

## CONTENTS

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Survey.....         | 1-5,7 |
| Roundtable.....     | 5-7   |
| Measurement.....    | 8     |
| Digital PR.....     | 8-9   |
| Internal Comms..... | 10-11 |
| Strategy.....       | 11,13 |
| Crisis.....         | 12-13 |
| Podcasting.....     | 14-15 |
| Data Dive.....      | 15-16 |

## SURVEY

## CORONAVIRUS AND PR

Dear Reader,

We hope this edition finds you, your family, friends and colleagues safe and healthy. Little else matters now. We're all adjusting to a new normal. So, we begin this edition with a survey of your fellow PR pros about their state of mind and the state of their business. We thank those who participated in this survey despite tremendous time demands. Much of this edition is a series of interviews with senior communicators. Similar to our survey, but more in-depth, we ask them how they are coping, adjustments they've made as communicators and near-term and longer range planning. We also thank them for spending a few moments with us. We believe they have offered a wealth of insights. Our hope is that you will identify with their insights and some of what they say spurs you to act.

Continued on page 13

# The Heart of PR: 80% Say Staff Safety Trumps New Revenue, 48% Strategizing for Post-Virus Era

Longtime readers of this publication have heard us mention often the advice of measurement guru and PRNEWS contributor **Katie Paine**. One of her insightful observations is about the important of testing assumptions periodically. You think your company is known for its design excellence. Survey your audience. You might find, no, your designs are considered out of date and difficult to navigate. Your audience, though, considers your customer service top notch.

So, it was with our quick survey about coronavirus and PR. Conducted during the final two weeks of March, it burst several assumptions about how PR pros at brands, nonprofits and agencies are thinking at this moment.

In short, we found:

- ▶ Most PR pros feel it's still a good time to pitch, even if the story is not related to the virus
- ▶ Emotion has emerged as a top-of-mind ingredient for internal and external messaging
- ▶ Emotion was *not* a top-of-mind part of messaging prior to the virus
- ▶ The financial health of PR firms is holding steady, for now
- ▶ Nearly 20 percent of companies lack crisis plans
- ▶ Overcommunicating to staff rules the day
- ▶ Most firms are planning for the post-virus period
- ▶ Employee safety, not revenue generation, is the top priority for the overwhelming majority of companies

## REVENUE OR SAFETY

Looking at the last finding, about revenue generation not being the top priority, our survey of 215 mostly senior com-

### 1 What are your company's priorities during the COVID-19 crisis? (check all that apply)



municators (see chart 10 on page 4), shows not even one-third say their company's top priority is finding new revenue streams (see chart 1).

Instead, the overwhelming majority said "making sure staff members are safe and healthy" (77 percent) and "communicating regularly with customers" (67 percent) rule the day. Not even half (41 percent) said the top priority was "staying afloat in a decimated economy."

Continued on page 2



**Editor,** Seth Arenstein, [sarenstein@accessintel.com](mailto:sarenstein@accessintel.com)  
**Graphic Designer,** Yelena Shamis, [yshamis@accessintel.com](mailto:yshamis@accessintel.com)  
**Senior Content Manager,** Sophie Maerowitz, [SMaerowitz@accessintel.com](mailto:SMaerowitz@accessintel.com)  
**Senior Content Manager,** Mark Renfree, [mrenfree@accessintel.com](mailto:mrenfree@accessintel.com)  
**Content Manager,** Nicole Schuman, [nschuman@accessintel.com](mailto:nschuman@accessintel.com)  
**Content Director,** Erika Bradbury, [erabradbury@accessintel.com](mailto:erabradbury@accessintel.com)  
**PRNEWS Publisher,** Tom Larranaga, [tlarranaga@accessintel.com](mailto:tlarranaga@accessintel.com)  
**SVP, Marketing Group,** Dan Hanover, [dhanover@accessintel.com](mailto:dhanover@accessintel.com)  
**Divisional President,** Kerry Smith, [ksmith@accessintel.com](mailto:ksmith@accessintel.com)  
**Chief Operating Officer,** Heather Farley  
**President & CEO,** Don Pazour

Group Subscriptions – [clientservices@accessintel.com](mailto:clientservices@accessintel.com)  
 Additional Copies & Article Reprints – Contact Wright’s Media, 877-652-5295; [info@wrightsmedia.com](mailto:info@wrightsmedia.com)



Published monthly by Access Intelligence, LLC  
 9211 Corporate Blvd, 4th Floor  
 Rockville, MD 20850

Client Services:  
 Phone: 888.707.5814 · Fax: 301.309.3847  
 e-mail: [clientservices@accessintel.com](mailto:clientservices@accessintel.com)

New York Editorial Office:  
 40 Wall Street, 50th floor, New York, NY 10005  
 Phone: 212.621.4890 · Fax: 212.621.4879

For subscribers only: full access to PR News article archives at [www.prnewsonline.com](http://www.prnewsonline.com)

## UPCOMING EVENTS AND WEBINARS\*

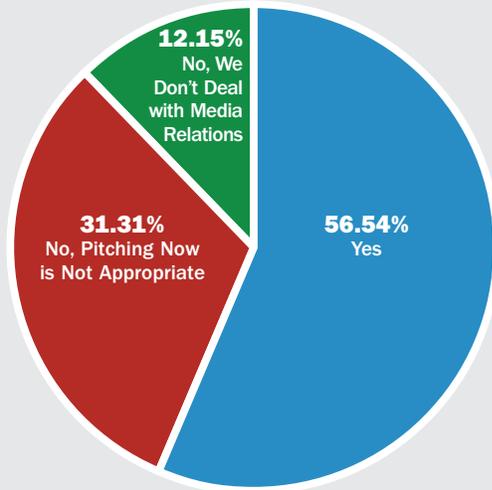
**WEBINAR: TIKTOK BEST PRACTICES & MAKING IT WORK FOR YOUR BRAND DURING COVID-19**  
**APRIL 14, 2020**  
 1:30-3:00PM ET

**TOP PLACES TO WORK AWARDS LUNCHEON**  
**JUNE 10, 2020**  
 NYC

**PLATINUM PR AWARDS DINNER**  
**SEPTEMBER 30, 2020**  
 NYC

Continued from page 1

### 2 Are you counseling those you represent or executives you work with to continue pitching non-virus stories where/when appropriate?



**Robert Hastings**  
 CCO/Chief of Staff  
 Bell

For **Robert Hastings**, CCO and chief of staff at **Bell** (formerly Bell Helicopter), the responses make sense. “During times like these,” he says, “leaders – and their communications partners – should be focusing on what is most important, and that is people.”

**Natasha Kennedy**, global managing director of **FleishmanHillard’s TRUE** Global Intelligence practice, was “pleasantly surprised and validated that many respondents are concerned about the welfare of their employees right now.” She adds, “It’s ethical, humane and plain good business.” Communicators will be needed “to deliver on our short- and long-term goals.”

A former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Hastings adds, “The health, safety, and welfare of employees is the most important responsibility of leaders.”

### ECONOMIC WOES LAG SURVEY



**Natasha Kennedy**  
 Global MD  
 FleishmanHillard

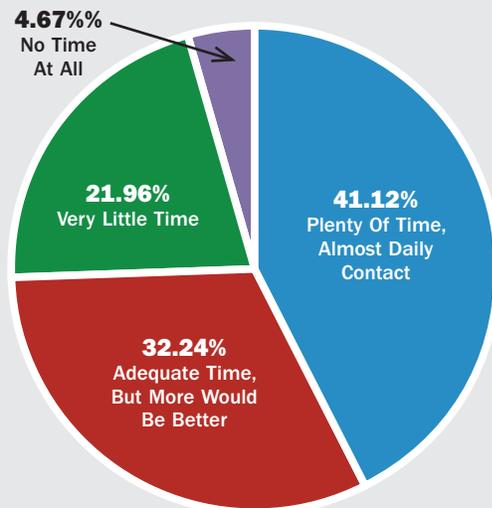
The last two responses (staying afloat and finding new revenue) can be seen several different ways. One is that the significant economic damage related to coronavirus was not fully understood when our survey was conducted.

