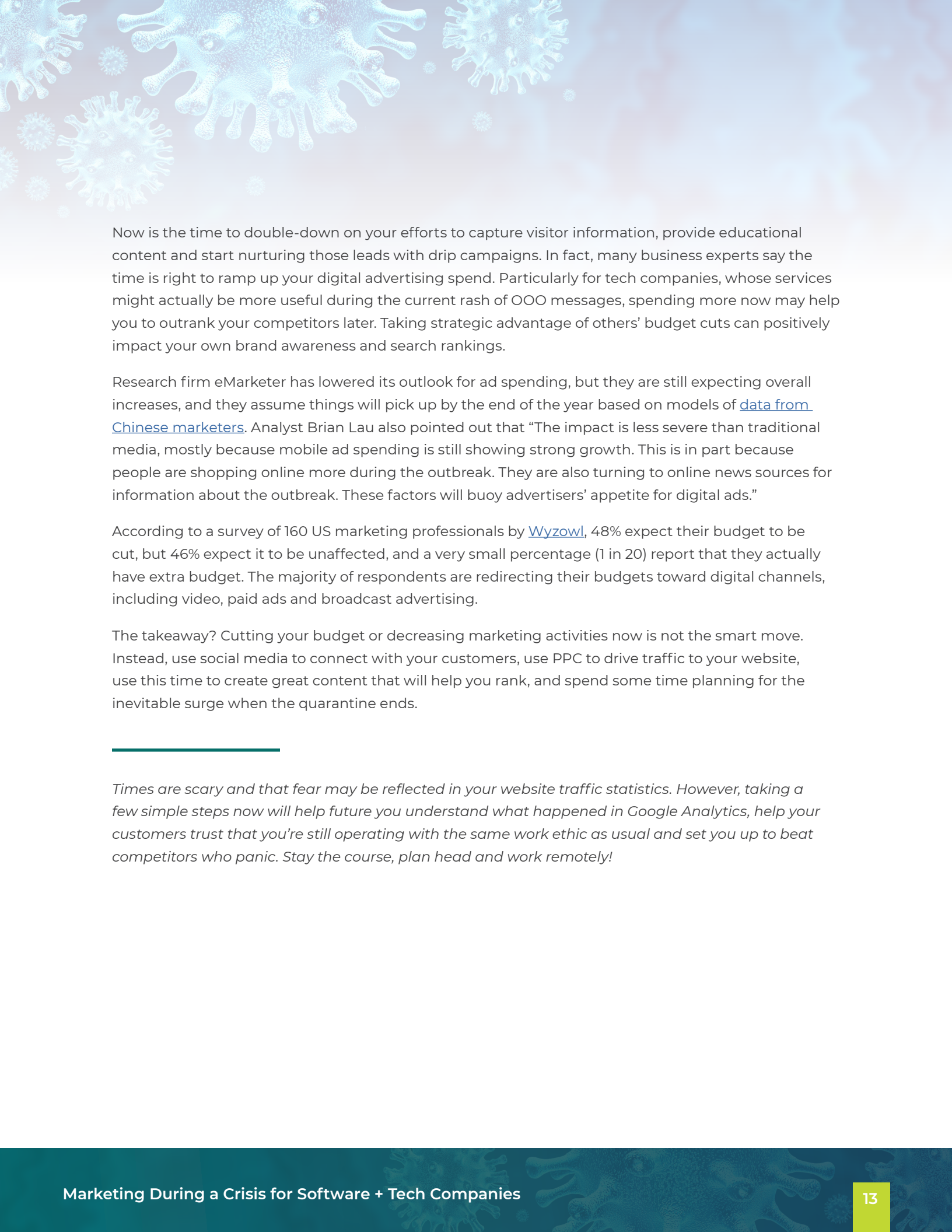
To manage your GMB account, go to <https://www.google.com/business/>. Once signed in, you can click on "Info" on the right to update your business hours. Google provides a place for you to indicate your normal hours and "special hours." However, Google is recommending that you update your normal hours. Just be sure to set a reminder for yourself to change them back once things are back to business as usual. If it's relevant, you can also indicate that your business is "temporarily closed."

An important note about GMB changes: Google's own quality team has been limited by the pandemic, so they are warning that changes may take longer than normal to appear in the search results.

Fight Back

This situation does not have to be all doom and gloom for marketers. In fact, Neil Patel reports that, while conversions have dropped in most sectors, they are not falling nearly as rapidly as traffic. **In the software and technology sectors, website conversions have only fallen about 2%.**

As people are working from home, many are finding more time in their schedules to research, learn and explore—and that means that more people may be entering the research phase of your sales cycle. Don't drop the ball and let those leads get away!



Now is the time to double-down on your efforts to capture visitor information, provide educational content and start nurturing those leads with drip campaigns. In fact, many business experts say the time is right to ramp up your digital advertising spend. Particularly for tech companies, whose services might actually be more useful during the current rash of OOO messages, spending more now may help you to outrank your competitors later. Taking strategic advantage of others' budget cuts can positively impact your own brand awareness and search rankings.

Research firm eMarketer has lowered its outlook for ad spending, but they are still expecting overall increases, and they assume things will pick up by the end of the year based on models of [data from Chinese marketers](#). Analyst Brian Lau also pointed out that “The impact is less severe than traditional media, mostly because mobile ad spending is still showing strong growth. This is in part because people are shopping online more during the outbreak. They are also turning to online news sources for information about the outbreak. These factors will buoy advertisers' appetite for digital ads.”

According to a survey of 160 US marketing professionals by [Wyzowl](#), 48% expect their budget to be cut, but 46% expect it to be unaffected, and a very small percentage (1 in 20) report that they actually have extra budget. The majority of respondents are redirecting their budgets toward digital channels, including video, paid ads and broadcast advertising.

The takeaway? Cutting your budget or decreasing marketing activities now is not the smart move. Instead, use social media to connect with your customers, use PPC to drive traffic to your website, use this time to create great content that will help you rank, and spend some time planning for the inevitable surge when the quarantine ends.

Times are scary and that fear may be reflected in your website traffic statistics. However, taking a few simple steps now will help future you understand what happened in Google Analytics, help your customers trust that you're still operating with the same work ethic as usual and set you up to beat competitors who panic. Stay the course, plan head and work remotely!

Switch Up Your Marketing Tactics

Trade show cancelled? Digital engagement tanking? Welcome to the new reality of marketing your B2B tech company during the Coronavirus crisis. Should you throw in the towel and just give up on marketing for the short-term? Of course, not!

Instead of panicking, try adjusting your strategy. Here's a list of our favorite ideas to do "this, not that" when it comes to specific marketing tactics.

Instead of trade shows, try webinars.

