

# Marketing During a Recession: 6 Strategies to Maximize Your Marketing Budget

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We are entering another period of economic uncertainty. Inflation has hit a decades-long high, **tech stocks are tumbling, supply chains remain snarled**, and workers **have not returned to the office** in the same numbers since the start of the pandemic.

Businesses are scrambling to prepare for this volatility. In general, leaders like to **hold onto cash** as a buffer during recessionary times. This often entails limiting spend on a variety of non-core activities or putting a freeze on hiring.

Budget cuts happen. **But by being strategic about where you spend your marketing dollars, you can maximize the spend you do have to generate the highest returns and position your business for a strong rebound.** Smart leaders use moments of uncertainty to invest thoughtfully in the future, not just short-term survival. Forward-thinking marketing strategies focused on your highest-performing channels will help you thrive during both booms and busts. In this guide, we highlight the top marketing strategies during a recession and how to implement them.

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# Why SEO is the best marketing strategy during a recession

Recessions often end with the economy roaring back stronger than it was before. **SEO and content marketing are the best places to invest limited resources during leaner times since they pay both short- and long-term dividends.** You can leapfrog ahead of the competition by focusing on building your organic presence when competitors are likely making budget cuts or investing their limited spend in channels with diminishing returns.

## Play the long game with SEO

SEO experts play the long game. If most paid media spend is like investing in stock (expensive with the potential for quick wins), then SEO/content spend is like investing in bonds—high-yield and low-risk. You invest today and continue to drive consistent value for years to come. So in an economic downturn when your paid media budgets may be limited, SEO is the best strategy to dedicate your time and efforts to.

Kroger, the largest U.S. grocery chain, knows this firsthand. Having recently expanded into the highly competitive eCommerce space, the team at Kroger struggled to get websites to rank for non-branded search terms. Of course, Kroger could have simply continued to plow money into pricey PPC ads to enhance its visibility. But this strategy is expensive, burning through cash quickly and failing to build a foundation

for growth. Kroger could have become dependent on paid spend, leaving its marketing and revenue teams at the mercy of Google's pricing.

Instead, Kroger partnered with Conductor to invest in creating an SEO strategy. With Conductor's support, the team at Kroger opted to invest in developing content around new topics and categories based on demand and interest from their target audience. After a relatively small outlay for content creation and research, Kroger's new content is building long-term visibility for the brand. **Kroger's new strategy helped increase organic traffic to their website by 7% year over year, resulting in millions of additional visitors per month.**

## Maximize SEO ROI

When evaluating your channel mix, return on investment (ROI) is one of the most important measures of success. SEO offers consistently high ROI compared to other channels. **One recent study calculated that each dollar invested in SEO leads to a whopping \$22 return.**

In the past, SEO investments have felt like a black box. The ROI is not always as easily quantifiable as paid media. As marketing leaders, we all like immediate and easy-to-see results.

SEO requires an investment in content creation and optimization. It can be more difficult to measure ROI. We've written extensively about this in our recent **in-depth guide on measuring marketing ROI**. The trick is to implement

a **multi-touch attribution model** to assess the influence of each channel. Great leaders recognize the potential ROI of SEO efforts and encourage their teams to invest.

Rather than making blanket cuts to your marketing spend during a recession, identify your top-performing channels from an ROI perspective first. That way, you can make informed adjustments to spend, improving your budget's efficiency by shifting budget towards higher-performing investments like SEO.

## SEO fuels all marketing efforts

Another reason why SEO is a great investment during a downturn is because it fuels your other marketing channels. Creating customer-first content is the foundation to successful SEO and ranking high in the search results.

Value-driven content can also power other channels by being featured in paid campaigns, social media posts, newsletters, targeted email outreach, and more.

Additionally, you can use search data to optimize your paid budget, both by pulling back on PPC spend for areas that you are already visible for organically and by increasing spend on harder-to-win keywords. You can use your SEO investment to power multiple marketing channels, increasing its effectiveness.

## Meet your customers where they already are

Consumer behavior can change during a recession, from lack of spending on unnecessary luxuries to reduced travel and mobility. During recessions and booms alike, however, your customers rely on search engines to help them find the answers they need. As a result, your investments in SEO will help reach potential customers in all economic climates. Tracking Google searches can help you understand what types of questions your customers are asking and how they change during a downturn.

For example, consider a hypothetical hotel brand: they may find that people are looking for staycations or cheap travel ideas in secondary cities during a recession. In such a case, the brand may want to pivot its content marketing strategy to focus on affordable travel in lesser-known places and how customers can save by booking with their brand.

Use organic search data to help build brand and customer loyalty during tough times. By answering a need, your customers will value your brand and become more likely to prioritize or revisit your offerings once things improve.

# Top strategies to grow your organic presence and business during a recession

Growth during a recession may seem unrealistic, but **smart growth is still possible with the right marketing strategies**. By focusing on the key areas below, you can drive the most impact and maximize your spend across all channels.

## Embrace a customer-first marketing strategy

One of the best ways to survive times of economic uncertainty is by building trust with your target audience through **customer-first marketing**. As mentioned above, this is not only good for SEO but your other marketing channels as well.

What is customer-first marketing? **Simply put, customer-first marketing means building your marketing organization with a single-minded focus on your customers and how you can help them.** Instead of focusing on the business's bottom line, prioritize how you can help people with your product or service through valuable marketing.