The **Labor Department** reported April 2, just after our survey closed, that nine million people filed for unemployment insurance during the last two weeks of March. A normal scenario has about half a million people filing. The jobless rate is estimated at 13 percent, higher than at any time since the Great Depression.

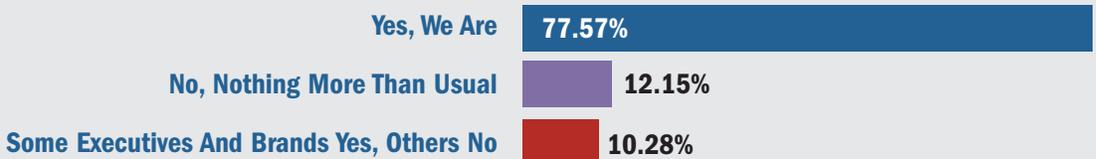
In addition, some states had not shut down. Understandably, respondents had yet to absorb the virus’s full impact on economic activity.

A second interpretation harkens to traditional PR. Communicators, this group argues, aren’t supposed to find new revenue streams. They’re

### 3 How much time have you had with the C-Suite to discuss communications objectives since the pandemic hit?

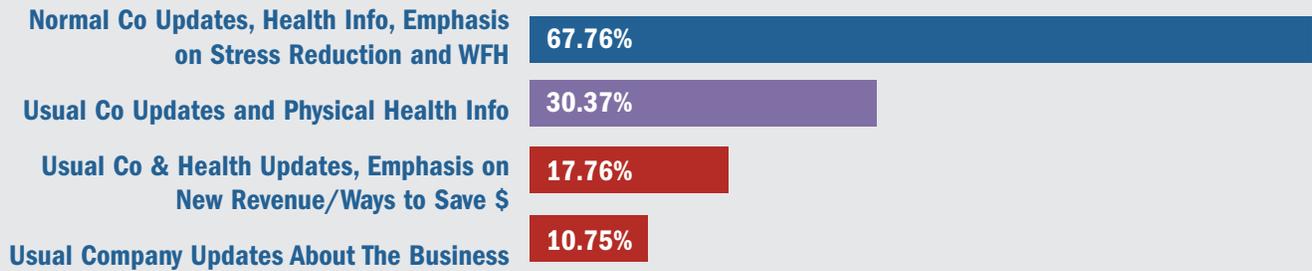


### 4 Are you advising those you represent or executives you work with to communicate more than usual with staff in the wake of the pandemic?

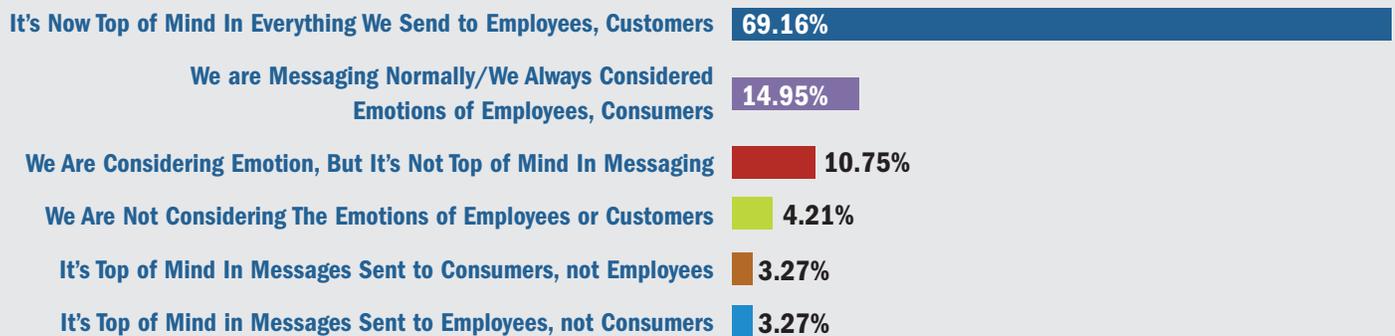


\*For subscribers only: You are entitled to 33% discounts on all PRN events and webinars. Contact: [clientservices@accessintel.com](mailto:clientservices@accessintel.com)

**5** If you are urging more communication than usual, what are you counseling people to say? (check all that apply)



**6** How much are you considering the emotional needs of those reading your messaging? (check all that apply)



**7** (Agencies Only) What is the state of your business?



Continued on page 4

Visit the PRNEWS store to get your copy of PRNEWS' Writer's Guidebook

**PR NEWS**  
**WRITER'S**  
**GUIDEBOOK**

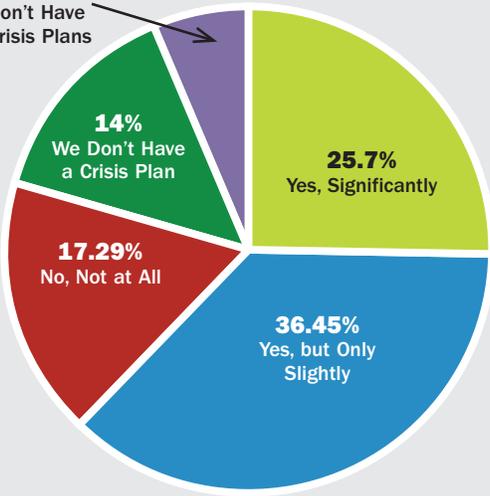
You'll receive more than forty articles detailing how best to write press releases, emails, speeches, biographies, backgrounders, crisis communications and annual reports!

[www.prnewsonline.com/prpress/](http://www.prnewsonline.com/prpress/)

8

**Since the pandemic, have you updated your or your clients' crisis plans?**

5.54%  
Our Clients Don't Have Crisis Plans



not an integral part of the sales funnel. While this is antiquated thinking, it might explain some of the response.



**Nicole Dye-Anderson**  
AVP, Media Relations  
Barclaycard

Another interpretation is that companies are acting differently than they would during business as usual. Instead of looking for new business, they are attempting to eke through this difficult period. They'll do that by serving customers as best they can.

In addition, as **Finn Partners'** managing partner and global health lead **Gil Bashe** says, during normal times, companies want to be perceived as smart and competitive. In this environment, though, being smart and caring are what's important. In other words, provide as much counsel, care and advice to customers, without selling them too hard.

For example, media companies such as the **NY Times** and the **Washington Post** have taken down their paywalls for coronavirus coverage. Similarly, **HBO** is offering 500 hours of programming free. Several cable operators are offering Wifi hot spots free to the public.

Media relations guru **Michael Smart** agrees. He believes smart companies, in PR and out, understand cash isn't flowing. Selling

9

**Are you planning for when the coronavirus eases and the public will be looking for messaging that's not 'all coronavirus, all the time'? (check all that apply)**



is less of a priority. Being seen as a company that cares about customers, providing knowledge at little or no additional cost, is paramount and will pay dividends after the virus has gone, he says.

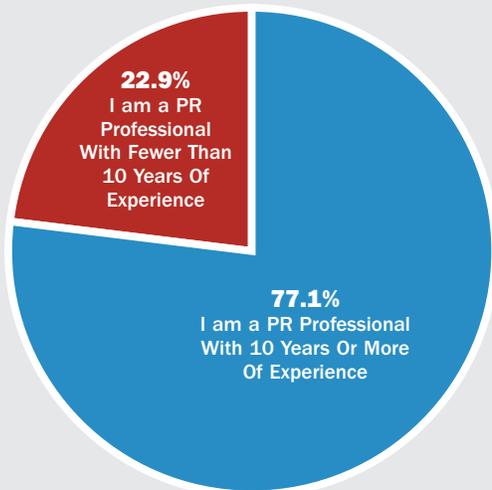
**PITCH OR NOT?**

Chart two, about pitching or not pitching non-virus-related material during this moment, is intentionally controversial. As you see, a slight majority (57 percent) are counseling that it's OK to continue pitching non-virus stories "where and when appropriate."

