

The logo for cbdMD, featuring the brand name in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font with a trademark symbol (TM) to the upper right of the 'D'.

cbdMD™

**Advertising Trends and Tactics
During a Pandemic
Cannabis**

As news of a new strain of COVID-19 spreading at alarming rates, the “new normal” (lockdowns) has led to increased levels of anxiety and stress for many people.



According to a [study published](#) by the Centers for Disease and Control Prevention:

31%

of American adults have reported signs of anxiety, a significant increase from last year

While a recent [Kaiser Family Foundation poll](#) found that:

>50%

of American adults who have faced pay cuts or layoffs blame the pandemic for damaging their mental health



According to a major [study into mental health impact](#) of COVID-19 in the UK::

57%

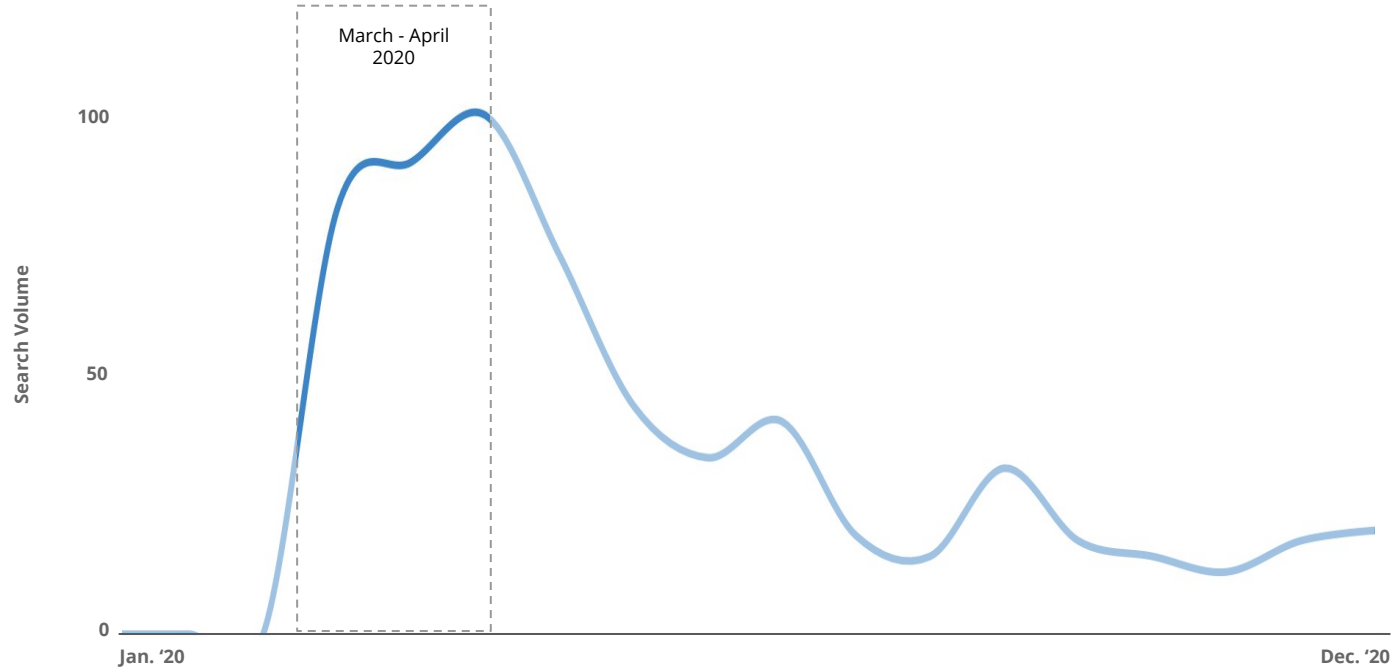
of UK participants have reported signs of anxiety

