

**WholeFoods Magazine**  
**Tip of the Month**  
**August 2020**

THE PERSONAL RESILIENCE OPPORTUNITY

**By Jay Jacobowitz**

The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated an existing trend: more grocery shopping online. Pre-Covid estimates suggest online grocery was about 4% of U.S. total grocery sales, with the pandemic propelling a 50% increase to about 6% through mid-2020. Even though online is growing, brick-and-mortar still accounts for 94% of all grocery dollars, and consumers don't yet show signs of long-term plans to abandon shopping in person.

According to new Nielsen research, nearly all (93%) of shoppers trust brick-and-mortar grocery stores and online grocers equally. Nielsen probed how consumer mindsets have changed as they haltingly emerge from months of lockdown. The simultaneous public health and economic crises have people realigning their essential values: empathy, trust, health and safety.

This new, heightened appreciation for empathy directly connects to community: essential workers on the front lines, the vulnerable elderly, and family. Retailers that recognize the increasing importance of empathy will use this moment to ensure their teams are empowered to engage with customers. Not in an impertinent, meddlesome or pushy way. But train employees to fully listen, to mirror back the sentiment they receive from shoppers. Ask yourself, is the internet capable of delivering digital empathy?

The internet is also weak on discovery. Scrolling through an online inventory fumbles the opportunity to expose shoppers to the full variety of products on your shelves. Curbside delivery is not the same thing as product discovery. And remembering items shoppers need but have forgotten, and impulse buying, are absent online.

Last month, independent natural products retailers shared with us how they responded to new Covid-19 shopping patterns. Operators consistently said what has been most striking is the pressing desire of shoppers to listen much more intently and learn more deeply than before. Customers both old and new are asking for advice on immune support, on good, basic nutrition practices, on a good multivitamin, on eating more fruits and vegetables, and on how to manage stress by adopting a healthier lifestyle. As one retailer told us, "We have had countless customers say they are so grateful we are here."

Research from the Hartman Group reveals the pandemic and economic shutdown have rendered people powerless. To reclaim power, people want to focus on things they can control, one of which is what they buy. The pre-Covid-19 trends of health, wellness, proactive mindfulness, holistic medicine and immunity, and most importantly, developing physical and emotional resilience, all now have greater momentum. Empower your employees to make full use of their nutritional expertise to recommend all the relevant products they might have overlooked in times when personal health and safety seemed less urgent.

The internet excels at convenience. But this is something more. Your ability to deliver on the acute new need for personal resilience is far more profound, authentic and real than artificial intelligence, algorithmically delivered. It is a form of love. As a politician once said, never let a good crisis go to waste. **JJ**