Customer-first marketing starts with listening to your customers and putting them first. Incorporating the **customer voice** throughout your content, website, and product or service names can make a huge difference in how customers find your brand. By understanding your customers and creating content to help them, you can reach your customers where they are. Most importantly, you will gain their trust by providing genuine value.

For example, before they partnered with Conductor, Travelers Insurance used the term “cyber risk” to refer to a type of insurance offering. **With Conductor's help**, the team at Travelers Insurance found that their target customers were actually searching for “cyber liability insurance” at a much higher rate. **By incorporating that simple change into the landing page, Travelers saw traffic increase by 100%.** Research the way your customers are searching to better incorporate the language they use and improve performance of content.

Customer-first marketing also helps future-proof your organization during downturns. This is because it makes marketing efforts more resilient to fluctuations in behavior and algorithms. Google has started to reward customer-first marketing; the **recent core update** pushes sites to **create content for humans rather than search engines**. Customer-first marketing is clearly the most effective approach at all times, but particularly so during a recession.

## Identify new opportunities through your search data

Did you know your SEO team is sitting on a gold mine of customer data? From Google Search Console (GSC) to web analytics, **your existing data can unlock real value for your business**. Some companies choose to outsource this data to an agency, while others keep it in-house. Each option has its pros and cons. Agencies can help organizations glean actionable insights when they don't have enough staff or expertise. But if you use an agency for several years, and then you switch to a different option, essential historical information often gets lost. Bringing this function in-house allows you to respond to consumer needs long-term and monitor your progress.

Whether you use an agency or not, there's value in your search data. For example, data from your internal site search lets you know the topics/products people are trying to locate. It can indicate how customers are (or are not) navigating your site and generate ideas on how to improve customer experience by, say, creating new pages to meet their needs. Additionally, your analytics platform can help you target underperforming pages or groups of pages. Many companies don't make use of their existing data, which is a costly mistake. Organizations should unlock the value of their first-party data during recessions since the only investment it requires is time.



## Align paid and organic teams to maximize your spend

Paid and organic synergy is one of the best cost savings strategies that comes with SEO investment. PPC can be an expensive channel because you are reliant on Google's proprietary market for bid pricing and there's often high competition. Also, PPC is not a viable long-term investment: your visibility disappears as soon as you stop bidding on a particular term.

By **aligning your paid and organic teams**, you can identify which of your PPC terms already have organic visibility. This

allows you to pull back on spend for keywords you're ranking for organically, opening up budget for more competitive terms. Additionally, savvy marketers analyze competitive ad copy to better position their content based on what is performing and what is not. You can also test different messaging and positioning strategies on paid keywords, see what converts, and then build organic content around the same topics for sustained returns. Investing in paid and organic synergy during a recession is a great way to maximize your spend and generate actual cost savings.

## Optimize new and existing content for SEO

Successful SEO implementation pays serious dividends. Customer-first content that ranks on the first page of Google can drastically impact brand awareness, visibility, traffic, and conversions. Here's how you can optimize both new and existing content to drive the highest possible ROI.

### ■ Improve your site's technical health

Technical SEO is like the foundation of a house—you may not think about it until a crack appears and the structure is compromised. Marketing leaders often discount the importance of investing in a site's technical health, but it is crucial for optimal performance. Optimize your site health to significantly impact how Google crawls your site, which will pay major dividends during and after a recession. Improving indexability will lift the performance of all your new and existing content and lend your site more credibility in the eyes of Google.

Conductor helped the team at BraunAbility **improve their technical health** by identifying frequent rank cannibalization issues throughout the site. Through the creation of smooth redirects, BraunAbility ensured that Google's site crawling technology was now able to index each page. This helped content and landing pages climb in rankings, growing leads by 24% and sales by 14% after just eight months of partnering with Conductor.

To help our customers further improve their site health, Conductor recently **acquired ContentKing**, the leading real-time website monitoring and auditing solution. ContentKing helps companies proactively identify issues with their sites. ContentKing allows you to resolve site problems in hours, not weeks, and build a strong foundation for the future.

### ■ Invest in the right content

All content is not created equal. It's not enough to churn out piece after piece of fluffy or unhelpful content—this type of strategy will not generate meaningful ROI. **It's crucial to identify the best type of content across all stages of the customer journey and then invest in creating, optimizing, and tracking it.**

Look no further than WeWork to see this process in action. Conductor helped the team at WeWork identify that their digital presence lacked early-funnel visibility. Our team helped WeWork's team create early-stage content, reaching new audiences and increasing brand recognition. SEO quickly paid off for WeWork's organic marketing team, **helping them attain 132% of their organic traffic goal and doubling their Page 1 visibility**. This type of optimization is especially helpful to implement during a recession since a good piece of content will help your customers and continue to drive website traffic for years to come.

# Now is the time to invest in the future

At Conductor, we always say that the best time to plant a tree was yesterday, but the second best time is today. **A downturn can be an opportunity**—consider it the right time to start growing roots that will help you weather current and future storms.

Learn more about optimizing your spend through paid and organic alignment in our recent **on-demand webinar** or **schedule a free demo** for additional insights on how Conductor can help supercharge your organic and SEO efforts when you need it most.

## About Conductor

Conductor is the world's leading organic marketing platform, helping businesses accelerate search traffic, digital growth and revenue. Conductor's technology helps marketers create powerful marketing content to drive quality traffic to their site and track their organic performance. Websites are more valuable than ever and getting found online is a #1 enterprise priority.