

Burn After Reading

Key takeaways from select sessions of the “**Crisis Communications Virtual Conference: Managing Communications through Coronavirus**”

Tuesday, March 31, 2020

Keynote—New Edelman Trust Barometer on COVID-19: Next Steps and Recovery Communications

Jennifer Cohan is president of **Edelman New York**.

- Those surveyed by the latest iteration of the 10-country study “Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report on COVID-19” expect brands and companies to do 4 things:
 - Show up – Now is NOT the time to be dark and modest.
 - Rare is the business or brand that can act alone, so seek partnerships amid crisis.
 - Companies and brands now need to be in service to solve issues whether they are helping customers, employees, communities or other stakeholder groups.
 - Be exceedingly factual, communicate with emotion and don’t stray from the truth.
- An overwhelming 63% of those surveyed want to hear from employers about the virus and pandemic. Employers communications is considered the most credible information source during the outbreak. The most relied on source of information remains the mainstream media. Scientists and MDs are ranked the most trusted spokespeople.
- Respondents believe that brands have a critical role to play in combatting the coronavirus.
- Respondents believe brands and companies are better equipped to solve issues than government or other institutions. This is a drastic shift from the past.
- 90% of respondents said brands and companies need to protect their employees’ wellbeing.
- Respondents expect companies to shift production to products that meet the needs of the day.
- Respondents expect and hope that brands and companies will partner with governments and NGOs to fill the gaps and help the government when it falls short.
- 85% of respondents want brands and companies to use their power to educate the public.
- 88% of respondents want to know how a brand is operating and any safeguards it may have in place to keep the population (employees and customers) safe.
- 73% of respondents say business must adapt its HR policies give paid sick leave or prevent at-risk employees from coming to work, among other things.
- Communicators should focus messaging on how your products and services can help people cope with pandemic-related life changes.
- Influencers are not trusted to speak solely on the pandemic, but are trusted when speaking in concert with doctors and physicians.
- It is important to be cautious with humor and escapism. This doesn’t mean brands should reject levity or “relief”-themed content, but this is not the time to break tone if you don’t already have that voice in place.

What's in Your Crisis Plan? Pack Your "Suitcase" with the Essentials in the Coronavirus Era

Deborah Hileman is the president and CEO of the **Institute for Crisis Management**.

- Where pre-COVID-19 crisis plans went wrong: Organizations believed certain crisis situations would never happen to their organization. This pandemic is proving that anything is possible.
- Communicators must take a leadership role by insisting on updated crisis plans and scenario planning moving forward. This requires communicators to step outside of the "communications function" and view the business holistically.
- One way for communicators to kickstart these efforts is to study the issues that surfaced among competitors and across (your) industry sector. This is a way to quickly improve crisis plans.
- Your organization should identify a devil's advocate on any departmental team, especially communicators. This person/advocate must be included in all crisis planning meetings.
- Prioritize crisis plans from most likely/probable to hurt your business to outlier scenarios.
- When a crisis plan goes off the rails: Have very clear guiding principles and values that drive all communications in place. These principles and values are not just departmental, but organizational principles and values. Some may need to be revised after this current crisis.
- When situations escalate: Seek order, but not control. Remember, "We can't do this alone."
- Crisis plans need to recognize, act on and communicate this truth: Put people first before business, finance or other entity. People are the most important part of any crisis.

Your Time Is Now! How to Prove Your Worth as a Communicator in Times of Crisis

Alex Dudley is the former Senior Vice President of Communications at **Charter Communications**.

Steve Cody is the CEO of **Peppercomm** and the current chairman of the **Institute for Public Relations**.

Tina McCorkindale, Ph.D., APR, is the president and CEO of the **Institute for Public Relations**

- Internal communication was the top priority according to a recent IPR survey of 400 communications executives titled, "COVID-19: How Businesses Are Handling the Crisis."
- Over 60% of respondents said the communications function has become "very important" to their organizations' crisis response.
- HR, communications and legal lead the cross-functional crisis response team for most organizations. Only 3% of respondents said communications was not part of this team. Surprisingly, 6% of respondents said they did not have a cross-functional response team. This poses an opportunity for communicators to take the lead in establishing one immediately.
- The communications messaging today should reflect what is aligned with the new normal. What happened in the past shouldn't dictate the future. That means all language must change to focus on providing care, compassion and clarity to all stakeholder groups.
- Interestingly, executives should not be afraid to use self-deprecating humor. We all need to laugh in uncertain times and humanizing the C-suite is a critical factor now.
- Similarly, leaders should mix the emotions and empathy and show vulnerability.
- Now is the time to follow the North Star of your organization's purpose and follow through on that guiding principles with action that supports and fosters it. Purpose and vision statements can no longer be empty proclamations.

- Know who the decision makers and the troublemakers/roadblocks are. Know where decisions are made and who is just trying to stir the pot—this includes members of your cross-functional crisis team.
- When it comes to content generation, focus fact-based content that provides accurate updates on COVID-19. Curate this content where possible.

“Viral” Social Media Surge: Responding to Crisis in a 24-7 Social Media News Cycle

Kim Markus is the consumer marketing and public relations manager at **ScottsMiracle-Gro**.

- Once a social post is out there, it doesn't matter if you delete it. Someone can screen grab it, so be cautious and judicious about everything you post. Think twice before posting now.
- Over 40% of customers who complain on social media expect a reply in 60 minutes or less. This is especially the case during crisis situations like this one.
- Give consumers more than what they expect of you. Always over-deliver; never under-deliver.
- Bypass negative news with brand advocates: advocacy and loyalty are long-lasting.
- Build your brand advocates by creating genuine connections with those who resonate with your brand purpose. They're the influencers who will come to your aid and share your messaging during a crisis.
- Be flexible when a crisis happens. Remember that a crisis doesn't care what time it is. It can happen at 7am, 11am or 2am. Social media managers are now expected to be on 24/7.
- Monitor your social platforms anywhere your customers are talking, even among your less active channels.