64%

of UK participants have reported signs of depression

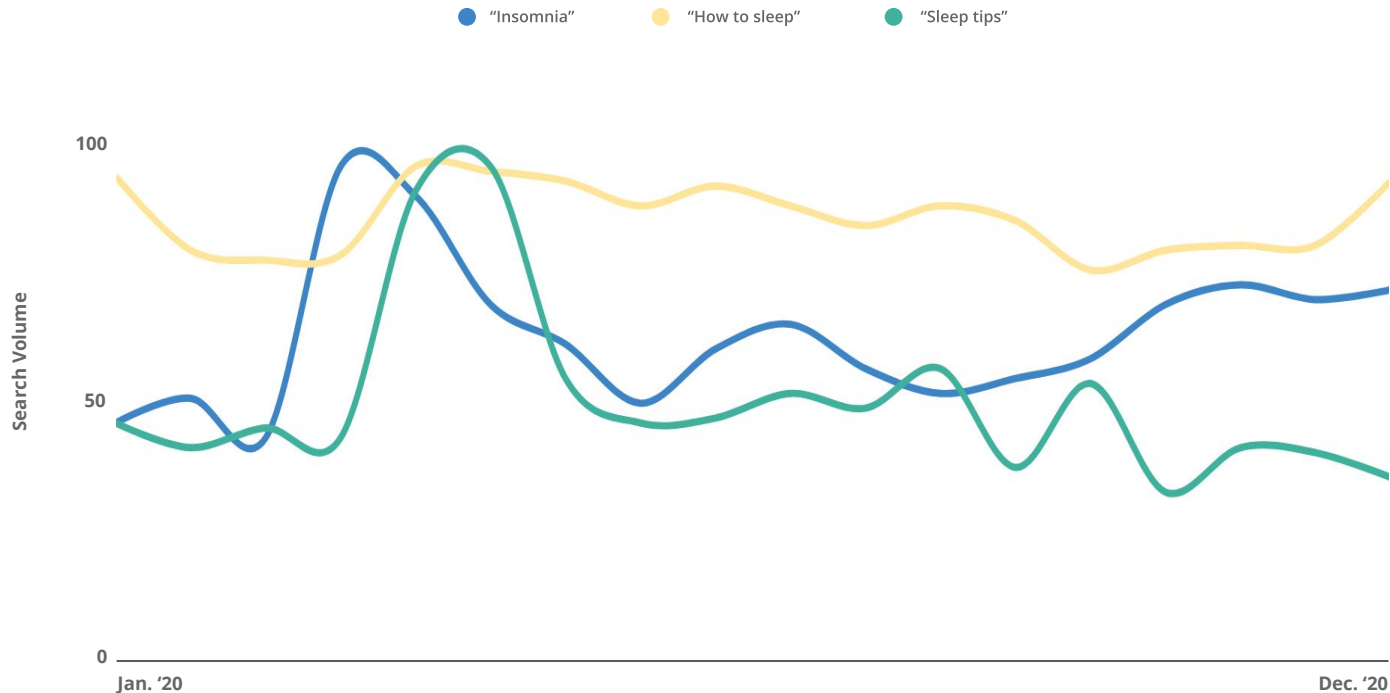
Quarantine depression entered our vocabulary in March 2020 and remains a part of it.

Search volume of search term "quarantine depression" on Google:



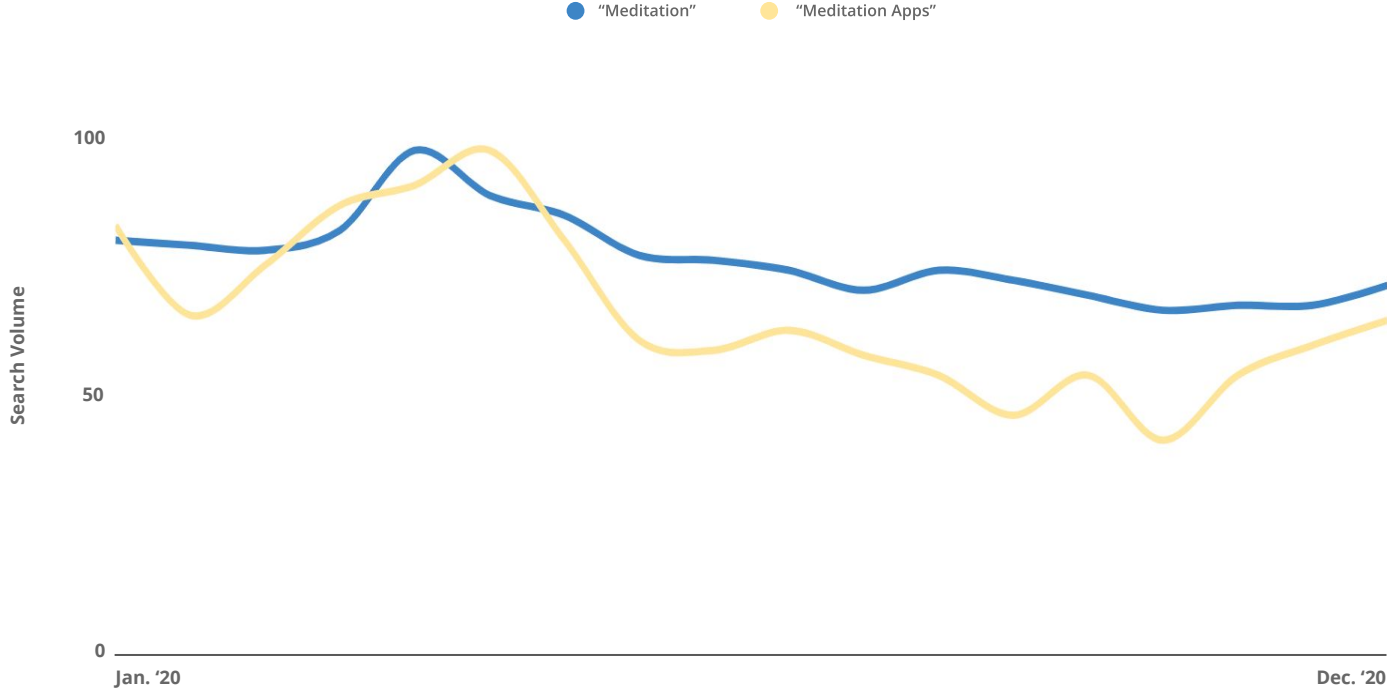
Many experiencing insomnia turned to the internet for tips on how to sleep.