[While our research shows that the best leads for B2B tech companies come from trade shows](#), those are obviously out of the equation for the foreseeable future. What's the next best way to gather large groups of people together in a digital way? Webinars, of course!

Silver Lining: If you're the one hosting the webinar, you're not sharing the proverbial "trade show floor" with anyone else. Of course you're going to want to be waaaaay less "sales-y" than you would be at a trade show booth, but the idea of not having to compete for attention is a big bonus.

Instead of Google Ads, try paid social media.

People are obsessed with news coverage about the Coronavirus. Instead of Googling topics related to your tech solution, they're glued to social media 24/7 for updates. So pause your traditional PPC campaign and take out paid ads on Facebook or Instagram instead. When people are endlessly scrolling through their feeds, you'll be right there with 'em.

Silver Lining: The cost-per-click on social media can be a bargain compared to traditional PPC! [An article by Wordstream](#) cited the average CPC in the B2B industry as \$3.33 on Google Ads vs. \$2.52 on Facebook. In the technology industry, the average CPC was \$3.80 on Google Ads vs. \$1.27 on Facebook.





Instead of polished videos, try motion graphics or smartphone footage.

Traditional video production requires high-end equipment (locked back in the office), on-sight locations (closed down because they're non-essential) and subjects (all working from home). Instead of shelving your video plans altogether, create motion graphics, repurpose old footage or ask co-workers to submit clips taken on their iPhone...get creative!

Silver Lining: Videos that look too polished may come off as disingenuous during a crisis—like you're trying to continue on with business as normal. Since videos shot on a smartphone have become mainstream over the past couple years, your tech brand may actually seem more relevant and authentic with non-professional footage.

Instead of mailers, try personalized landing pages.

There's nothing more fun than getting a package in the mail. But there's nothing more creepy than asking a prospect for their home address so you can continue your ABM campaign. Instead, create cool n' customized digital content via a personalized landing page!

If you use a service like Unbounce, take advantage of a cool feature called [dynamic text replacement \(DTR\)](#). In HubSpot, this functionality is called a [personalization token](#). Basically, it lets you automatically swap out landing page copy to be super relevant to readers. You're probably used to this in emails—{{Firstname}}—but you can also customize company name, job title, location, industry and more on landing pages. Any data that you record in your database can be dynamically populated on a personalized landing page.

Silver Lining: Personalized text is fun, but personalized graphics are epic. With the help of a third-party tool like [Cloudinary](#), you can customize image thumbnails by changing out the text for each individual name. Or, take it to the next level with personalized video; platforms like [Vidyard](#) can create a large number of unique videos instantly by weaving in individual viewer data, like a user's name or company. [Try it out for yourself on their demo page.](#)



Instead of long-form content, try short-form content.

Your prospects are probably still getting used to working from home, with attention divided between kids, news updates and maybe even a bit of real work. Let's be honest...no one is wanting to read a multi-page white paper right now.

Instead, focus on producing short-form content, like quick infographics for social or blog posts that take less than five minutes to read. Anything that's quick to consume and easy to share is a winner in today's climate.

Silver Lining: With conditions changing multiple times a day, any long-form content you create now may be out of date by the time it's actually published. By sticking to short-form content that's fast to create, you can adjust your tech marketing plan on the fly...and not be too upset if you have to shelve anything.

As you can see, marketing during a pandemic or recession isn't impossible...just different. With a bit of creativity, you can adjust your tactics to be effective with a distracted and remote audience.

STEP #5

Support Your Sales Team

We're not going to sugarcoat it here...being a salesperson during the Coronavirus outbreak can really suck.

First off, everyone is worried and distracted. Obviously. Your customers and prospects are figuring out how to work from home while consuming doomsday news in the background all day long. Your B2B tech offering is probably the furthest thing from their minds right now.

All of your normal tactics are not going to work. Trade shows? Cancelled. Lunch meetings? Nope. Flying out for pitches? Well, you see the pattern here. Social distancing is no joke!

How is the sales team at a B2B software or technology company supposed to adapt? Here are our top 11 tips for continuing the sales process remotely during the Coronavirus crisis.

Be empathetic

Don't use the crisis as a chance to push your product. Use it as a chance to connect with people and figure out ways to help. No more ABC...adopt an **ABH attitude instead: always be helping.**

Identify their new mindset. In a crisis, companies tend to fall into one of three categories: "panic-and-hit-pause-on-all-spending" vs. "don't-launch-anything-new-but-use-downtime-to-plan" vs. "continue-on-with-business-as-normal." Recognizing what position your prospect's company has taken will be crucial in communicating with them effectively.

Adjust your messaging

Once you figure out what prospects need today—not last month—adjust your messaging ASAP. Reexamine any automatically scheduled sales sequences and make sure new outreach talks to this new reality.

Engage on LinkedIn

Without in-person contact, you can create meaningful connections by commenting on social media posts. Write something that shows genuine interest or appreciation...not just a throwaway comment like "nice post." A bit of flattery can go a long way.

Don't call unexpectedly.

Working from home during this crisis likely means also taking care of children during normal business hours. Be respectful and don't disturb potential homework or nap time by calling out of the blue. Use a meeting scheduler tool like [Calendly](#) to book time instead.





Schedule virtual coffee dates

If you're used to having one-on-one networking meetings, go virtual. Send someone an e-gift card to their favorite coffee store (drive-thru only!) and then drink together via a [Google Hangout](#).

Embed videos in email

Think attention spans were short before? We are at the height of distraction right now. Instead of writing long emails, shoot a quick video of yourself on a platform like [Soapbox](#) or [Loom](#) and embed it in an email to prospects.

Jazz up your proposals

If you normally send over pretty boring proposals and then “wow” prospects with your in-person charm, it's time to let the proposals do some of the impressing instead. Instead of a Word doc or PDF, try a platform like [Qwilr](#) that lets you easily create visually stunning documents in a web page format.

Rely on video conferencing

Use video conferencing with your virtual team and customers alike to take the place of in-person meetings. Even if the other person is embarrassed to go on camera (likely because they didn't shower today!), leave your camera on so they feel a stronger connection.

Be more flexible

Adjust terms, add in extra tech support, offer a money-back-guarantee...basically work with your customers to adjust to the unique circumstances.

But don't devalue your product

Find ways to be flexible that don't involve drastically cutting prices. It will devalue your product and your reputation, making people think there's something wrong or that they were overpaying before. Even during a recession, value > price.

By adapting your B2B tech sales strategy during this unprecedented crisis, you'll be leaps and bounds above your competitors who continue to operate by their old playbook. After all, studies have shown that “sales for companies that remained aggressive during the recession enjoyed sales that were 2.5 times the average of all other businesses.” (Source: [F&I](#))

STEP #6

Use Data to Make Faster Decisions

As marketers, we're tasked with influencing user behavior—a challenging task in the best of times. So, how can you tackle planning at this completely unpredictable time?