"That blew my mind," says **Nicole Dye-Anderson**, AVP,

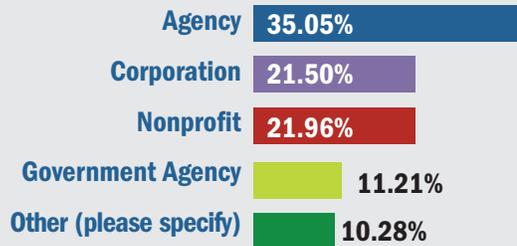
10

**What is your experience level?**



11

**What is your company type?**



media relations and partnerships at **Barclaycard**. Her concern is that some companies are pitching stories that are too sales-y for this moment. "It's almost tone-deaf," she says.

On the other hand, she's fine with HBO's #StayHomeBoxOffice effort, that includes the aforementioned 500 hours of free content. "HBO's encouraging people to stay home. That's helpful and the hashtag is clever. It doesn't seem too self-serving," she says.

During the next 3 to 9 months, Dye-Anderson believes, companies "will

# Old Ways Inform New Normal: Transparency is Key to Internal, External Comms and Media Relations

PRNEWS and partner **Yonder** recently gathered a panel of senior communicators for a webinar: “Communicating About COVID-19 — Navigating a New and Uncertain Crisis.” You can hear a free replay of that session here: <https://bit.ly/3bMGUAs>

During the session, the 1,500 attendees generated more questions than we could handle during the 90-minute session. To tackle the submitted questions left unanswered, we assembled a virtual roundtable of PR practitioners to answer some of those questions.

The panelists included **Adam Snyder**, founder, **ALS Impact**, a strategic communications consulting firm, **Deb Hileman**, CEO, **Institute for Crisis Management**, **LT Taylor**, communications director at **Burrow**, the online furniture brand, and **Raminta Lilaite** and **Kristina Skindelyte**, founders, **Blue Oceans PR**, a firm in Lithuania. Their edited responses are below.

**PRNEWS: How would you make the case to the C-suite about the importance of having communicators in the room when decisions about coronavirus strategies are made?**



**Deb Hileman**  
CEO, Institute for Crisis Management

**Deb Hileman:** My advice would be blunt: get your communications leaders in the room now, if they are not already there. If you don't have senior communicators on staff, engage with outside PR/crisis communications counsel to provide solid advice and support. As we've seen through countless communications missteps going viral, carefully crafted messages are more important than ever.



**Adam Snyder**  
Founder, ALS Impact

**Adam Snyder:** Good leaders know they can't do everything and instead surround themselves with people who can. Communications professionals, by our very nature, are in the business of perception and reputation. CEOs should consult their comms lead on everything that will be known ex-

ternally...Spar over ideas to present an image of stability, consider stakeholder relationships and the community, and work together so any external communication is created in a genuine, honest way.

**PRNEWS: In this environment, how often should communicators be pushing out information? We want to be informative but not overwhelming.**



**Raminta Lilaite**  
Co-Founder, Blue Oceans PR

**Raminta Lilaite:** Are you able to offer a useful innovation? Can you solve a problem? Offer advice and expertise? Is your message able to inspire? Before issuing communications, consider if your main message answers these questions.

**Snyder:** That's right. Be very selective and don't overdo it. Focus on the essentials and leave anything extra off to the side.

**PRNEWS: How do we ensure our messages do not come off insensitive when our clients still have to advertise during this time?**



**Kristina Skindelyte**  
Co-Founder, Blue Oceans PR

**Kristina Skindelyte:** Create a communications strategy that balances empathetic messages with business as usual messages.

Emphasize values. You don't want to be seen as a company that is preoccupied with its profitability. Be perceived as an organization seeking to help others in need, supporting the community and striving to provide products and services to those who need them.

**Snyder:** Be mindful, but don't try to capitalize on the crisis...A large company shouldn't make a big donation [merely to] boast about it...Give back and be humble. The news of what you've done will come out, so lean into being part of the solution.

*Continued on page 6*

ENTER TODAY



ENTER NOW

**LT Taylor:** Iterate on each message. For instance, say you decide to proceed with a long-planned product launch. Make sure to give your audience the context and be sensitive about the positioning.

For example, “We know things are weird, but this is something we’ve been working on for a while. We’re proud of it and want to continue celebrating the small wins.” This approach has three components: it shows you’re not insensitive and have been keeping an eye on the news cycle, it adopts best-in-class examples from other brands and shows you’re thinking about how to authentically communicate with your customers.

**PRNEWS: What are some keys for an effective media relations strategy during this crisis?**

**Snyder:** Be as transparent as possible. Don’t pretend it’s business as usual. Pitch stories that inform your customers how the virus will, or may, impact them and what steps you’re taking to ensure the continuation of your business.

Don’t try to be an authority on coronavirus, unless you are one. I’ve received detailed updates about health-related virus issues from so many companies that have no business telling me anything about health....there are world-class health organizations to do that, such as **WHO** and **CDC**.



**LT Taylor**  
Communications  
Director  
Burrow

**Taylor:** Tread lightly and reset your goals and expectations since so many outlets and reporters have shifted their priorities. It’s still important, maybe more so, to understand *why* you’re telling a story...and who might be interested in it. As always, spend time reading each content creator’s previous articles, see what they’re sharing on Twitter, and approach each pitch with empathy. If you’re not getting results, respect that your pitch may not be a good fit right now.

**Hileman:** In the midst of the overwhelming amount of difficult news coverage about the virus, some reporters are seeking pitches about feel-good stories that can uplift audiences. The caveat is that many of them will want virus-related, feel-good material. Stories about actions your organization is taking to help customers, employees or the community will add to its goodwill bank of trust and reputation.

**Lilaite:** Context is important. A product launch might not be a good pitch for most content creators now. On the other hand, if your product or service makes sense in this atmosphere, pitch the launch. An example is **Quibi**, which provides content that people can access on their phone during this moment when audiences are homebound.

**PRNEWS: What advice do you have for communicating with remote employees to keep them engaged and energized?**

**Snyder:** Again, transparency is key. Create a feeling of we’re all in this together...Your business strategy should be about survival. Find a way to enlist employees in the cause, and

regularly report back to them about how the business is doing. Call out employees who have gone above and beyond. Last, working remotely doesn’t mean teams are separated. Find ways to regularly connect face-to-face over video conferencing apps for everything from meetings to happy hours.

**Taylor:** Overcommunicating is key, especially as things have become increasingly serious and stressful. Make a point to start each call with lighthearted small talk. Encourage managers to ask team members how they’re doing during one-on-one meetings. Friends, family members and industry folks are experiencing the pandemic in different ways. You’ll find that having those human conversations helps.

**Skindelyte:** Start the morning with a daily review of goals.... Communicate current challenges, and share good news. It’s very important to keep staff up to date. This will help reduce anxiety and provide stability.

**WHEN IS BUSINESS AS USUAL?**

**PRNEWS: How and when do you start to begin publishing business-as-usual messages?**

**Snyder:** On day one. How your employees work and how your customers interact with you may have changed, [but] what you offer, the trust you’ve built, the work you do and what your customers get, should not.

**Hileman:** It is important to be thinking about business as usual communications now, but do so in a framework of the new normal. Timing for ramping up communications will vary depending on geography, but strategic discussions should explore what the future may look like.

**PLAN NOW**

**PRNEWS: How should we develop communications plans for the rest of Q1 and plan for Q2?**

**Snyder:** Be very flexible in everything you do. And plan in 2-week increments. We don’t know how long the self-isolation and social distancing will last, what the economic impact is or how many jobs will be lost. If a company is signing a big partnership, it should be focused on making an impact during the current new normal.

