

STAYING CONNECTED DURING COVID-19:

A BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS PLAYBOOK

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak continues its worldwide spread, we find ourselves in uncharted territory, making adjustments in the way we live our lives and conduct business.

As national, regional and local governments take action to contain the virus' spread, communication continues to play great importance in guiding how we interact in our daily lives.

You may have noticed communication from many of the brands you follow started with messages on increased sanitation practices and evolved to include dramatic changes to business models, and in many cases complete closure of businesses until deemed safe to reopen.

In a time of such uncertainty, communication must be clear, concise and factual. Detroit-based integrated communications leader Franco has put together this Communications Playbook to guide your communications strategy.

WHO

Who are your organization's audiences? And more importantly, which of these audiences should receive communication first? Most often, it is important to communicate internally first (or at the same time as distributing information to the public). Your internal team members can be your most important ambassadors, particularly in times of crisis. Consider providing talking points to your internal audiences, or key leaders, so their message is consistent when communicating your message to external audiences, such as customers or the media.

WHAT

Most people want to know **"how does this impact ME?"** It is important to anticipate the questions your audience will ask and prepare responses accordingly. The right kind of communication in a time of crisis can help restore a sense of calm to those you're interacting with.

In the case of COVID-19, how will you communicate internally and externally if one of your employees or customers tests positive? If you've been forced to close, how are you still serving customers and the community? How can you keep your customers authentically engaged during this downtime?

Carefully plan your messaging and its delivery. Be honest and empathetic as you develop your messaging.

What you DO communicate is important, and what your organization SHOULD^NT say or do can be equally as valuable in protecting your reputation. Avoid being overly promotional in a time of crisis and reconsider what's appropriate content on your social media channels or in emails. Some businesses are finding their customers want promotions to keep them engaged, but if you can't offer any value to your audience through communications, don't put something out just for the sake of doing so.

Communications during a crisis should acknowledge the unique situation rather than avoid it.

Remember, not every organization needs a COVID-19 message. Determine what's right for you, and more importantly, your audiences.

WHERE

What communication channels are available to your organization to reach your audiences both internally and externally? Do your email lists need to be updated or modified? What is the appropriate tone on each of your social media channels? Are you proactively contacting media, or are you appropriately monitoring your channels for a reactive response? Be prepared to communicate on all channels and adapt your messages as you analyze where your audiences are most engaged.

HOW

Having the right processes and protocols in place can make all the difference during a time of crisis. An easy process to follow:

- **Flag** | Know who needs to be in the room to make operational and communications decisions for your organization.
- **Audit** | Evaluate your existing crisis protocols. How can they be adapted for the current situation if it doesn't fit into those protocols already? Take stock of all your communication vehicles and opportunities.
- **Strategize** | Make a plan before taking action. It's always better to prepare than panic in a time of crisis. What role will each of the key players in your organization play throughout

the crisis and communication? What additional protocols need to be developed to manage this crisis? Consider how you will handle inquiries from your employees, clients, customers and the media.

- **Respond** | Be polished, poised and prepared in your response. Communicate simply and consider the message you want your audiences to remember – drive that message home!
- **Monitor** | Continue to track the situation and update your crisis team, so you can continue to evolve your strategies and communicate appropriately throughout the crisis situation.

If you haven't reviewed your crisis protocols and procedures in a while (or if you don't have them!), now might be the time.

STAYING INSPIRED

How are YOU holding up? Leaders and business owners are under inordinate pressure. You know the importance of self-care. Take breaks, drink water, get outside. But it's also important to stay inspired. Find outlets that inspire your creativity. Read about what other businesses are doing, and let that inspire ideas in you. Talk with peers inside your business, but ask questions of people outside your industry, too. You never know where you may find the inspiration that pushes you forward.



ABOUT FRANCO

Founded in 1964, Franco is an integrated communications agency that builds strategic programs for B2B and B2C clients in a variety of industries with a local, national and global reach. The company's integrated programs include a wide range of PR, marketing, digital services and crisis communications counsel. Franco serves organizations in the healthcare, consumer, nonprofit, professional services, automotive and technology industries.

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