Search volume of search terms related to "insomnia", "how to sleep", and "sleep tips" on Google:



Searches for “meditation” and meditation apps also increased in March and April.

Search volume of search terms related to “meditation” and “meditation apps” on Google:



Weekly average app downloads in 2020 for “mindfulness” apps (such as Calm, Headspace, etc.) increased +25% in March compared to January and February.

Top English-Language Mental Wellness Apps in April 2020 by downloads:



Calm



Replika



Headspace



Relax



Reflectly



Breethe



Fabulous



Relax Melodies



Meditation App



Meditopia



Calm



Meditation App



Headspace



Moshi



Fabulous



Synctuition
Meditation



Reflectly



Daylio

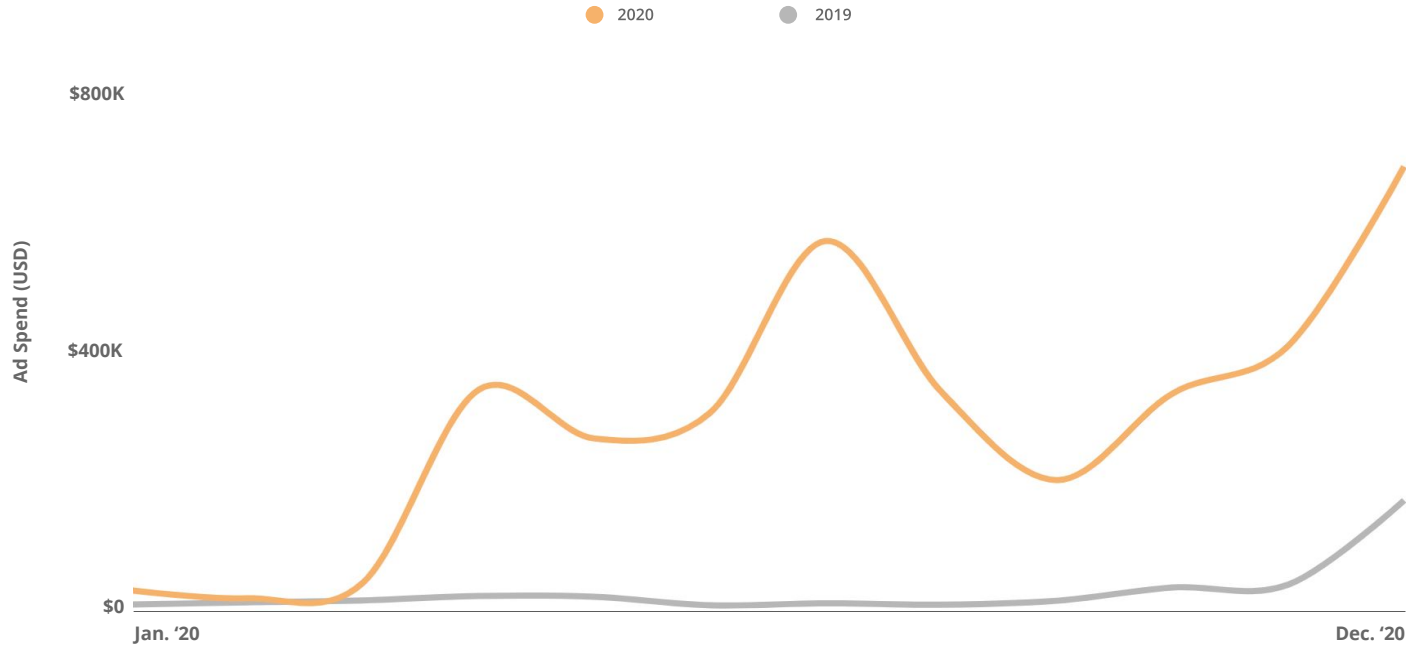


Breethe



Insight Timer

At the same time, meditation apps aggressively increased their spending to attract users. Calm increased their digital ad spend by +796% (2020 vs. 2019) in addition to a \$15.6M spend on TV ads* between March and August.



Calm's advertising content strategy focused on targeting those who struggle to fall asleep. Their ad mix included the following:

Testimonials

Soothing Visuals

Discounts

Celebrities

Calm
November 26 at 3:15 AM · 🌐

"2018 Trend of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"2017 iPhone App of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"The Happiest App in the World" - 🧘 Humane Tech

4 Steps to Ease Anxiety

1. Stop scrolling for a moment.
2. Pause a moment to notice your breathing.
3. Take a deep breath.
4. Go download Calm.

The most relaxing app in the world [INSTALL NOW](#)

CPM: **\$7.32**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm
June 2 at 10:44 PM · 🌐

"2018 Trend of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"2017 iPhone App of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"The Happiest App in the World" - 🧘 Humane Tech

"I was listening to this and fell asleep 5 minutes later. It was amazing."

