



3 WAYS B2Bs CAN BETTER NAVIGATE DISRUPTION



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In just a matter of weeks, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the face of trade—grounding aircraft, sealing borders and upending the usual course of supply chains around the globe. Businesses everywhere, including transportation logistics organizations like AIT, were thrust into crisis mode.

While we moved quickly to preserve our teammates' livelihoods, AIT was not immune to the virus' initial business impact. And with global trade expected to contract by as much as 32% this year, we recognize that the challenge is far from over.

However, these extraordinary times have already taught our team some incredibly valuable, overarching lessons about staying true to our core values to weather a crisis—takeaways I'm happy to share with you here.

Three practices helped guide our business through the current challenges of COVID-19, and also set our company up to better handle future crises. No matter your unique geography, company culture or industry niche, I believe these practices can work for your organization, too.

1. TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

Most importantly, we never lost sight of our basic core values and culture—the fundamentals of how we engage with each other, our customers and communities. These established pillars should function as a roadmap for any situation, especially guiding a team during a crisis.

If you don't have a defined culture that everyone understands and can get behind—one that includes prioritizing proactive communication and active listening—then now is the time to start. It's vital to have a rhythm and process for clearly and consistently sharing your strategy, new initiatives, solutions for the customer, and organizational wins.

When AIT was called upon to serve as an essential business, we turned to our shared values to project a sense of calm from the leadership team, while simultaneously implementing new safety processes and staying aggressive on offering creative solutions to our customers.

In addition to our regular channels of customer communication, we introduced a dedicated COVID-19 Information Hub to our website, debuted a twice-weekly email newsletter focused on carrier disruptions, and launched several social media campaigns highlighting new programs designed to keep customers' freight moving.

For our teammates, in addition to sending several company-wide updates on the company's status as the crisis unfolded, we also introduced an intranet space dedicated solely to COVID-19 updates and resources, including work from home tips and guidance, state shelter-in-place policies, return-to-work guidance and more.

We also quickly completed a company-wide project to distribute laptops and cloud-based solutions, covering nearly 100 percent of our workforce within a few weeks.

Along with most other companies, we established daily video calls at all levels of the organization and moved our quarterly town halls and leadership Q&A sessions to Zoom.

2. STAY FOCUSED ON SERVICE, SOLUTIONS

While you want to stay aggressive on finding solutions for your customers, you've got to make sure you're providing crisis-mitigation and management solutions and options for your employees and vendors as well.

In the first several weeks of the pandemic, our top priorities were to 1) create solutions that would protect all stakeholders connected to the company, 2) make a concerted effort to treat the issues that arose as symptoms of a global challenge—not the fault of one particular party, and 3) design cost-cutting programs that limited long-term, negative impact.

From an internal service perspective, we looked to create solutions that could help our people both personally and professionally. That included inviting experts in high-performance psychology, mindfulness and nutrition to give our teammates a weekly time to focus on themselves, introducing and utilizing the best mental and physical tools to deal with stress and boost the immune system.

For our customers, we asked our teams to dig into AIT's core value of high performance to develop aggressive procurement solutions and methods to manage rapidly fluctuating freight capacity



and costs, as well as logistics offerings that would allow us to stay relevant and protect customers' supply chains.

Our primary core value, earning our customers' trust, really resonated during this crisis. As the supply chain became more and more disrupted, I watched as, around the world, the team took a personal, mission-style approach to solving problems with an increased intensity.

A couple of my favorite examples:

- Introducing new, essential business pricing solutions exclusively for the lockdown periods to support customer cost-reduction initiatives
- Developing customized charter solutions in the technology, life science and government sectors
- Focused resources into our 24-hour global air charter desks to support an increase in mission-critical personal protective equipment shipments
- Immediately redefining contactless procedures for safe home deliveries

I'm also proud to be able to share that during one of the most capacity-constrained periods in history, thanks to our teams' intense focus on values and quality, we were actually able to improve our already excellent on-time delivery percentage.

3. ADJUST TO STAY RELEVANT

The ability to stay focused on the customer and quickly adapt to changing market

conditions is a distinct competitive advantage. This is key in normal times and proves to be critical when typical market indicators are unstable and market conditions are changing hourly.

To meet the demands of a quickly changing environment, we had to evaluate and adjust both external and internal plans and messages on a weekly—sometimes daily—basis.

Quick internal pivots at AIT included work from home manuals, health and safety policies, adjusting work schedules, and effective communication between all stakeholders of the business. We also undertook a massive technology enhancement, quickly implementing all-new cloud platforms and data mining tools to support remote work within just a couple weeks.

Externally, we spent the first 45 days of the initial lockdown period making sure our customers were aware of skyrocketing rates, giving them as much time as possible to make business decisions. Then, as rates dropped in the next 45 days, we made sure to communicate the competitive pricing opportunities available.

And the adjustments continue today. As an example, AIT, like many others, has revamped our outside sales approach and how we engage and communicate with customers. These are evolving processes, but ones that will strengthen our sales pipeline long-term—well past this current pandemic crisis.

For best results, stay flexible, focused

Make no mistake, these are trying times. Many organizations continue to struggle. But the good news is that this is also an opportunity to improve and prepare as a company.

In order to successfully navigate COVID-19 (or any other disruption), I recommend implementing the following three behaviors, which have been essential for AIT:

1. Rely on your values for effective and transparent communication
2. Stay focused on both the internal and external customers
3. Constantly evaluate and adjust the plan

Finally, we should all acknowledge that the work is not done yet. Managing through the disruption that continues to ripple through our industry will be an ongoing process for all of us.

At AIT, while we continue to evaluate, adjust and prepare for the arrival of additional waves of this virus, or whatever form the next global or local disruption takes, I have faith that the work our team has done on culture and our dedication to each other and our customers will see us through. And it's my sincere hope that this list helps you and your teammates do the same. ✈️

About Keith Tholan

As Co-Owner and Chief Operating Officer for AIT Worldwide Logistics, Keith is a driving force behind the organization's sales and operations strategy and a champion for core values.