First, relax.

In an article about decision making in uncertain times, consulting firm [McKinsey & Company](#) advised business leaders that their first step should be to, “pause and take a breath—literally. Giving yourself a moment to step back, take stock, anticipate, and prioritize may seem counterintuitive, but it's essential now.”

[Harvard Business Review](#) seconds this advice. When asking how to make good decisions despite the human psychological factors like uncertainty and lack of control, they shared, “The best way to resist the siren call of action is to slow down. Panic makes people want to act right now to avoid a threat, but most of the actions you are likely to take will not be prudent in the face of a potential pandemic.”

When you have had a moment to calm your fears, steady yourself, and regain focus, **turn to data.**

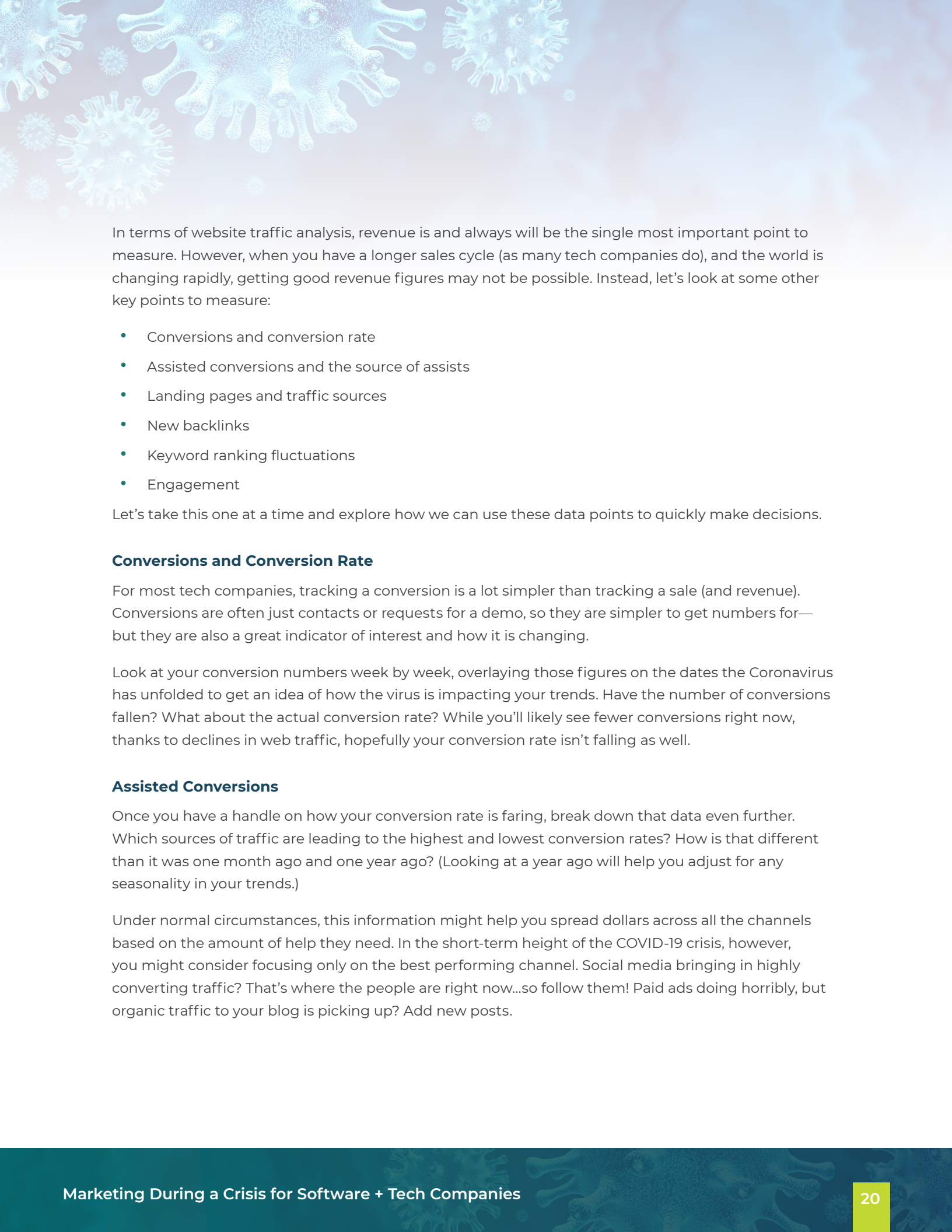
The only way to make sound marketing decisions right now is to know your customers—and how they might change in the face of a recession. And the only way to know that is to use data, whether it's yours or from the larger industry

Using Your Own Data

If you're running Google Analytics or other tracking tools on your website, you're sitting on a goldmine of data. And in this changing environment, you may just find a new market unfolding there.

While these tools offer a ton of data, they can be overwhelming. The first step should always be identifying the types of questions you want to answer. Lily Kennett, Director of Intelligence at Schilling Partners, told [Financier Worldwide](#), “Monitoring is part of the answer, and for this to be done really successfully it is valuable to spend time up front to assess what you would monitor for. Simply put, what matters most, and how do you track it? This might include a focus on images or hashtags, or a close watch on influential accounts for comments or inferences that might influence the dialogue. You need to monitor in a meaningful way to inform the response.”





In terms of website traffic analysis, revenue is and always will be the single most important point to measure. However, when you have a longer sales cycle (as many tech companies do), and the world is changing rapidly, getting good revenue figures may not be possible. Instead, let's look at some other key points to measure:

- Conversions and conversion rate
- Assisted conversions and the source of assists
- Landing pages and traffic sources
- New backlinks
- Keyword ranking fluctuations
- Engagement

Let's take this one at a time and explore how we can use these data points to quickly make decisions.