**Lilaite:** Q2 may call for post-crisis communications. Plan *now* for alternative scenarios.

**PRNEWS: When should planning start for the post-crisis environment?**

**Snyder:** Every company should have a crisis- and disaster-recovery plan in place. Once there is some inkling of an upswing it’s time to dust off the recovery plan. Make it relevant for today and begin to slowly get back to normal...create con-

tent that shows and celebrates teams are back at work. Do the same around serving customers, working with vendors and performing community outreach events.

**Skindelyte:** The new frontier in the post-crisis period will likely see rapid digitalization of services and new trust models in

society and business...planning for this should start as soon as possible. Planning for various scenarios is key. Adaptability is also very important. ■

**CONTACT:** [adam@alsimpact.com](mailto:adam@alsimpact.com) [dhileman@crisisconsultant.com](mailto:dhileman@crisisconsultant.com) [LT@burrow.com](mailto:LT@burrow.com) [pr@blueoceanspr.com](mailto:pr@blueoceanspr.com)

*Continued from page 4*

be judged” by how they react now to the virus. What emerges after might include new ways to do PR, she adds.

**Chart 3** is a glass half full or half empty. Some argue the responses show communicators are getting that coveted seat at the table: 73 percent said they have “plenty” or “adequate” time with the C-suite. It’s concerning, though, that nearly one-third (27 percent) had “very little time” or “no time at all” with leaders to discuss objectives.

It’s not a secret that there’s a lot of communications advice floating around during the pandemic. People are worried about many things, including their and their family’s health, their job/health insurance and future.

### USEFUL OVER-COMMUNICATIONS?

A phrase that’s almost become a buzzword is *over-communicate with staff*. The survey shows it’s popular. Nearly 80 percent said they’re over-communicating (see **chart 4**). The question: Are communicators sending employees useful, authentic messages or long-winded speeches from the C-suite, filled with jargon and lacking transparency?

More communication and more human communication is expected during difficult times, says Hastings of Bell. “Today’s crisis is a human one, and it requires a human response.” People are looking for answers “in an overload of conflicting and confusing information.”

Since coronavirus is a crisis without a clear end, Hastings says staff are seeking “guidance in the face of the unknown. They are looking for strength instead of fear.”

It is imperative, he adds, that leaders be visible, informative, compassionate and authentic at this time. Leaders, he says, “will make the difference between organizations whose employees remain engaged, motivated, and productive.”

### SOFTER MESSAGES

In addition, 68 percent of those who are communicating more with staff are including what can be called softer messages with the usual business updates (see **chart 5**). These softer messages include stress reduction tips and working from home ideas. Note that just 18 percent are sending messages emphasizing new revenue streams. This seems to track with the low response to the need for revenue creation seen in chart 1.

**Chart 6** was a surprise. While we expect the emotional content of messaging to be high at this moment, and it is, at 69 percent, we thought more PR pros would have chosen “we are messaging normally in that we always considered the emotions of our customers and consumers.” Only 15 percent

chose that response.

That surprised Dye-Anderson of Barclaycard, too. “There’s got to be an emotional side” to every story, she says. “That’s one of the things that makes a story newsworthy,” along with elements like timeliness. By the same token, she’s surprised that just 69 percent said emotional needs are top of mind in their messaging.

**Chart 7**, which was for agency communicators, either indicates that companies are hesitant to let go of their communicators—just 14 percent of agencies said “a lot of clients are leaving” — or, as we said about chart 1, the economic downturn was still in progress when the survey was completed.

### THE CRISIS CONUNDRUM

As with all these questions, **chart 8** represents a snapshot in time. That’s why we asked if the pandemic has prompted companies to be more concerned about crisis.

As you see, 20 percent of respondents said they or those they represent lack a crisis plan. That’s what we’ve seen in our other surveys.

Kennedy was surprised 37 percent said they and their clients either lack a crisis plan (20 percent) or have no intention of updating their plan in light of coronavirus (17 percent). She thinks that’s a mistake. The pandemic, she says, will change “our prior ideas...of relationships.” This calls for companies to have crisis plans and update existing plans.

### PLAN NOW

The question about crisis planning in chart 8 transitions easily into **chart 9**, where we find nearly half the respondents (48 percent) have a formal planning process for the post-virus world. Another 29 percent are planning sporadically, with about the same amount living day to day and not planning ahead. So, it’s about roughly 50-50, planning vs not planning. “I think the 48 percent who are planning are right,” Dye-Anderson says.

Fleishman’s Kennedy and Dye-Anderson admit plans created today for the post-virus world might need to change often. Still, Kennedy argues, planning helps organizations and agencies support innovation, which they’ll need to continue to serve key stakeholders.

Dye-Anderson takes a practical approach to planning. “What are your goals? How are you going to achieve them?” ■

**CONTACT:** [rhastings@bellflight.com](mailto:rhastings@bellflight.com) [ndyeanderson@barclaycardus.com](mailto:ndyeanderson@barclaycardus.com) [chelsey.watts@fleishman.com](mailto:chelsey.watts@fleishman.com)

## New H+K Analytics Head Sees Coronavirus Increasing the Need for Data Verification

**[Editor's Note:** In many cases, COVID-19 has shifted priorities. To give readers a feel for how communicators are thinking, we've conducted a series of four interviews with PR pros.

The first is with **John Gillooly**, **Hill+Knowlton Strategies'** (US) newly installed SVP for data and analytics. Gillooly heads the firm's data and analytics work across all sectors. He was most recently MD, global analytics at **Athena Global Advisors**. We asked about his priorities and what might carry over from the pandemic. His edited responses are below.]

**PRNEWS: What are your priorities in this position? Have they changed with the coronavirus pandemic?**



**John Gillooly**  
SVP, Data +  
Analytics  
H+K (US)

**John Gillooly:** My priority is to merge existing research experts, who are well-versed in H+K's capabilities, with new capabilities in machine learning-enabled capture and to synthesize insights across a multitude of data sources.

Overall, my priorities haven't shifted [since coronavirus], but the distribution of focus has changed a bit. H+K is committed to the health and happiness of its staff, and that is something I am very mindful of in this climate.

In general, analytics folks tend to be very happy disappearing into code and pouring through information. As such, they, myself included, might forget the human aspect of our business.

It would be easy for us to be *heads down* and churn on things that could lead to burn-out. As a team, we need to remember to come up for air, shut off, laugh with co-workers and stay engaged.

I have prioritized to the team that our day is not just writing and QA-ing code, but that it is about maintaining contact with one another in a host of virtual settings.

“ We need to come up for air, shut-off, laugh with co-workers and stay engaged. ”

**PRNEWS: What are you counseling brand communicators to be doing at this moment, measurement-wise?**

**Gillooly:** I don't think my counsel has radically changed. [It has always been] to ask, 'What is our null hypothesis?' Or, to use a less academic term, 'What is our default action at the moment, and what information will change that?'

There is so much information circulating rapidly every day. Having that core anchor is important.

**PRNEWS: Do you see anything different that's being done now in measurement and analytics that likely will carry over after coronavirus levels off, or once this crisis passes?**

**Gillooly:** Information ingest and fact-checking/verification efforts are going to stick around. The proliferation of fake news is nothing new, but this moment has really amplified the amount of information circulating. How do we verify information? How do we summarize it in a way that isn't crippling?

In addition, how do we identify key topics and themes the public is latching onto, to further identify gaps in understanding or the availability of trusted information?