Tilysia

The most relaxing app in the world [INSTALL NOW](#)

CPM: **\$5.97**
[Click to view.](#)

calm · Follow

"I used to hit snooze 7 times a day..."

29,041 views

calm This self-care app is changing lives. "2018 Trend of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"2017 iPhone App of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"The Happiest App in the World" - 🧘 Humane Tech

APRIL 23

The most relaxing app in the world [INSTALL NOW](#)

CPM: **\$6.92**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm
May 14 at 8:44 PM · 🌐

This self-care app is changing lives.
"2018 Trend of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"2017 iPhone App of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"The Happiest App in the World" - 🧘 Humane Tech

"I kept staying up way too late scrolling Twitter and Instagram."

The most relaxing app in the world [INSTALL NOW](#)

CPM: **\$8.30**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm
August 13 at 1:12 AM · 🌐

For tonight's sleep story, Journey to the far north of Europe, to a snowy world of mountains, fjords, and awe-inspiring islands 🏔️🌊

"Whenever I'm having trouble calming my mind, I pick a story and I'm asleep in minutes!"

- Ashley K

The most relaxing app in the world [INSTALL NOW](#)

CPM: **\$7.89**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm's advertising content strategy focused on targeting those who struggle to fall asleep. Their ad mix included the following:

Testimonials


Soothing Visuals

Discounts

Celebrities

Calm June 11 at 1:06 AM · 🌐

Learn life-changing skills that can help you manage feelings of anxiety, stress, and worry. Try Calm for free.


★★★★★
"I was listening to this and fell asleep 5 minutes later. It was amazing."

exhale

The most relaxing app in the world [INSTALL NOW](#)

CPM: **\$7.64**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm September 23 at 5:44 PM · 🌐


"2018 Trend of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"2017 iPhone App of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"The Happiest App in the World" - 🧘 Humane Tech

Anxious about tomorrow...

"Whenever I'm having trouble calming my mind, I pick a story and I'm asleep in minutes."
-Amanda K

CALM.COM
Take advantage of our 7-day free trial [LEARN MORE](#)

CPM: **\$8.46**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm October 19 at 12:00 AM · 🌐


Limited time offer: 25% off an annual subscription to Calm - the iPhone App of the Year


Calm
The iPhone App of the Year [LEARN MORE](#)

CPM: **\$8.95**
[Click to view.](#)


Calm March 18 at 8:54 PM · 🌐

"2018 Trend of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"2017 iPhone App of the Year" - 🍏 Apple
"The Happiest App in the World" - 🧘 Humane Tech

For 20 seconds, just breathe.
breathe in


CALM.COM
Start the Daily Calm today. [LEARN MORE](#)

CPM: **\$7.93**
[Click to view.](#)

How People With Anxiety Fall Asleep in 10 Minutes


The most relaxing app in the world
Calm October 14, 2020 at 5:57 PM · 🌐

The most relaxing app in the world
This self-care app is changing lives.
... More

👍👍👍 458 254 Comments 53 Shares

CPM: **\$7.60**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm's advertising content strategy focused on targeting those who struggle to fall asleep. Their ad mix included the following:

Testimonials

Soothing Visuals

Discounts

Celebrities

December 17 at 11:37 PM · 🌐

Show your love. Give the gift of Calm this holiday season.

Give the gift of peace.
Special Holiday offer for
60% off
a gift to a
LIFETIME
subscription to Calm.

CALM.COM
Calm
The most relaxing app in the world

GET OFFER

CPM: **\$8.83**
[Click to view.](#)

November 26 at 8:44 PM · 🌐

Black Friday got you feeling blue? Enjoy 50% off Calm for a limited time.

50% off
a Year of Calm

Shop limited-time offer

CALM.COM
Calm
The most relaxing app in the world

LEARN MORE

CPM: **\$9.12**
[Click to view.](#)

November 29 at 6:33 PM · 🌐

Black Friday got you feeling blue? Enjoy 60% off a lifetime of Calm, this weekend only

60% off Calm
for Life

\$159 (\$399)

Shop limited-time offer

CALM.COM
Calm
The most relaxing app in the world

LEARN MORE

CPM: **\$8.93**
[Click to view.](#)

Give the gift of peace.
Special Holiday offer for
60% off
a gift to a
LIFETIME
subscription to Calm.

Calm
The most relaxing app in the world
calm.com

December 17 at 11:52 PM · 🌐

Calm
Show your love. Give the gift of Calm this holiday season.

CPM: **\$8.18**
[Click to view.](#)

December 18 at 5:23 PM · 🌐

Don't forget this special offer. Give the gift of Calm this holiday season.

Give the gift of sleep.
Special Holiday offer for
60% off
a gift to a
LIFETIME
subscription to Calm.

CALM.COM
Calm
The most relaxing app in the world

GET OFFER

CPM: **\$8.36**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm's advertising content strategy focused on targeting those who struggle to fall asleep. Their ad mix included the following:

Testimonials

Soothing Visuals

Discounts

Celebrities

Calm
October 13 at 10:30 PM · 🌐

"I'm a bit obsessed with sleep... ideally it's what we should all spend a third of our lives doing." - Cillian Murphy

CalM
Hello,

CALM.COM
Drift off to Cillian's sleep story tonight

LEARN MORE

This ad features a video of Cillian Murphy in a red hat on a train track. The text includes a quote from him and a call to action to watch a sleep story.