Conversions and Conversion Rate

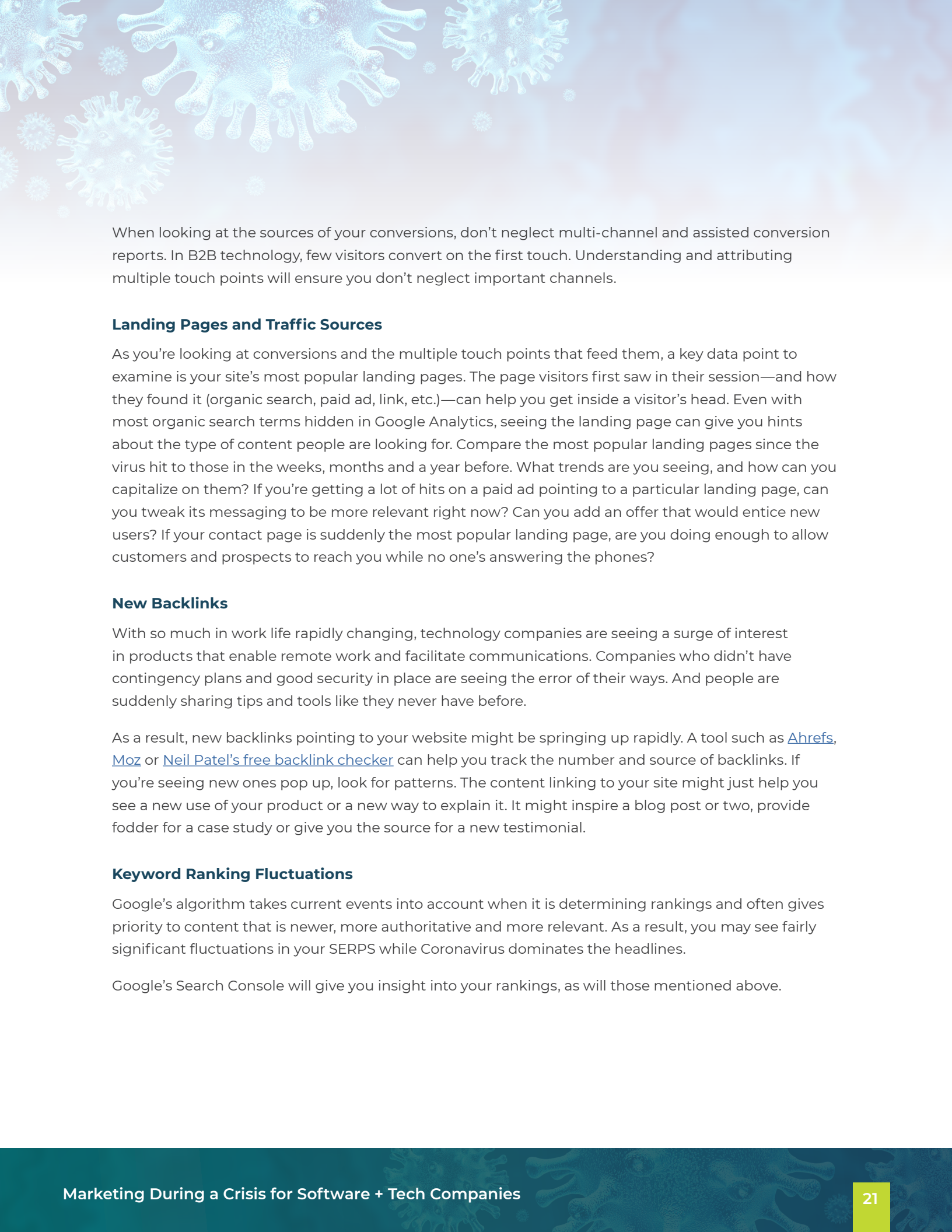
For most tech companies, tracking a conversion is a lot simpler than tracking a sale (and revenue). Conversions are often just contacts or requests for a demo, so they are simpler to get numbers for—but they are also a great indicator of interest and how it is changing.

Look at your conversion numbers week by week, overlaying those figures on the dates the Coronavirus has unfolded to get an idea of how the virus is impacting your trends. Have the number of conversions fallen? What about the actual conversion rate? While you'll likely see fewer conversions right now, thanks to declines in web traffic, hopefully your conversion rate isn't falling as well.

Assisted Conversions

Once you have a handle on how your conversion rate is faring, break down that data even further. Which sources of traffic are leading to the highest and lowest conversion rates? How is that different than it was one month ago and one year ago? (Looking at a year ago will help you adjust for any seasonality in your trends.)

Under normal circumstances, this information might help you spread dollars across all the channels based on the amount of help they need. In the short-term height of the COVID-19 crisis, however, you might consider focusing only on the best performing channel. Social media bringing in highly converting traffic? That's where the people are right now...so follow them! Paid ads doing horribly, but organic traffic to your blog is picking up? Add new posts.



When looking at the sources of your conversions, don't neglect multi-channel and assisted conversion reports. In B2B technology, few visitors convert on the first touch. Understanding and attributing multiple touch points will ensure you don't neglect important channels.

Landing Pages and Traffic Sources

As you're looking at conversions and the multiple touch points that feed them, a key data point to examine is your site's most popular landing pages. The page visitors first saw in their session—and how they found it (organic search, paid ad, link, etc.)—can help you get inside a visitor's head. Even with most organic search terms hidden in Google Analytics, seeing the landing page can give you hints about the type of content people are looking for. Compare the most popular landing pages since the virus hit to those in the weeks, months and a year before. What trends are you seeing, and how can you capitalize on them? If you're getting a lot of hits on a paid ad pointing to a particular landing page, can you tweak its messaging to be more relevant right now? Can you add an offer that would entice new users? If your contact page is suddenly the most popular landing page, are you doing enough to allow customers and prospects to reach you while no one's answering the phones?