With so many polls and surveys coming out every day, are there unanswered questions that remain? Where are audiences turning for answers? Our behavioral science team has been doing a lot of research on many of these questions as well. ■

**CONTACT:** [Ed.Patterson@hkstrategies.com](mailto:Ed.Patterson@hkstrategies.com)

## DIGITAL PR

## Pandemic Forces PR to Confront Edit Calendars: 'Is My Message a Priority or Appropriate Now?'

**[Editor's Note:** Next in our series of interviews with senior communicators we speak with **Julie O'Donnell**, who last month was named EVP/global head of digital at health communications and PR firm **Evoke KYNE**. She joined Evoke in 2017 and is based in Dublin, Ireland. Prior to that she was a senior director at **Lundbeck**, the multinational pharmaceuti-

cal company. We asked her about companies rapidly adding digital activities during this moment, among other things.]

**PRNEWS: What a time to be named global head of digital for a health communications firm. What have you learned about digital communications during the pandemic so far?**

**Julie O'Donnell:** Despite much talk about digital integration or multichannel strategies, many organizations – particularly in healthcare – remain overly reliant on face-to-face communication, particularly sales reps and those in events.

Those who really had cross-channel communications engrained in their business have found it easier to adapt. I think this will be a wake-up call for organizations to ensure they finally integrate digital across all business functions.

The old adage, 'Necessity is the mother of invention,' is very apparent. Digital transformation is happening overnight. Technology is not as daunting when face-to-face goes out the proverbial window.

We've always known digital provides many solutions. Now we're seeing that, with a little collaboration, digital solutions are infinite. The pandemic has simply expedited its growth.

**PRNEWS: How are you counselling clients not involved with coronavirus about content and cadence?**



**Julie O'Donnell**  
EVP, Global  
Head, Digital  
Evoke KYNE

**O'Donnell:** Arming yourself with data is critical. Set up monitoring dashboards, and use social listening as your guide. Understand what your audience needs, or doesn't, now.

Content and cadence will be individualized, but people increasingly are looking for non-COVID content – and new solutions – as well as hope and optimism.

We're working with clients on scenario planning for the weeks and months ahead, particularly as people's media consumption increases due to quarantining. Content calendars are being reviewed to adapt to the changing landscape. Everything needs to be viewed through this lens: Is this message a priority or appropriate right now? If not, it comes out.

**PRNEWS: What do you see communicators doing poorly in digital during the pandemic?**

**O'Donnell:** First, some of them are over-sharing. Age-old communications mistakes are amplified at times like this... Organizations think that just because something is important to them, that it will be important to their audience.

We've seen many companies broadcasting their perspective on COVID-19, and how they're managing it, via social and email. The majority perceives this as spam, unless your company is doing something truly remarkable...or sharing updates that impact service delivery and/or customers.

Second, not delivering value. Communicators need to recognize that we're in the midst of not only a pandemic but an infodemic, according to the **WHO**.

Misinformation and fake news are spreading faster than the virus. We're encouraging clients in the life sciences and healthcare space to consider, first and foremost, whether your content is adding value or adding to the noise. When you take that position, it's much easier to make decisions about what to focus on, or what to shy away from.

It's critical that content plans are reviewed with much higher frequency, as the landscape is shifting so quickly.

Another problem is [communicators] trying to spend their way out of the problem. Communications has seen a shift in recent years from the idea that 'content is king' to a 'money matters' mindset, with increasing focus across all industries on paid promotion.

In this COVID climate, companies need to revert to content fundamentals. They need to avoid being seen as opportunistic or promoting content that isn't of public health value.

We've seen backlash toward organizations...even those delivering thousands of masks and other equipment...because they've paid to promote the tweet announcing that fact. People would rather see all resources invested in front-line health care services right now.

**PRNEWS: What are communicators doing well with digital?**

**O'Donnell:** They're moving quickly. WHO's executive director says speed trumps perfection. You must be fast.

This is timeless advice for those organizations that aim to be leaders in their spaces. Leaders are staying in tune, through feedback and social listening, with their audiences. They are adapting content and channel strategy rapidly.

Collaboration is key. We're seeing great partnerships...strengthening messaging and supporting communities.

Authenticity is essential. These are challenging and uncertain times. It's brave to be vulnerable and empathetic. Give your company a human face...audiences consuming vast amounts of community-generated content – selfie videos on smartphones, for example – value relevance over production standards. This means there are no excuses. Communicators can create content, without production teams, remotely.

**PRNEWS: Is anything happening now that might become a permanent part of digital communications after the crisis?**

**O'Donnell:** Yes. Two things: remote working models and a mindset shift.

Businesses that never imagined having their entire organization operate remotely have shown that, not only is it possible, but it may be essential in our uncertain future. Communicators will need to use collaboration software and tools that allow communications to be managed end-to-end by anyone, working from anywhere.

In a regulated sector, many point to the need for cross-functional alignment and regulation as an excuse for sometimes defaulting to a 'tick the box' mentality, lengthy project timelines and slower adoption of new technology. The pandemic has forced people to embrace channels and tactics that were outside their comfort zones, challenging the status quo in a positive way. Teams and organizations are mobilizing quickly, collaborating virtually with aggressive timelines. ■

**CONTACT:** [Lindsay.Barnes@evogroup.com](mailto:Lindsay.Barnes@evogroup.com)

# Internal Communications Watching as Employee Needs Change During Pandemic

**[Editor's Note:** It's almost tax time. Oh, wait, the pandemic; no, it's not tax time. **Jesse Hamlin** runs corporate communications at **Avalara**, the tax software firm. As part of our series of interviews with senior communicators, we asked Hamlin how Avalara is communicating during coronavirus.]

**PRNEWS: What is the state of Avalara's business? How has this changed your communications strategy and tactics?**



**Jesse Hamlin**  
Senior Director,  
Communications  
Avalara

**Jesse Hamlin:** One of the things that's fascinating about the tax business is its ubiquity. Every company has a government-mandated obligation to understand its tax footprint. That said, communicating in this environment has forced everyone to get closer to understanding their customers. Communication is far more targeted at this moment. We're no different.

There are two sides to what's happening: those segments and businesses that are exploding... and those that are struggling. If you manufacture bread machines, it's probably a busy time. For those selling travel accessories, it's probably pretty slow. Marketing professionals must craft segment-based communications that go deeper to be relevant and ensure they are not tone-deaf.

Amidst the fog of crisis, this is not about Avalara. When it comes to PR and marketing, it's a focus on how companies can best serve customers and businesses struggling to navigate the new normal.

**PRNEWS: What have you learned about internal communications in the pandemic period?**

**Hamlin:** As a global company, [we have seen] the pandemic period as a 24/7 game for six weeks rolling into April. Last year we flipped a lot of communications resources in-house. I fought hard for a dedicated internal communications team.

During the last few weeks, I've never been more grateful for those individuals. If you're a growing business, don't wait until it's too late to bring on communications professionals totally focused on internal communications.

Any plan we had did not apply to the speed and scale of this crisis. Communications to employees obviously was the first priority. How do we keep the team safe, ensure it understands how we are reacting, [while] having a steady voice.

**PRNEWS: And your headquarters is in Seattle, right?**

**Hamlin:** Right. There was a two-week period where we were issuing urgent communication to all, or most, employees, every single day given how fast things were moving. Since we

were in the initial epicenter of the outbreak in the US, the local environment certainly shaped our early reaction.

As a team, we learned a few things:

- ▶ **Having internal comms at the decision-making table helped immensely in terms of speed and clarity of message.** Our entire internal comms team sits on daily executive briefings and is the primary triage point for global leadership.
- ▶ **There is an evolution of employee needs, and it will continue to evolve.** We have to shift our comms approach and tone constantly to adjust to what we are hearing. For example, in the earliest days, we had to communicate rapidly because people were looking for clear decisions and guidance. The news was changing hourly, so we had to show that we were on top of it.
- ▶ **Shifting to a well-being-focused phase.** How do we best help people feel valued as members of our community and supported to take care of themselves and their families? As people settle into working from home, the wear of weeks of stress and uncertainty is taking a toll.
- ▶ **One thing that buoys us is capturing the bright spots.** We have set up a couple of channels for people to highlight and acknowledge those individuals in the business who are rising to the occasion.