CPM: **\$8.41**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm
November 14 at 1:27 AM · 🌐

"Turns out, I'm a walking sedative."
-Nick Offerman

"Turns out, I'm a walking sedative."

The most relaxing app in the world

INSTALL NOW

This ad features a black and white portrait of Nick Offerman with a quote about being a walking sedative. It includes a call to action to install the app.

CPM: **\$6.69**
[Click to view.](#)

calm · Follow

CalM

"Sleep and meditation are a huge part of my routine."
- Harry Styles

5,958 views

calm Your dreams just got a whole lot sweeter. 🍯 Fall asleep with Harry Styles as he reads our new Sleep Story. #DreamWithMe. Available now in the Calm app.

This ad features a video of Harry Styles with a quote about sleep and meditation. It includes view counts and a description of the Sleep Story feature.

CPM: **\$6.92**
[Click to view.](#)

Calm
July 30 at 12:10 AM · 🌐

Join Eva Green at The Magic Hotel. Get your reservation ready and check into your imagination, where anything is possible.

Magic Hotel
Narrated by
Eva Green

The most relaxing app in the world

INSTALL NOW

This ad features a video of Eva Green with a quote about The Magic Hotel. It includes a call to action to install the app.

CPM: **\$7.66**
[Click to view.](#)

Meanwhile, Headspace communicated their app's end benefit of "feeling happier", "less sad", and "get sleepy" through bright ad visuals.

Bright Visuals

"Free" Offer

Headspace
May 11 at 5:47 AM · 🌐

Tired people get grumpy. Improve your health and happiness with Sleep by Headspace.

headspace

Get sleepy.

Put Your Mind to Bed

INSTALL NOW

CPM: **\$7.69**
[Click to view.](#)

Headspace
Yesterday at 6:00 PM · 🌐

Meditation techniques for mindfulness, stress relief & peace of mind

Search

sleep walk relax morning

Life challenges

Movement & sport

Personal growth

Day to day exercises

Headspace: Meditation & Sleep

INSTALL NOW

CPM: **\$7.76**
[Click to view.](#)

Headspace
May 11 at 5:48 AM · 🌐

Experts have shown that Headspace can help you live a happier, healthier life. So go ahead, put it to the test.

headspace

28% less sad. 10 days.

Try Headspace for free

INSTALL NOW

CPM: **\$7.60**
[Click to view.](#)

Headspace
July 17 at 2:43 PM · 🌐

Improve your ability to cope with life's challenges and move forward.

headspace

Stress, meet mindfulness

Meditation

HEADSPACE.COM

Try Headspace for free

LEARN MORE

CPM: **\$7.46**
[Click to view.](#)

Headspace
September 10, 2019 at 7:36 PM · 🌐

Increase happiness. Reduce stress. Boost focus. Science says you can have it all with a little bit of Headspace

headspace

THE MOST science-backed meditation app IN THE WORLD

Try Headspace for free

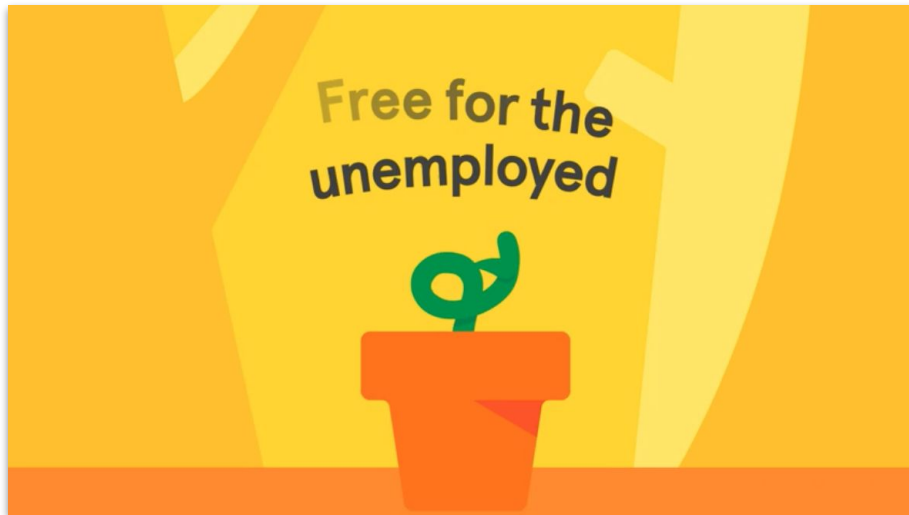
INSTALL NOW

CPM: **\$7.44**
[Click to view.](#)

They also pushed out a promotion that let healthcare workers, K-12 teachers, and those who lost their job due to COVID-19 use the app for free.