New Backlinks

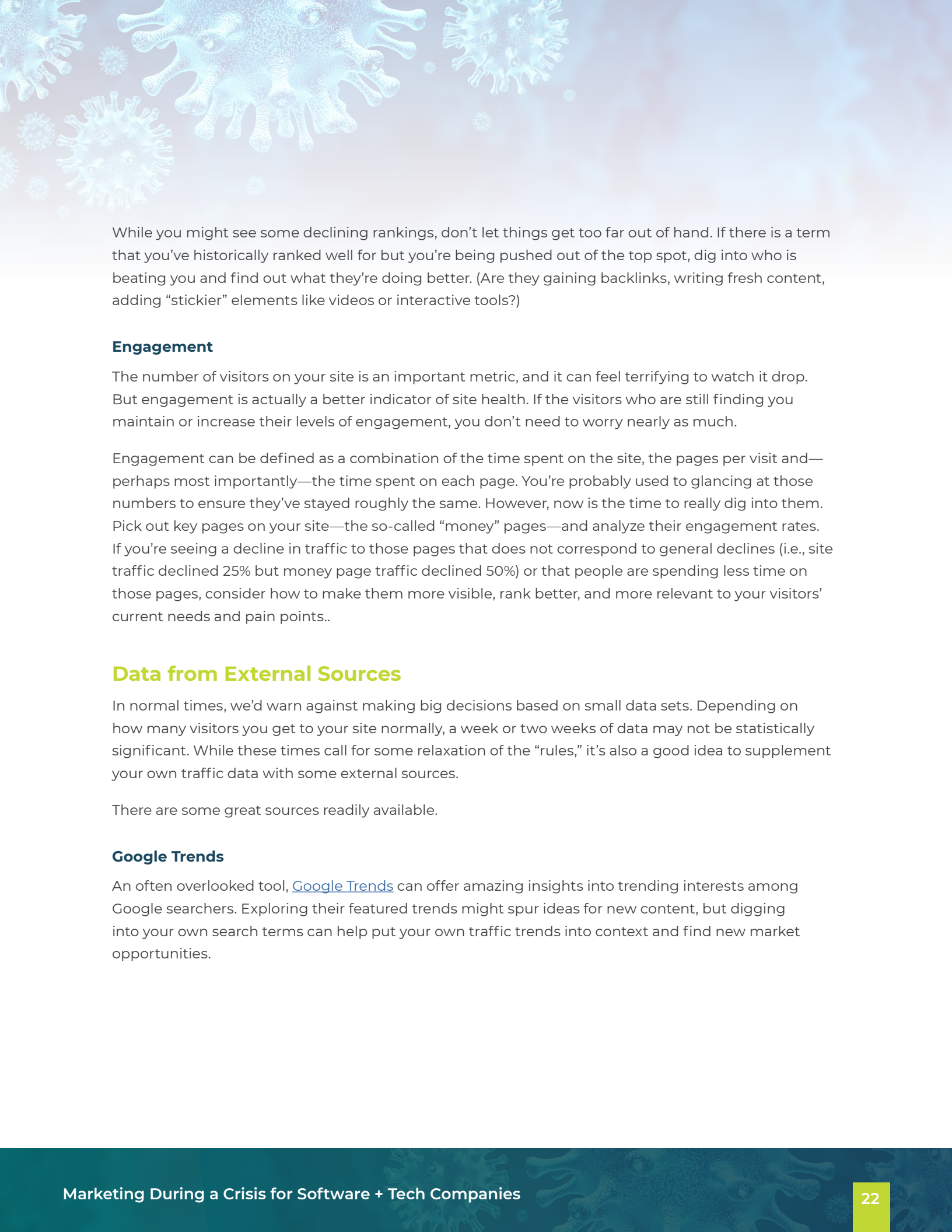
With so much in work life rapidly changing, technology companies are seeing a surge of interest in products that enable remote work and facilitate communications. Companies who didn't have contingency plans and good security in place are seeing the error of their ways. And people are suddenly sharing tips and tools like they never have before.

As a result, new backlinks pointing to your website might be springing up rapidly. A tool such as [Ahrefs](#), [Moz](#) or [Neil Patel's free backlink checker](#) can help you track the number and source of backlinks. If you're seeing new ones pop up, look for patterns. The content linking to your site might just help you see a new use of your product or a new way to explain it. It might inspire a blog post or two, provide fodder for a case study or give you the source for a new testimonial.

Keyword Ranking Fluctuations

Google's algorithm takes current events into account when it is determining rankings and often gives priority to content that is newer, more authoritative and more relevant. As a result, you may see fairly significant fluctuations in your SERPS while Coronavirus dominates the headlines.

Google's Search Console will give you insight into your rankings, as will those mentioned above.



While you might see some declining rankings, don't let things get too far out of hand. If there is a term that you've historically ranked well for but you're being pushed out of the top spot, dig into who is beating you and find out what they're doing better. (Are they gaining backlinks, writing fresh content, adding "stickier" elements like videos or interactive tools?)

Engagement

The number of visitors on your site is an important metric, and it can feel terrifying to watch it drop. But engagement is actually a better indicator of site health. If the visitors who are still finding you maintain or increase their levels of engagement, you don't need to worry nearly as much.

Engagement can be defined as a combination of the time spent on the site, the pages per visit and—perhaps most importantly—the time spent on each page. You're probably used to glancing at those numbers to ensure they've stayed roughly the same. However, now is the time to really dig into them. Pick out key pages on your site—the so-called "money" pages—and analyze their engagement rates. If you're seeing a decline in traffic to those pages that does not correspond to general declines (i.e., site traffic declined 25% but money page traffic declined 50%) or that people are spending less time on those pages, consider how to make them more visible, rank better, and more relevant to your visitors' current needs and pain points..