You have to document all the things going right and wrong in the moment. In this case, we're hearing incredible stories from employees. It's our job to preserve those so we don't forget the things that people did and what went well during a very difficult time.

We have people holding **Zoom** calls with their team member's kids so parents can get a 30-minute reprieve from juggling. There's a team member who spends weekends making face shields to donate to local hospitals.

Homeschooling experts are lending counsel and resources to parents trying for the first time. If you can find and bring forward those moments, it can have an impact.

**PRNEWS: With dates for tax filing delayed, how have you changed your external communication?**

**Hamlin:** Changing tax rules? This happens every day in our business – the only difference is a much larger scale trigger for those changes. We have a global team of tax experts who monitor and implement these changes, no matter the scale, day in and day out, so it's been rather fascinating to watch them work during this period.

[A side note: working internal vs. at an agency gives you a whole other layer of respect for the interconnectedness of the business.]

As with employees, there are phases to our approach to external communications.

► **Navigating The Crisis Phase:** The best thing we can do is offer expertise with wild generosity: “Here, we’re the experts. Take our knowledge.”

We’re publishing real-time updates on what global governments are doing to change tax laws, we’re engaging with our partners to offer just-in-time resources for businesses changing business models, etc.

That will change over time as businesses settle into other phases, especially in their own post-mortem phase, when they assess how their business navigated this. Now *that* will be a fascinating and fiercely competitive time for business software/service providers.

**PRNEWS: How are you and your staff monitoring the social conversation during this period?**

**Hamlin:** We have four primary channels; two are focused on our employees and two on our customers and the industry. Our tone in both environments has changed, naturally.

Usually we are playful, especially around heavier subjects like tax, and certainly about our fun employees. That has obviously shifted; to carry on as-planned would be tone-deaf now. Again, there is a heavier focus on generosity and respect in both arenas.

What’s fun is having established channels on social media where you *can* play a bit. We’re using the employee-focused channels as a place to highlight the bright spots.

**PRNEWS: We’re obviously in an economic downturn. Has**

**that changed your external communications?**

**Hamlin:** You adjust everything – internal, external, peer-to-peer. There are different emotions, priorities and timetables at play. To think what you planned is still appropriate in most scenarios is silly.

**PRNEWS: Any early takeaways?**

**Hamlin:** There always is opportunity in crisis to learn, to improve, to be memorable and to establish relationships. This moment will be cemented in the memories of stakeholders – how did your business and individuals within it respond and act?

**PRNEWS: What about crisis behavior?**

**Hamlin:** Individuals rise to the occasion at different phases – not everyone does it all at once and that lends sustainability to a team. Some people thrive early during crisis moments – the reactions and fast decision-making.

Some take their time and soak up what is needed and bring thoughtful, long-term solutions to the table.

This pattern of new energy constantly rising as the prior shift needs to recharge is *fascinating* to watch and be part of.

And this plays out at all levels and segments of our internal business – from our executive team to sales to customer support to marketing communications.

Right now there is a lot of ‘Thank you, I’ve got this; take a break – we’ll need you again soon,’ organically happening. It’s energizing to see. ■

**CONTACT:** [Tommy.morgan@avalara.com](mailto:Tommy.morgan@avalara.com)

## STRATEGY

# During Pandemic, Aflac Conditions Public to Seek Real-Time Updates at Single Site

**[Editor’s Note:** As part of our series of interviews with senior communicators, we asked **Aflac’s** SVP, chief ESG and CCO **Catherine Hernandez-Blades** to tell us what she and her team have learned during this difficult period.]

There are few businesses that the COVID-19 pandemic has not touched significantly. At Aflac, business imperatives are to protect our people, secure continuity for the benefit of our policyholders and continue to drive the capital strategy, ensuring liquidity.

## START STRONG, START SMART

We began by creating a map of all possible stakeholders,



**Catherine Hernandez-Blades**  
SVP, Chief  
ESG and CCO  
Aflac

what they need to know and where they go for information.

Similar to many businesses, in two weeks, the company went from a single-digit percent of telecommuters to more than 90 percent remote workers.

While there are some issues with this arrangement, it was necessary. In short order, the set-up allowed us to ensure business continuity, which is allowing us to deliver on our promises to customers.

In addition, shareholders need to have confidence in the actuarial science that by definition prices risk. In the current

*Continued on page 13, bottom*

# The 7 Must-Haves for Your Executive Crisis Communication Procedures

[Editor's Note: Columnist Mark Weiner will return next month.]

When a crisis hits, the volume of news can be overwhelming. Enter coronavirus. The firehose of content is on full blast, streaming directly at executives from every angle: peers, investors, board members and more.

If you have been tasked with distilling this information for leadership, the project can seem daunting. While most communications departments are experts at putting information into the world, many may be struggling now to invert the process. The quality of news varies considerably, so leadership teams need to know they can trust your communication as the gold standard.

The most critical step in managing the information flow up to leadership happens *before* the crisis hits. Organizations need to build infrastructure for executive crisis communication in advance. As many are learning now, if you wait until the volume of information is as gargantuan as coronavirus news, you'll scramble to react.

It's crucial to establish your crisis communication processes in advance.

## SOP

To be prepared for any crisis, develop standard operating procedures (SOP) and revisit them quarterly or at least semi-annually.

• **The POC:** Determine in advance who runs point on monitoring the media on a day-to-day basis. Does the person in charge (POC) change in a crisis, or can you mobilize additional resources? Does the POC change based on the type of crisis?

You don't want to find out during a chat at the (virtual) watercooler that you have a manager with a background in public health who isn't being utilized. Know where you have expertise and use that to your advantage.

If a financial crisis is on the horizon, know who on your team has the foundation to understand jargon and broader implications. Identify the knowledge gaps on your team and fill them ahead of time.

• **Frequency:** What time do your executives start their day? Do they span multiple time zones? A 7am ET update may suffice for a US-based firm, but if you have executives in London, how are they being serviced? Determine the frequency with which you produce an update. Is it daily? Twice daily?

No matter what, avoid falling into the trap of forwarding news as it arrives. Your C-suite likely does not have time to read full-text articles on an ad-hoc basis. Identify in your SOPs when you'll send updates and stick to that schedule, so your leadership knows when to expect them.



• **Distribution:** How widely will your updates be distributed? Remember, your job is not to inform your entire company about every piece of information related to the crisis. One solution might be to distribute to VPs and above, and allow them to pass on to their teams as needed. Save this distribution list as a listserv or group email contact. Reply-all won't cut it.

• **Format:** How tech-savvy is your leadership team? Will it expect a printed copy of your updates on their desks, or do team members prefer something mobile-friendly? Are they voracious readers, or do they want tight bullet points? You'll want to learn their preferences beforehand. As with frequency, these are decisions that require buy-in from your leadership.

## WHEN THE CRISIS HITS

• **Refine the Source List:** You should already know whether your executives are *Wall Street Journal* or *New York Times* junkies. Look for additional sources that consider the news through your industry lens.

You already know the list of trade journals in your space, but keep in mind that those sources may be slower to report on breaking news. Which are the most up-to-date, reliable, and evidence-based?

For example, if you have a warehouse in coronavirus-stricken Italy, consider looking at top Italian news directly or monitoring trusted sources for international news. Be careful with sources that have political leanings.

If you have a **Google** News alert set up for coronavirus, you might be suffering from information overload. Instead, use your source list as a tool to shrink down the volume of coverage.

• **Data, Data, Data:** As much as possible, use data. Save your CEO time by pulling data points out of articles and displaying them prominently.

An article with a lot of data may have only one data point that's relevant to your organization. It is up to you to sift through the noise to put that figure in front of your leaders.