Bright Visuals

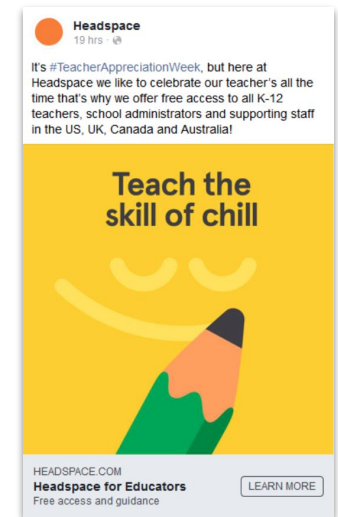
"Free" Offer



CPM: **\$15.23**
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: **\$16.45**
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: **\$6.97**
[Click to view.](#)

As for the CBD industry, 2020 marked the year where consumer purchasing of CBD products shifted heavily from in-person (via dispensaries) to online shopping.



\$238M

estimated spend on flower, tinctures, edibles, and infused drinks during the Thanksgiving long weekend in the United States
(according to statistics from cannabis tech company, Akerna)



Digital First

many brands across the United States have recognized the importance of having a proper digital ecosystem, especially a seamless online shopping experience

Consumer research conducted by [Brightfield Group](#) reports that anxiety is the #1 ailment of CBD users, with depression and insomnia at #3 and #4 respectively.



53%

of cannabis users reported anxiety as one of their main ailments, and one of the main reasons they use CBD products.



4 in 10

cannabis users say they plan to use CBD more frequently because of COVID-19, with 15% planning to use higher dosages.

Cannabis brands are focusing on marketing their products around keywords like “resetting” and “refocusing”, with a heavy emphasis on mental and physical wellness.

Airfield
SUPPLY COMPANY

x

KIVA
• CONFECTIONS •

“CHECK YOURSELF” Campaign

Airfield Supply Company, along with the Keep a Breast foundation, developed a limited-edition CBD gummy with KIVA Confections to bring awareness to breast cancer.



**CALIFORNIA'S CANNABIS LEADERS
HAVE UNITED AROUND
BREAST CANCER PREVENTION.**

WE'RE IGNITING THE CONVERSATION.

“We are using the New Year, when so many look to set personal wellness intentions, to remind ... that **if you are old enough to enjoy legal cannabis, you are old enough to make monthly self-exams** a part of your routine.”

- Marc Matulich, Airfield Supply Co.'s Chief Executive Officer

CbdMD led their advertising messaging around “stress relief” and capturing audiences’ attention by asking leading questions and referring to 2020 as a year “we all need a little extra self-care”.

CbdMD

CBDistillery

oHhO



CPM: \$2.87



CPM: \$2.46



CPM: \$8.36
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: \$8.29
[Click to view.](#)

CBDistillery referenced the same idea of “world of chaos” and focused their advertising around finding “calm” and “relaxation”.

CbdMD

CBDistillery

oHhO



CPM: \$15.87



CPM: \$10.13



CPM: \$9.43

At the beginning of lockdown (March–June), they prioritized “shop now” CTA and leveraged promo codes to drive traffic to their eCommerce platform.

CbdMD

CBDistillery

oHhO



CPM: \$4.83



CPM: \$22.71



CPM: \$12.61



CPM: \$13.50

OHHo Botanicals is another example of CBD brand that double downed on promo codes to redirect people from shopping at distilleries to shopping online.

CbdMD

CBDistillery

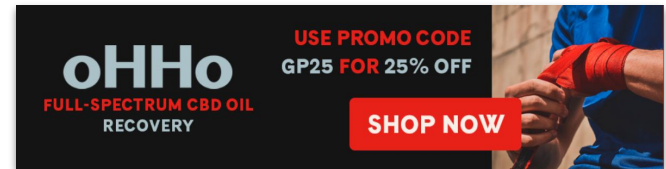
oHHo



CPM: \$5.08



CPM: \$11.21



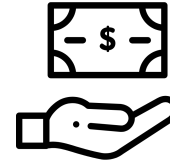
CPM: \$8.34

Antidepressant medication is another category that seized the opportunity to leverage increased anxiety levels.



\$77M

spent on ads for antidepressant medications on traditional platforms from March through June 2020 according to [Kantar](#).



\$4.3M

spend on ads from March through June from companies focused on CBD, more than five times the \$798,000 they spent a year earlier according to Kantar.

StressBalls entered the “anxiety” market with product-focused ads and very clear “stress less” message and “turn the stressed life into your best life” CTA.

Stressballs

Nature's Bounty

stressballs_us • Follow

58,039 views
stressballs_us Stress less so you can live more.
7 DAYS AGO

CPM: **\$6.78**
[Click to view.](#)

Stressballs
May 20 at 7:50 PM

Stress less so you can live more.