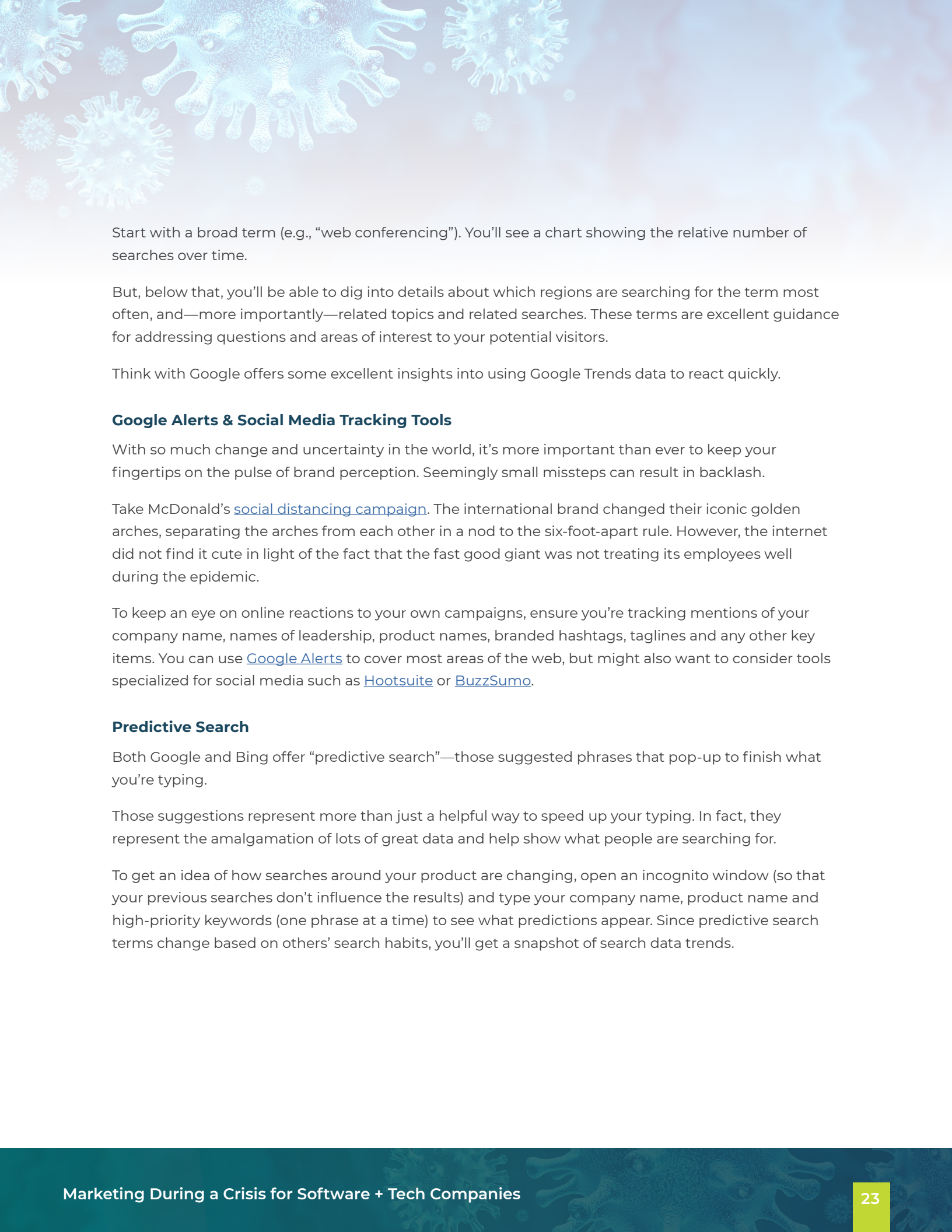
Data from External Sources

In normal times, we'd warn against making big decisions based on small data sets. Depending on how many visitors you get to your site normally, a week or two weeks of data may not be statistically significant. While these times call for some relaxation of the "rules," it's also a good idea to supplement your own traffic data with some external sources.

There are some great sources readily available.

Google Trends

An often overlooked tool, [Google Trends](#) can offer amazing insights into trending interests among Google searchers. Exploring their featured trends might spur ideas for new content, but digging into your own search terms can help put your own traffic trends into context and find new market opportunities.



Start with a broad term (e.g., “web conferencing”). You’ll see a chart showing the relative number of searches over time.

But, below that, you’ll be able to dig into details about which regions are searching for the term most often, and—more importantly—related topics and related searches. These terms are excellent guidance for addressing questions and areas of interest to your potential visitors.

Think with Google offers some excellent insights into using Google Trends data to react quickly.

Google Alerts & Social Media Tracking Tools

With so much change and uncertainty in the world, it’s more important than ever to keep your fingertips on the pulse of brand perception. Seemingly small missteps can result in backlash.

Take McDonald’s [social distancing campaign](#). The international brand changed their iconic golden arches, separating the arches from each other in a nod to the six-foot-apart rule. However, the internet did not find it cute in light of the fact that the fast food giant was not treating its employees well during the epidemic.

To keep an eye on online reactions to your own campaigns, ensure you’re tracking mentions of your company name, names of leadership, product names, branded hashtags, taglines and any other key items. You can use [Google Alerts](#) to cover most areas of the web, but might also want to consider tools specialized for social media such as [Hootsuite](#) or [BuzzSumo](#).

Predictive Search

Both Google and Bing offer “predictive search”—those suggested phrases that pop-up to finish what you’re typing.

Those suggestions represent more than just a helpful way to speed up your typing. In fact, they represent the amalgamation of lots of great data and help show what people are searching for.

To get an idea of how searches around your product are changing, open an incognito window (so that your previous searches don’t influence the results) and type your company name, product name and high-priority keywords (one phrase at a time) to see what predictions appear. Since predictive search terms change based on others’ search habits, you’ll get a snapshot of search data trends.



Competitive Research

You're not the only one living in a Coronavirus dystopia! Your competitors are facing the same challenges you are, and you might gain some important insight by watching what they are doing.

So, when you're looking at search trends, setting up Google Alerts, and testing predictive searches for your own product and company, why not do the same for them?

There are also lots of tools you can use to “spy” on your competitors and ensure they're not overtaking you. Many of the websites offer free tools or free trials, but the majority require a subscription to see complete data.

A sampling of tools for competitor research:

- [Ahrefs](#)
- [SERanking](#)
- [SimilarWeb](#)
- [SpyFU](#)
- [Ubersuggest](#)

It's a scary time with lots of unpredictability—the one thing marketers hate the most. But arming yourself with data can make you feel more in control and help you make quick decisions. The key is to keep monitoring key metrics, supervise fluctuations to your brand perception and study what the competition is doing. With these tools and insights, you can react quickly to the changing environment and keep growing.



BONUS SECTION

Five Simple Ways To Stay Secure While Working Remotely



While working remotely is natural for some tech marketers, many are facing a period of transition during the Coronavirus pandemic. Tech marketers no longer have a clear distinction between their “work” space (i.e., the office) and their “home” space where they relax. Remote workers now need to strike a new balance between home and work priorities while being in the same space.

This can be a challenge. Some things may fall through the cracks. But, there are some aspects that should not be forgotten about...like cybersecurity. Usually monitored by someone at your company, your home relies on you to be the IT expert! In many homes, a modem and router are placed in a central space, devices are connected, and life goes on without interruption.

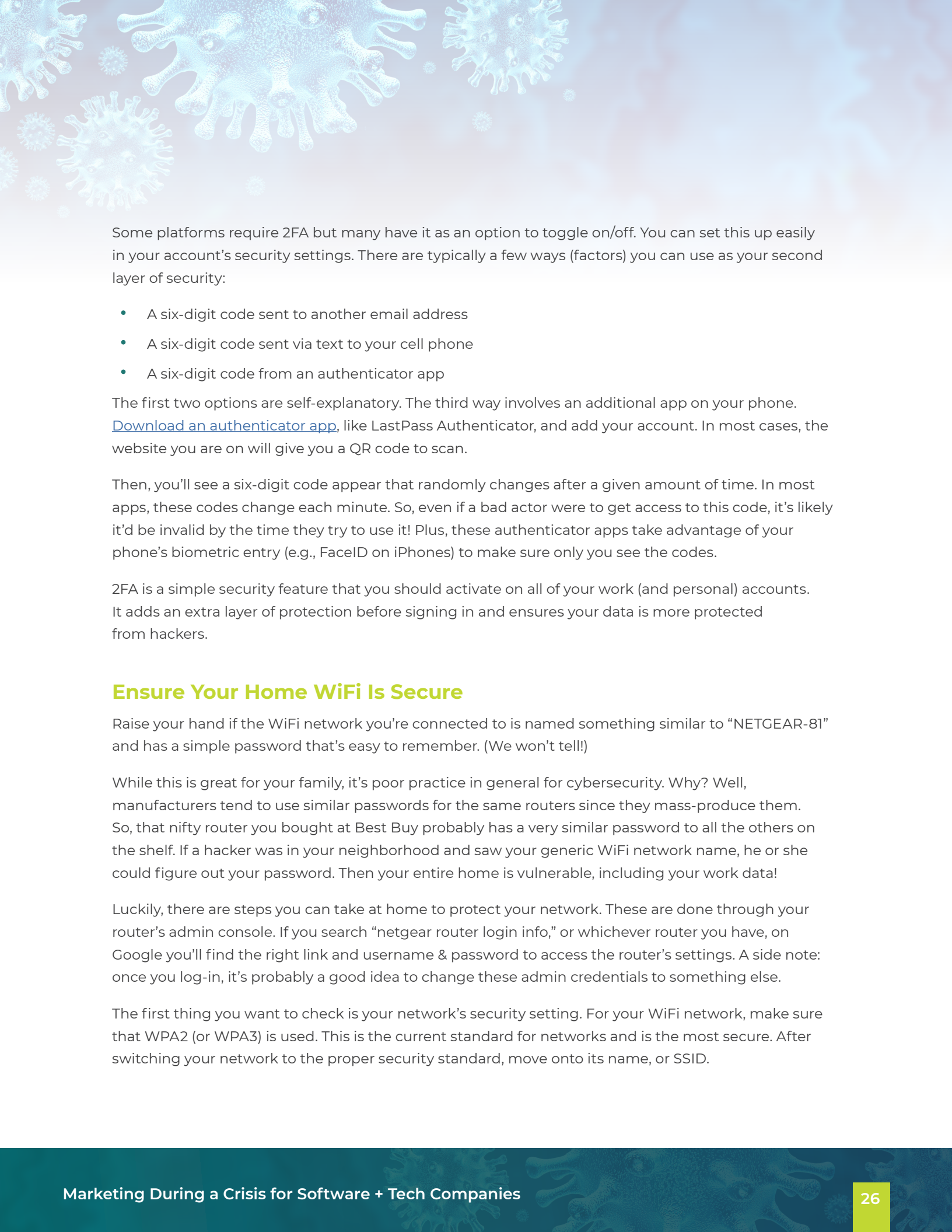
But when conducting sensitive client work at home, there are additional precautions you should take to keep your work data secure. Here are five things you can do to boost your home’s cybersecurity while working remotely.