Bear in mind that statistics often get manipulated. The source of the data is just as important as the data itself, so be sure to use citations clearly. For coronavirus updates, prioritize data from the CDC, Johns Hopkins, NIH, and other trusted institutions in the infectious disease space.

• **Eliminate Bias:** Remember the bit about a good POC? Someone with experience in the field will be better equipped to sort through fact from fiction, but even they may have bi-

ases. Put a second or third pair of eyes on everything.

If adding internal perspectives, clearly label it as such. When a journalist paints a negative picture, attribute the sentiment to the journalist, not to the situation.

There's a fine line between presenting the reality of media coverage and shielding your executives from it. If the news is bad, you can't pretend it's good. You might be inclined to say, 'Don't shoot the messenger.' But that's not a winning strategy.

Instead, find an approach that won't inflame your leaders, but also don't leave them in the dark.

*Continued from page 11*

situation, we are modeling based on the most recent pandemic—in this case, the Spanish Flu, which began in 1918 and lasted into the early 1920s.

Aflac must provide frequent, updated information to other stakeholders, including: the board of directors, analysts, government officials, sales leadership, the general public, a field force of independent sales contractors, employees, supply chain partners, media, brokers, customers and more than 50 different regulatory bodies.

In the first three weeks of the pandemic, about one-third of Aflac's corporate communications team drafted and distributed more than 150 pieces of communications to all of those audiences.

## STREAMLINE UPDATES

Obviously, that's a lot of messaging. On the other hand, we are trying to communicate only when necessary. One tactic we've been using is to condition audiences to go to a single place for updates. That way, you can make changes in real time to a few sites, rather than constantly distributing updates en masse.

This pandemic is a fluid situation, which is why solutions to communicate in real-time are best.

## FROM 50,000 FEET TO 5,000

On a typical day, a communications executive spends most of her time at the 50,000-foot level. She uses all of her business acumen to develop and drive company strategy, not just

If you're not already briefing your leaders regularly on the coronavirus, it's time to rethink how you communicate with them. Following these steps will provide value for your executives and remind them of the many ways the communications department is a vital member of the crisis team.

If the above seems overwhelming, consider outsourcing the work this time around. And, as soon as the pandemic settles down, get cracking on those SOPs so you're ready for a wave that might come or whatever occurs next. ■

**CONTACT:** [rebecca.dersh@cision.com](mailto:rebecca.dersh@cision.com)

communications strategy, while ensuring her team executes on it flawlessly.

During a crisis, leaders must quickly parachute to the 5,000-foot level, roll up their sleeves and bang out reams of copy. A good number of the documents mentioned earlier were drafted by one person – me.

That brings to mind another important lesson: lean on your team! During any crisis, there's still a component of business as usual. It's important to make sure you have business continuity issues covered.

For example, Aflac completed a large acquisition in the midst of this pandemic. Certainly there were allowances for the pandemic and our response to it; still, some part of the business continues.

## COURAGE IS CRITICAL

In spite of this dark moment, the world is changing for the better. At its site, PRNEWS is compiling a daily listing of brands and people doing good during the pandemic.

It includes examples such as **CVS Health** providing free prescription drug delivery and Aflac's own CEO, **Dan Amos**, donating a \$1 million challenge grant to a Georgia hospital.

It is crucial for everyone to look out for one another during this time. Which leads to the most important lesson: stay safe, take care of yourselves and each other! ■

**CONTACT:** [nikki@instituteforpr.org](mailto:nikki@instituteforpr.org)

*CORONAVIRUS AND PR Continued from page 1*

**To summarize some takeaways: 1. Let your brand's values inform your actions. 2. Prioritize and stay in touch with family, staff and customers. 3. This is a human crisis, make sure your content is human too. 4. Be more than a brand, be a friend and a resource to customers. 5. Make interactions with you and your brand as easy as possible—customers and staff will remember what and who reduced stress at this moment. 6. Communicate often with consistent content, but ensure you're not adding to the noise, ensure your messages are valuable and appropriate to this moment. 7. In this uncertain time, think of the emotional and physical needs of audiences and include content that will help. 8. Take time to plan for the days and weeks ahead, as well as 3-6 months hence. 9. Document good things happening at your company and in the community, as well as lessons you're learning. 10. Take a break and smile, if only a bit. And think about slowly resuming something resembling life as we knew it. Take care of yourself and everyone else. Sincerely, *The Editors***

# COVID-Related Ratings Decline Should Not Dim Enthusiasm for Podcasting



With the novel coronavirus pandemic running afoot, launching a podcast may be one of the furthest things from a communicator's mind. Or is it?

During the virus lock-down, fewer people are commuting to work. As most podcast listening occurred during commutes, podcast listening is in decline at the moment. Downloads worldwide dropped about 10 percent since the start of March, according to data from **Podtrac**. Total unique listeners dropped some 20 percent.

Podtrac says US audiences for podcasts fell 8 percent during the week of March 15. Each topic that Podtrac follows (news, sports, comedy, society and culture, and true crime) is down since March 9. News, the most listened-to topic, fell 10 percent. True Crime, a growth engine, is off nearly 30 percent since early March. Comedy is down 15 percent.

Those staying home are turning to cable and online news mostly. Traffic at news sites is up 30-40 percent. **Nielsen** ratings for **CNN** are up almost 200 percent; **Fox News** is up nearly 100 percent, with **MSNBC** rising about 60 percent.

## PODCASTING'S MOMENT?

Still, podcasting is booming as a category. **Apple** lists nearly 600,000; additions are announced almost daily. Moreover, at this moment people are worried about health, health insurance, jobs and the future. They're clamoring to learn as much as possible to protect themselves and their families. Podcasting could prove a valuable resource. In addition, the public is seeking entertainment and a sense of community. Brand podcasts can fill this need.

While organizations have their preferred methods of distributing messages to audiences, some are turning to podcasts for more comprehensive discussions around necessary information.

Audio as a medium for distributing information is certainly not new; instantly accessible technology allows for anyone to create his or her own show, and communicators are noticing.

## WHAT'S WORKING

Recently, publishers have found success creating podcasts that cover specific issues and granular topics. Election-focused podcasts, such as **FiveThirtyEight's** "Politics" and **Slate's** "Political Gabfest," deal with constituent issues. Sports-themed podcasts leapt from the radio airwaves to center on everything from fantasy football to **Premier League** soccer, including "Pardon My Take" by **Barstool Sports** and "Football Weekly" from **The Guardian**, which led the way toward growth of themed podcasts.

Some of the newest series, of course, focus on the pandemic. Examples include **CNN's** "Coronavirus: Fact vs. Fiction," which launched in late February, and **BBC World News'** daily, "Coronavirus Global Update." **Inside Radio** reports that one quarter of all news podcasts are entirely coronavirus-focused.

The success of brand podcasts is seen in other sectors beyond news. **Mayo Clinic**, one of the foremost institutions for medical content, hosts 12 podcasts on its website. These include everything from simple medical Q&A to employee experiences and surgical insights. Mayo Clinic also released a

## Podcast Creation for an Army of One

Many readers are one-person PR teams. We asked Robert Johnson, partner at **RIESTER Public Affairs** and co-host of the **PR Nation's** podcast, to discuss his **Questions to Ask Before Starting a Podcast**.

**1. Objective:** Make sure you know why you are doing a podcast. Is it to build media relations? Communicate to your audience without a filter? Whatever the reason, make sure you have one.

**2. Audience:** Do you have a way to reach people interested in your message, product or service? It's much easier to grow listenership if you have a list to promote your podcast. This can be an email database, social media following or a membership list.

**3. Message:** Consider whether you have something interesting to say, not just once, but often. Make a list of stories you think might be interesting to the listeners. If you

can't think of any, then podcasting isn't your medium.

**4. Format:** What kind of show are you hearing in your head? Do you think your stories are better suited to a news-style show, with a focus on guest interviews? Or are you or an executive at your company interesting enough that a solo show would captivate the masses?