WWW.WALMART.COM
Turn stressed life into your best life. SHOP NOW

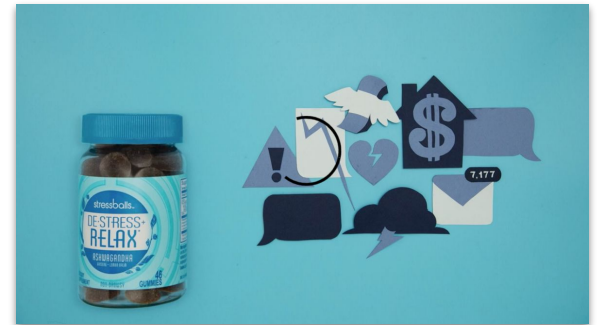
CPM: **\$7.27**
[Click to view.](#)

Stressballs
Yesterday at 7:50 PM

Stress less so you can sleep more.

WWW.WALMART.COM
Turn stressed life into your best life. SHOP NOW

CPM: **\$7.28**
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: **\$8.16**
[Click to view.](#)

Meanwhile, Nature's Bounty allocated \$20.3K of their ad budget towards a series of uplifting messages around employee appreciation in April.

Stressballs

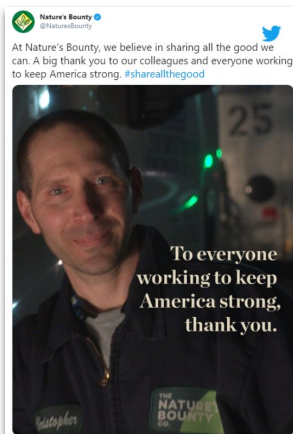
Nature's Bounty



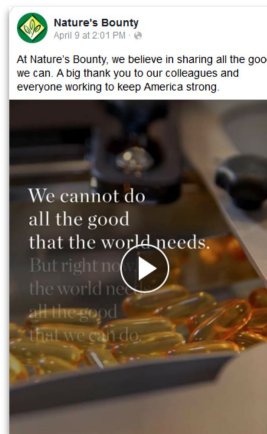
CPM: **\$7.25**
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: **\$4.19**
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: **\$4.18**
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: **\$7.31**
[Click to view.](#)



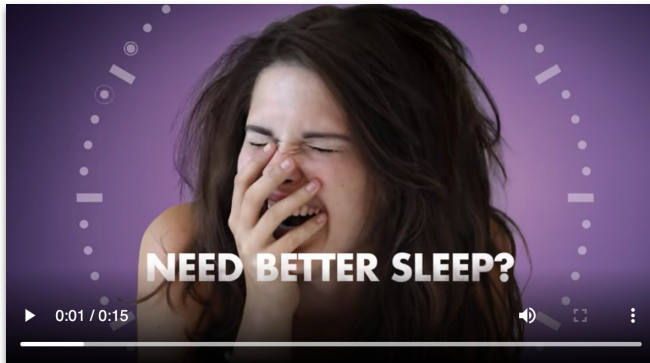
CPM: **\$18.05**
[Click to view.](#)

The company also released seasonal ads targeting different ailments, such as sleep supplements in the spring and immune system boosters in the winter.

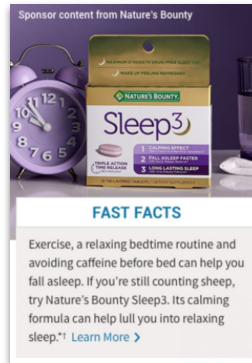
Stressballs

Nature's Bounty

Sleep/Insomnia

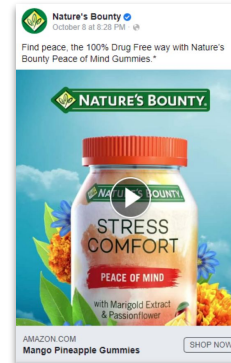


CPM: **\$31.67**
[Click to view.](#)

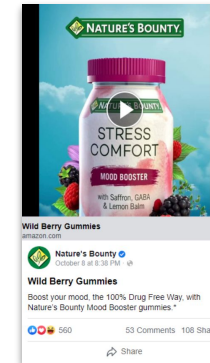


CPM: **\$13.34**

Stress Relief



CPM: **\$8.33**
[Click to view.](#)



CPM: **\$8.30**
[Click to view.](#)

Immune System



CPM: **\$8.41**
[Click to view.](#)

As a whole, stress relaxants, meditation apps and CBD product brands have sharpened their messaging to grasp consumer attention during the pandemic, using keywords such as:

<i>Peace</i>	<i>Reset</i>	<i>Refocus</i>	<i>Calm</i>
<i>Mindfulness</i>	<i>Physical Health</i>	<i>Relief</i>	<i>Wellness</i>
<i>Deeper Sleep</i>	<i>Better Cognitive Functioning</i>	<i>Reduced Anxiety</i>	<i>Mental Health</i>

When it comes to addressing COVID-19 in ad messaging, a FreeWheel study concluded that 75% of UK consumers believe brands should address the pandemic situation in their advertising campaigns.



of UK consumers believe that brands should include pandemic messaging if the brand is involved in the situation or to help in assisting prevention messaging.