Turn on Multi-Factor Authentication

Commonly referred to as “Two-Factor Authentication” (2FA), this is a way to keep your online accounts safe from malicious actors. While best practice tells tech marketers to generate a secure password like “3^Xe7@G#xL5N” for every single account they have, very few people actually do this. Even though a password manager (e.g., [LastPass](#)) can hold all of these impossible-to-remember passwords, we tend to use duplicate, easy-to-remember passwords instead!

When you sign in to an account—say, your email—you enter your username and password, then you’re logged in. Sometimes you’ll get an email if it’s a new device you’ve logged in from, but if someone has hacked into your account, it could be too late to save your data.

Enter 2FA. Instead of logging you in after entering your username and password, 2FA asks for a code or additional verification from one of your other devices, like your phone. So if a hacker tries to infiltrate your email, he or she would need a code that only your phone shows.



Some platforms require 2FA but many have it as an option to toggle on/off. You can set this up easily in your account's security settings. There are typically a few ways (factors) you can use as your second layer of security:

- A six-digit code sent to another email address
- A six-digit code sent via text to your cell phone
- A six-digit code from an authenticator app

The first two options are self-explanatory. The third way involves an additional app on your phone. [Download an authenticator app](#), like LastPass Authenticator, and add your account. In most cases, the website you are on will give you a QR code to scan.

Then, you'll see a six-digit code appear that randomly changes after a given amount of time. In most apps, these codes change each minute. So, even if a bad actor were to get access to this code, it's likely it'd be invalid by the time they try to use it! Plus, these authenticator apps take advantage of your phone's biometric entry (e.g., FaceID on iPhones) to make sure only you see the codes.

2FA is a simple security feature that you should activate on all of your work (and personal) accounts. It adds an extra layer of protection before signing in and ensures your data is more protected from hackers.

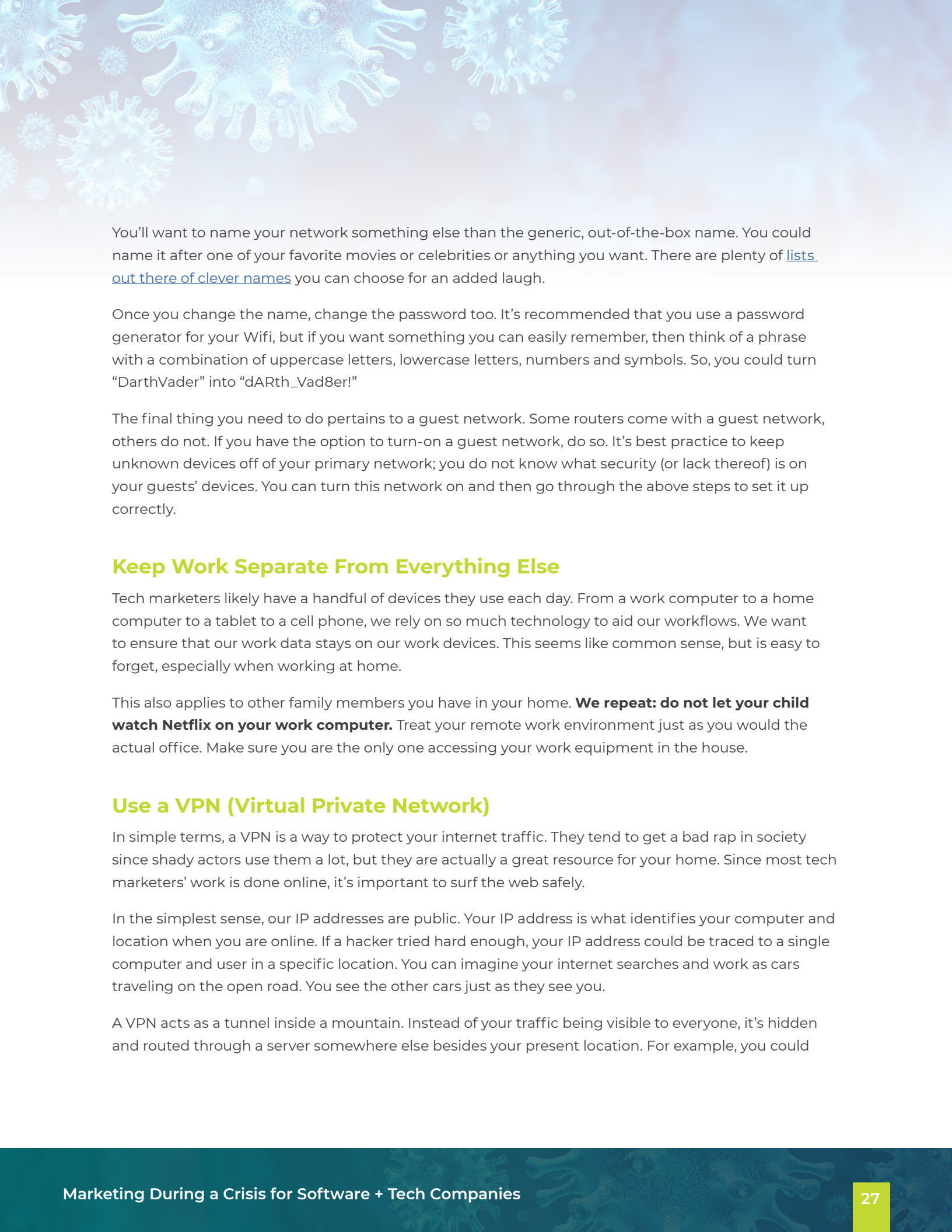
Ensure Your Home WiFi Is Secure

Raise your hand if the WiFi network you're connected to is named something similar to "NETGEAR-81" and has a simple password that's easy to remember. (We won't tell!)