**5. Commitment:** Do you have enough time? If you're a PR army of one, you will do everything, from formatting the look and sound, to booking guests, conducting research and interviews, and editing the final product. Expect a monthly show to take 40-50 hours to produce—or more, if you are a novice.

**6. Talent:** Do you have the skills to gather, package and present your stories? Are you an extrovert? Do you like people? Are you naturally curious? These are the personality

traits that work best for podcast hosts.

**7. Patience:** What is your timeline? It takes time to grow an audience for a show, even if you have lists to promote it. Some podcasts publish every week for an entire year before they start to catch on with listeners.

**8. Economics:** Do you have funding to support production? How about money to buy equipment? You may need to purchase good microphones, a mixer that can connect to your laptop and mobile phone and software to record and edit. A good set-up will cost about \$1,000 or more, depending on several other factors, including the number of guests on each podcast. In addition, factor in about \$100-\$200 per month for the connection, editing and hosting subscriptions necessary to support production. Don't forget a website and social media channels. Even if the platforms are free, good content is not.

mini-series for those searching for the latest on COVID-19.

In 2018, **McDonald's** responded to a crisis surrounding a botched launch of Szechuan sauce with a three-episode series podcast, titled "The Sauce." McDonald's enlisted the help of **Studio@Gizmodo** and **Onion Labs** for the podcast. It peaked at No. 94 on the **iTunes** 100 podcast chart 24 hours after its release.

The condiment, which debuted in 1998 as part of a **Disney** promotion for the film "Mulan," returned to the forefront after it was featured in a television episode of "Rick and Morty" in early 2017. McDonald's decided to capitalize on the fervor and resurrect the sauce for one day, but it quickly ran out of supply.

McDonald's decided a satirical true crime-themed podcast would playfully address the issue.

## LAUNCHING A PODCAST DURING THE PANDEMIC

While news publishers and healthcare providers may find a podcast a useful information tool during the COVID-19 outbreak, some brand communicators might think differently.

**Jered Martin**, co-founder and chief operations officer at **OnePitch**, a platform designed to help connect PR pros and technology journalists, went full speed ahead to launch the second season of "Coffee with a Journalist," which features editors and reporters from top-tier newsrooms in discussion about journalists' lives and careers.

After the success of its first season, the team was eager to get a second one in the works. Martin and his team started planning for season 2 in fall 2019.

"We were skeptical about launching in the middle of the COVID crisis," Martin said in an interview. "Some of our episodes are pre-recorded and didn't touch on the news that's consumed us over the past month." Martin says the podcast transitioned the way it records the show. "Now we're recording with new guests weekly and touching on current events as part of a new segment."

While Martin and his team were somewhat unsure about

timing, they decided to move forward with the launch.

The show's goal is "to inform our listeners about each unique guest who joins us," Martin said. "The individuals who recorded with us need a platform to get their names out there and their stories read."

In addition, the team "want[ed] to give our listeners something new and fresh to listen to...We realize, in general, it's a sensitive time to talk about things. For us, the hope is that our listeners will find enjoyment in each episode and gain insight into journalists that many of them are familiar with."

## TOOLS TO START AND EXPAND

If you think a podcast is the right vehicle for your message, there are many free, accessible tools to get you started.

**Anchor** bills itself as a one-stop platform where users create, distribute and monetize podcasts from any device for free. It recently launched additional capabilities to make it easier for podcasters to record and conduct remote podcasts and interviews via Record With Friends 2.0.

There's also **Spotify for Podcasters**, which gives users a chance to see data such as listeners' musical tastes, age, gender, location and how long they listened to a particular episode. It also features an accompanying blog with interviews and tips for starting a podcast.

And for podcasting beginners interested in the craft, one recommendation is **Gimlet Academy**, a five-part podcast series from podcast pioneer and Gimlet Media co-founder **Alex Blumberg**, which dives into how best to make your audio stories more compelling.

While the technology is ripe, communicators are urged not to underestimate how much time and work it takes to make something that will hold an audience's attention (see sidebar).

A tip: Consider what it is that only you can offer and the best way to speak directly and honestly to a community that matters to you. ■

**CONTACT:** [nschuman@prnewsonline.com](mailto:nschuman@prnewsonline.com)

## DATA DIVE

# 'The Daily Show' with Dr. Anthony Fauci Garners Top Consumer Engagement on Facebook in March

PR pros and their homebound audiences are accessing social media more than usual. To gauge what they're looking at, we asked data partner **Shareablee** to alter its normal chart. As you can see (p.16), Shareablee has tracked the most engaged **Facebook** posts about COVID-19 and coronavirus in March.

There are other changes from Shareablee's usual format. First, the Type column refers to the post's format. The first symbol in that column, which resembles a movie camera,

represents a video clip.

The symbol that looks like an old-fashioned camera, seen in the third post on the chart from **Humans of NY**, represents a post that was a standard photo post on Facebook.

The final symbol, which looks like a paper clip and is seen at the fifth and sixth posts, represents posts that link, in this case to [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com) and [cnn.com](http://cnn.com), respectively.

The next column, Total Actions, refers to the amount of

*Continued on page 16*

Continued from page 15

consumer engagement with the post, which is the total of reactions, comments and shares. The final column, Views, refers to the number of times the video content was viewed.

As you can see, the top post was **Comedy Central's** "The Daily Show," when the featured guest was **Dr. Anthony Fauci**. The peripatetic infectious disease specialist answered viewers' questions during the show.

It's well ahead of post 2, **Fox News'** video showing **President Trump's** 9-minute speech to the nation about the novel coronavirus. At 39,000 comments, it was the most commented-upon post. It received more than three times the number

of comments as the post from "The Daily Show."

It's interesting to look at the leaders in each category. Post 3, from Humans of New York, a photo blog, told a first-person story about a potential coronavirus patient and kindness. It garnered the most reactions.

The Times' post (5) about the US having the most virus cases in the world, garnered the most shares. The most-viewed footage was post 8, The **Red Table Talk** of **Will** and **Jada Pinkett Smith**. ■

**CONTACT:** [herman@shareablee.com](mailto:herman@shareablee.com)

| Shareablee   |                    |   |   |               |           |          |        |       |  |
|--|--------------------|---|---|---------------|-----------|----------|--------|-------|--|
| TOP 10 POSTS RELATED TO COVID-19 OR CORONAVIRUS ON FACEBOOK: MARCH 2020  |                    |   |   |               |           |          |        |       |  |
| Based on Total Actions <span style="float: right;">Sources: </span> |                    |   |   |               |           |          |        |       |  |
| RANK   | BRAND              |   | TYPE  | TOTAL ACTIONS | REACTIONS | COMMENTS | SHARES | VIEWS |  |
| 1  | The Daily Show     |  |  | 477K          | 230K      | 12K      | 235K   | 10M   |  |
| 2  | Fox News           |  |  | 418K          | 264K      | 39K      | 115K   | 25.2M |  |
| 3  | Humans of New York |  |  | 362K          | 348K      | 5K       | 9K     | -     |  |
| 4  | CNN Replay         |  |  | 323K          | 173K      | 13K      | 137K   | 16.2M |  |
| 5  | The New York Times |  |  | 317K          | 49K       | 6K       | 262K   | -     |  |
| 6  | CNN                |  |  | 302K          | 140K      | 8K       | 154K   | -     |  |
| 7  | CNN                |  |  | 231K          | 158K      | 32K      | 40K    | 15.6M |  |
| 8  | The Red Table Talk |  |  | 216K          | 98K       | 13K      | 105K   | 78.8M |  |
| 9  | The Daily Show     |  |  | 216K          | 118K      | 11K      | 87K    | 5.7M  |  |
| 10   | CNN                |  |  | 208K          | 155K      | 28K      | 25K    | 19.7M |  |