

COVID-19: Communication Strategies For Your Organization

The new operational reality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic presents unique reputational and communication challenges for companies as they adjust to a new operating, business and public policy environment. This unprecedented public health crisis affects all stakeholders, including patients and their families, employees, investors, customers/partners and regulators. As a result, tailored and informed messaging around safety, changes in SOPs, business impact and what companies are doing in response to this crisis for society at large will be critical.

Internal Communications

As companies seek to safeguard their workforces, they will need to ensure everyone is receiving consistent, accurate and actionable information. Employees, and/or the potentially impacted communities they work in, will be looking to businesses for a response, guidance and regular communications. In addition, as businesses shift to a remote work policy, they will have to be more diligent than ever in demonstrating communications best practices in order to manage a work-from-home culture. As companies manage this shift, preparedness and planning are key to ensuring employees are safe, connected and engaged. It is also critical at this time to:

- Acknowledge employees — highlighting employee efforts will reassure workers that their dedication in working through this difficult time is valued and greatly appreciated — and show that companies working on COVID-19 initiatives are invested in fighting the pandemic on all fronts;
- Provide guidance and targeted communications to employees who may not always be in front of a computer, including providing guidance on how to manage issues like social isolation;
- Be consistent and overcommunicate via standard channels; provide easily referenced Q&A and FAQs; and provide regular updates on company policies, SOPs and business operations;
- Plan to communicate around tangential issues related to COVID-19, such as a protracted work-from-home policy, government-mandated quarantine, financial and market-related concerns, and business impacts.

External Communications

Business performance and operational strategies will no doubt be significantly affected by COVID-19. Proactive, consistent and clear external communication strategies can help maintain a level of business continuity, demonstrate a commitment to all stakeholders (patients, health officials, local communities, employees, vendors, partners and investors), earn trust, and even strengthen and build relationships during this uncertain time. Companies that have a focused and well-thought-out plan can act quickly if needed, be proactive and differentiate themselves. For companies to continue to conduct business in as effective a manner as possible, it will be important to consider the following:

- Posting COVID-19 updates on a dedicated section of the company website, including:
 - Policy procedures and business updates
 - Press releases, company statements, Q&A and FAQ updates
- Incorporating content related to COVID-19 responses and strategies into existing materials;
- Developing a response plan for external questions — use social media conversations and search traffic analyses to ensure you can respond to common questions related to COVID-19
- Creating a cohesive communications approach across channels, to include:
 - Ensuring that critical communications are pinned to the top of company feeds on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn so they are visible to site visitors
- Providing financial disclosures and business impact updates to investors, at the appropriate time and when a full analysis is completed;
- Incorporating philanthropic/CSR communications around COVID-19 efforts: acknowledging government and health worker efforts, and sharing third-party updates from the CDC and other government agencies is a great source of content and an opportunity to show support for industry efforts;
- Providing thought leadership pieces by Executive Committee leaders, as appropriate;
- Knowing where you stand relative to your peers: conducting peer research, industry benchmarking and best practices around how other companies are coping and communicating during this crisis can help you identify where you can stand out and be a differentiator.



Policy and Government Affairs

Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen a wide variety of federal, state and local policy directives that will affect stakeholders and business operations. Because these policies will evolve and certainly change throughout the course of this crisis, understanding these policy and regulatory changes and communicating the nuances and business impacts during a time of heightened scrutiny will be critical. Companies will need to:

- Provide real-time monitoring and analysis of policy changes and political risk;
- Prepare scenario and crisis planning, as well as associated messaging;
- Engage with the media to correct the spread of misinformation, promote solutions, and keep stakeholders up to date;

- Leverage company assets for thought leadership opportunities;
- Guide direct outreach to stakeholders; and
- Protect the overall reputation of the organization.

Facing the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic requires focus at a time when uncertainty makes it particularly difficult to focus. Consistent, informed, accurate and actionable communication will provide support not only to your organization, but to the community at large.

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