While this is great for your family, it's poor practice in general for cybersecurity. Why? Well, manufacturers tend to use similar passwords for the same routers since they mass-produce them. So, that nifty router you bought at Best Buy probably has a very similar password to all the others on the shelf. If a hacker was in your neighborhood and saw your generic WiFi network name, he or she could figure out your password. Then your entire home is vulnerable, including your work data!

Luckily, there are steps you can take at home to protect your network. These are done through your router's admin console. If you search "netgear router login info," or whichever router you have, on Google you'll find the right link and username & password to access the router's settings. A side note: once you log-in, it's probably a good idea to change these admin credentials to something else.

The first thing you want to check is your network's security setting. For your WiFi network, make sure that WPA2 (or WPA3) is used. This is the current standard for networks and is the most secure. After switching your network to the proper security standard, move onto its name, or SSID.



You'll want to name your network something else than the generic, out-of-the-box name. You could name it after one of your favorite movies or celebrities or anything you want. There are plenty of [lists out there of clever names](#) you can choose for an added laugh.

Once you change the name, change the password too. It's recommended that you use a password generator for your Wifi, but if you want something you can easily remember, then think of a phrase with a combination of uppercase letters, lowercase letters, numbers and symbols. So, you could turn "DarthVader" into "dARth_Vad8er!"

The final thing you need to do pertains to a guest network. Some routers come with a guest network, others do not. If you have the option to turn-on a guest network, do so. It's best practice to keep unknown devices off of your primary network; you do not know what security (or lack thereof) is on your guests' devices. You can turn this network on and then go through the above steps to set it up correctly.

Keep Work Separate From Everything Else

Tech marketers likely have a handful of devices they use each day. From a work computer to a home computer to a tablet to a cell phone, we rely on so much technology to aid our workflows. We want to ensure that our work data stays on our work devices. This seems like common sense, but is easy to forget, especially when working at home.

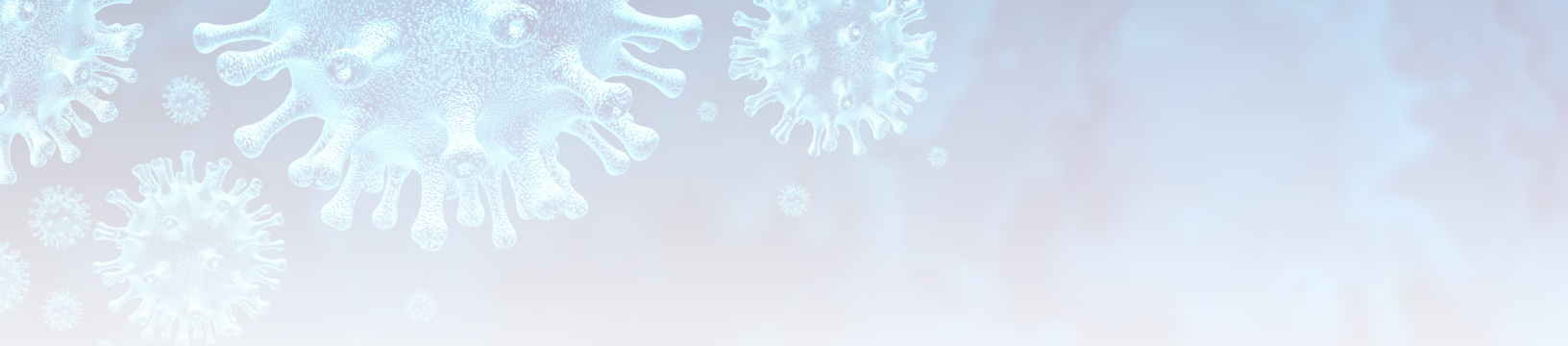
This also applies to other family members you have in your home. **We repeat: do not let your child watch Netflix on your work computer.** Treat your remote work environment just as you would the actual office. Make sure you are the only one accessing your work equipment in the house.

Use a VPN (Virtual Private Network)

In simple terms, a VPN is a way to protect your internet traffic. They tend to get a bad rap in society since shady actors use them a lot, but they are actually a great resource for your home. Since most tech marketers' work is done online, it's important to surf the web safely.

In the simplest sense, our IP addresses are public. Your IP address is what identifies your computer and location when you are online. If a hacker tried hard enough, your IP address could be traced to a single computer and user in a specific location. You can imagine your internet searches and work as cars traveling on the open road. You see the other cars just as they see you.

A VPN acts as a tunnel inside a mountain. Instead of your traffic being visible to everyone, it's hidden and routed through a server somewhere else besides your present location. For example, you could



be sitting in Cleveland but your IP address would show you're in the Rocky Mountains. So, if a hacker obtained your IP address, it would not trace back to you. It would trace back to a small encampment in the mountains!

Some employers already have VPN solutions so that employees can access servers and other internal assets remotely. When you use your company's VPN, it's still best practice to save your work to the network, rather than your local desktop. If your company does not use a VPN, you can [purchase a respected solution online](#). While VPNs cost money, the extra expense leads to more protection. Be wary of free or low-cost solutions as these likely have security flaws.

Remember the Basics...Update and Back Up

The above solutions pertain to the security of your devices and online work. As a tech marketer, there are also things that you should do continually as regular maintenance on your devices. Install software updates whenever there are some available as these often contain security patches. Plus, back-up your data to the cloud consistently just in case something happens at home.

When choosing a back-up solution, look past the marketing jargon that says that a company is the "best back-up solution" or "has super-fast upload speeds." While this is great, the more important piece is getting your data restored if you need to access the back-up. So, look at how quickly your data can be restored when [researching online back-up providers](#).

There are lots of challenges that come with transitioning from a physical office space to an at-home work environment, but cybersecurity shouldn't be one of those issues. Now kiddos who interrupt your conference calls or a cat who walks all over your keyboard...we can't help you there. Stay safe and healthy!



For the most up-to-date info for software and tech marketers during the Coronavirus crisis and recession, visit our special resources page at kiwicreative.net/Coronavirus



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