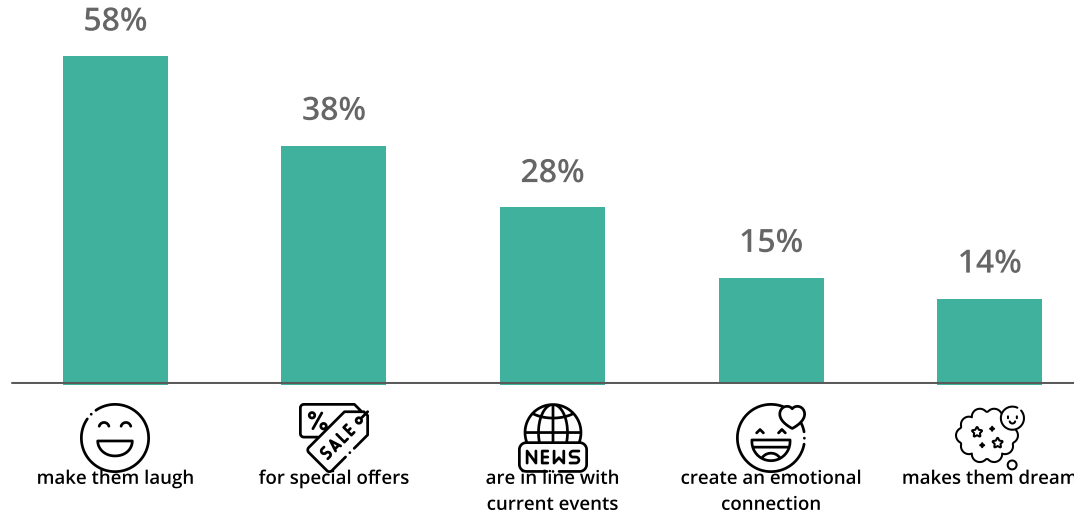
**of the 75% of UK consumers who believe brands should address COVID-19 in their ad messaging*



of UK consumers say they pay more attention or just as much attention to ads as they did before the lockdown periods

Humour-based ads are the most popular with UK consumers, with 58% of respondents saying they want to see ads that make them laugh.

UK respondents in the study also say that they prefer to see ads that:



Key Takeaways

From the Advertising Trends and Tactics During a Pandemic

Content & Messaging Tactic — Leverage Testimonials and Social Proof: Calm heavily leverages testimonials to communicate trustworthiness and effectiveness, including current customer reviews as part of their ad copy as well as any mentions and awards from various publications (such as “2017 iPhone App of the Year”). Headspace uses a similar tactic, using expert testimonials in their advertising and copy like “the most science-backed meditation app in the world” to add to the legitimacy of their app’s end benefit claims.

Content & Messaging Tactic — Using Video Clips as “Proof of Concept”: Both Calm and Headspace use short video clips in their social media ads to demonstrate to consumers how the app “looks and sounds”. These video clips are generally under 15 seconds long and include features from audio clips (that help aid in meditation, etc.) to relevant call to actions (i.e. “breathe for 15 seconds”), giving consumers an idea of what to expect when they use the app.

Content & Messaging Tactic — Focus on Crafting Advertising Campaigns around Mental and Physical Wellness: Major studies from various publications conclude that the prevalence of anxiety and depression has greatly increased in 2020 due to COVID-19, be it from the disease itself or from various lockdown measures. In UK alone, 57% of study participants reported signs of anxiety while 64% reported signs of depression.

As such, many brands have led their advertising campaigns around wellness keywords such as:

- **Stress Relief:** CBDistillery, CbdMD, and Stressballs marketed their products to consumers looking to relief stress or to find calm in a “world of chaos” while
- **Anxiety / Mindfulness:** Calm’s advertising including messaging that targeted consumers who struggled with anxiety while Headspace focused on increasing happiness and mindfulness
- **Sleep / Insomnia:** Nature’s Bounty, along with various other brands, pushed out ads focused on targeting ailments around sleep and insomnia

Key Takeaways

From the Advertising Trends and Tactics During a Pandemic

Content & Messaging Tactic — Directly Address the Pandemic Situation in Advertising Campaigns: In general, when it comes to talking about COVID-19 in advertising campaigns, 75% of UK consumers believe that brands should directly address the issue in their advertisements, especially if the brand is involved in some way with the pandemic. Consumers also believe that brands can help in spreading prevention messaging in their advertisements.

eCommerce Tactic — Create a Seamless Online Shopping Experience: Unsurprisingly, purchase behaviour of CBD products this year has greatly shifted from an in-person experience at distilleries to an online experience. Many brands have come to realize the importance of having a proper digital ecosystem, especially a seamless online shopping experience so consumers can get the products they need without leaving their homes. Many brands, such as oHhO Botanicals, have led their advertising around promo codes and “shop now” CTAs rather than “learn more” CTAs to get consumers directly into a shopping experience.

Content & Messaging Tactic — Craft Ads with Humour in Mind: In a study done on UK consumers, a vast majority of respondents (58%) say they preferred ads that were able to make them laugh, suggesting that humour-based ads are more effective in capturing consumer attention. Notably, humour-based ads were more preferred than even sale-based ads, as only 38% of respondents led with “ads with special offers” as their preferred messaging tactic.