

Ten Tips for Communicating During COVID-19

Emily Bradbury Communications, April 1, 2020



Following the past few weeks of collective shock and disruption, many of us are now settling into our WFH situations and thinking about how to navigate our organizations in response to COVID-19. Some are facing truly devastating prospects, while others are realizing opportunities that did not exist a few weeks ago. Almost everyone is in a state of uncertainty.

Last week, the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies ([VCET](#)) asked me to do a presentation for their community, mainly entrepreneurs and start-ups, on communicating during COVID-19.

Here are ten takeaways that are relevant for any organization looking for some guidance:

1. **Flip the lens.** Instead of asking what your organization would like to communicate, ask what your audience would expect you to do and say as a company, or an individual leader. It's a good time to hit "pause" on planned newsletters, press releases, and blog posts and dig deep on that question. As any good marketer knows, meeting or exceeding expectations is at the core of gaining trust and loyalty among stakeholders, and there is no quicker way to lose that trust than to fall short of those expectations.
2. **Do the right thing.** Your communications strategy begins with your actions. Demonstrate care in all that you say and do, and align your actions to your values as an organization. When this is over, what people will remember is whether or not your heart was in the right place.
3. **Empathy on overdrive.** It's critically important to remember that everyone is experiencing this crisis on at least one level or another—from their own personal health, to the wellbeing of loved ones, impact on their job or business, loss of income, overall concern about the economy, adjusting to social distancing and stay-at-home orders, or all of the above. The holistic and universal nature of this crisis makes it especially important to communicate with compassion.

4. **Relevance, not noise.** Please, please, please do not issue a generic statement about COVID. At this point, communications should be specific to your niche audience and offer useful, relevant information. Dig a little deeper. Where can you add value? What perspective or advice can you offer that is not currently available elsewhere?
5. **Take a minute to listen.** Place a few phone calls, email small groups of people whose opinion matters to your organization, monitor your social channels. How are the people who matter to your organization feeling? What is keeping them up at night? What are they looking to you for right now?
6. **Facts, not fluff.** Most people have a pretty low tolerance for marketing fluff on the best of days, and these are not the best of days. If you do have something relevant and helpful to offer, do it succinctly. Stick to the facts, minimize enthusiastic promotion, and speak directly and honestly to your audience.
7. **Watch your tone.** While a familiar, casual tone has become the norm in most communications, it may come across as inappropriate when people are feeling stressed and vulnerable. Be true to your brand, but check your content to be sure it doesn't come across as glib or tone-deaf. It's a really good time to ask someone to review your work through that lens before you hit send.
8. **Calibrate and recalibrate.** Expectations are dynamic right now. Your communication strategy today may not be quite right next week. Keep a pulse on your audience, stay nimble, and be willing to adjust on short notice.
9. **Plan for sunny days ahead.** At some point, we will come out of COVID and be hungry to reconnect. Some are even suggesting marketers will have an important role in getting the economy going again. Now is a good time to plan your editorial calendar for Q3 and Q4, do some deep thinking about your communications strategy, prioritize your messaging, do an audit of current efforts and jettison underperforming platforms, clean up media and email lists, and update your social media profiles.
10. **A little grace.** We are all adjusting and responding to this crisis together, and people will make mistakes. Extend grace where you can, offer kindness whenever possible, and be gentle on yourself. Remember, there are no "companies talking to customers," we are all just humans talking to one another and doing the best we can.