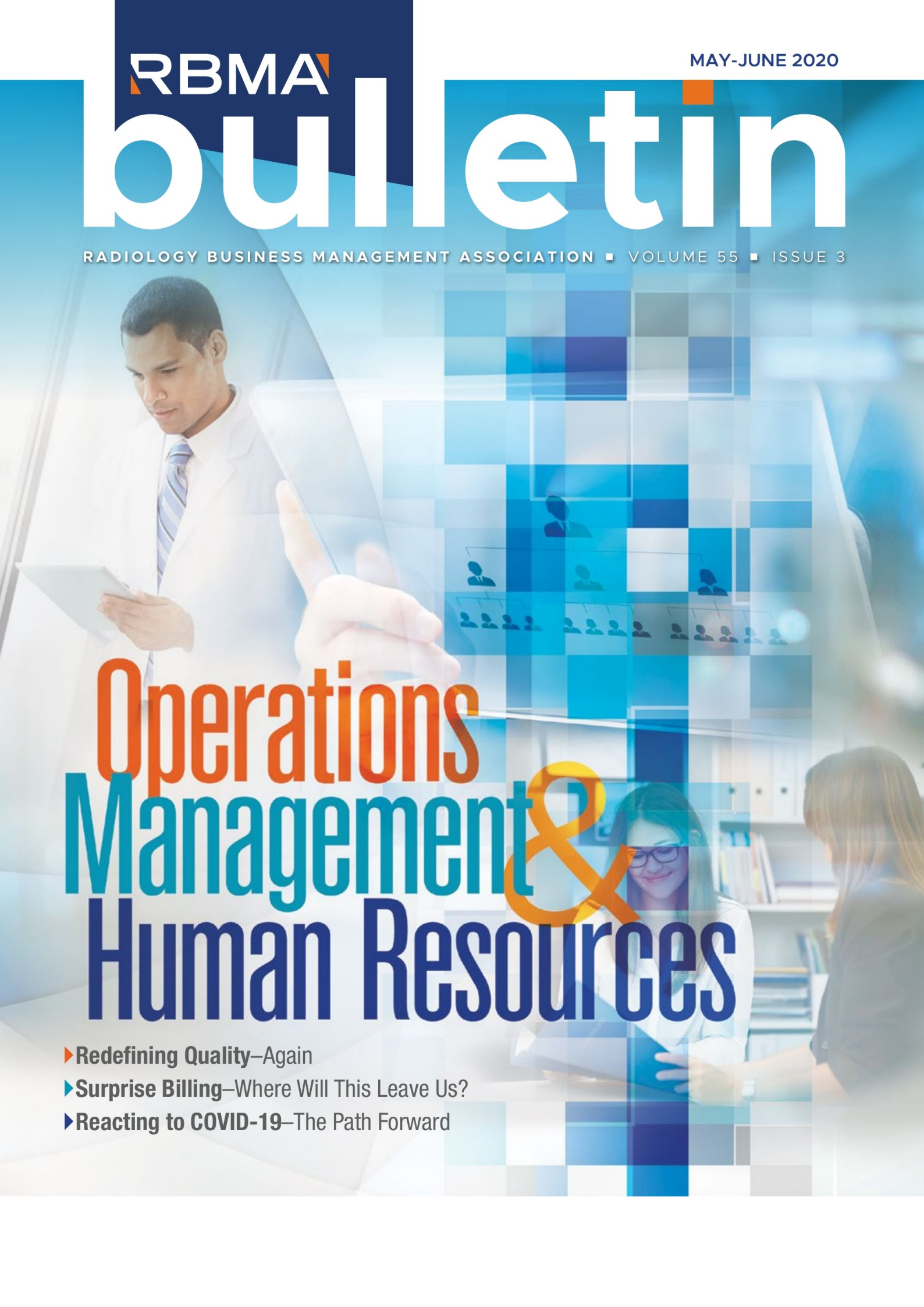


RBMA

MAY-JUNE 2020

bulletin

RADIOLOGY BUSINESS MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION ■ VOLUME 55 ■ ISSUE 3



Operations Management & Human Resources

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The Path Forward

BY KIM KELLEY, FRBMA

For the first time since I began writing regularly for the RBMA Bulletin six years ago, I can definitively say that we all just walked through the most surreal period in modern history...together. Our individual experiences may have been different, but we all saw business and life as we know it become very much like a rollercoaster. It twisted, looped, climbed, spiraled, and at the same time, stood eerily still.

By the time you read this, like me, you might be saying “What. Just. Happened?” And even more important, “How do we carve our path forward?”

Just as the COVID-19 crisis looked different to everyone, the speed and depth of recovery will be different. In large part, due to the knee-jerk reaction to “get back to normal,” recovery could happen fast. While we all want the feeling of normalcy to return, I urge you to resist the urge to return to business as usual.

Your role in crisis recovery

If you're wondering what your role as a marketer is when recovering from a crisis, well, some of the frequently repeated marketing anthems apply here. Take action by crafting a marketing plan and stick to it. Earn your seat in the boardroom by providing real-time insight into your organization. Be the voice of the consumer. The communications part of your role has likely never been as vital as it is now.

Whether your organization was well-capitalized before the COVID-19 pandemic and you were able to maintain your marketing presence, or everything came to a screeching halt beyond your control, you have a communication opportunity. Yes, some people will be ready to spend again. Yes, some people will dutifully reschedule their screening exams (right after they run to the hair and nail salon!). Yes, you can strengthen your relationship with your existing customers. But others, they're going to need more. The idea of emerging with marketing campaigns in each hand is not made of practical and tactical messages. Some might think it was the head that was most affected by this experience with everything being put on pause and way too much alone time to think. No, our crisis was an emotional one. It was the heart that took a big hit.

Navigating from “what now” to “what next”

This is your opportunity to pivot. Adjust your creativity from a hard sell to a more friendly approach. Be human. Recognize that some people will still be struggling. Your pre-pandemic marketing strategies aren't going to be well-suited in this new normal. But your refreshed content marketing



strategy will be. Customers are still going to be looking for content after social media use surged during the pandemic.

Minus the endless stream of devastation, they'll be looking for brands they can trust, that are credible, and address them as human beings with genuine feelings. And guess what? If your marketing plans came to a halt during the crisis—get ready. If you think the social landscape was competitive before, prepare for a post-COVID-19 challenge. Every brand is going to be competing for the attention of your customer. Craft your social media posts, praise people who make a difference, write a blog about your organization's involvement in the community, share a patient story or video testimonial with a success story, and inspire and engage your customers.

Grow in the recovery

One thing is certain—we've never seen anything like the crisis that just occurred. There is no guidebook for how to adjust your marketing strategies and budget. But marketers know how to be flexible and keep moving by doing what we do best: create, test, share, measure, and optimize. Perhaps there is a way to reframe the “why” in all of this.

Articles I've been taking in have posed the question, “What if this was the greatest gift?” Not the humanitarian crisis and the sadness, but the out-of-our-control opportunity to just... pause. To stop running in the daily hamster wheel of life, to shut off the noise, and listen. It's an opportunity to discover whether we've been true to our mission, where there were gaps that could be filled, and to raise the bar by creating a new “normal.”



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