

## SEVEN TIPS FOR YOUR COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS PLAN





Businesses around the world have been forced to respond quickly to the disruption caused by COVID-19. It is essential that all businesses develop a communications plan that supports all stakeholders – both internal and external to your organization. We recommend these seven tips to help you communicate clearly and maintain support from your stakeholders.

## 1. DEVELOP AN INTERNAL TEAM FOCUSED ON COVID-19 COMMUNICATIONS

As a first step, create a cross-functional team within your organization including members from all departments. The team will act as a task force, responsible for helping the organization understand what the current needs are, any threats there are to the business, and begin formulating a communications plan.

It's important to build a team with representation across all departments. This will ensure that 1) the needs of each department are identified, and 2) the messages being shared are consistent. This team should be the one and only source of communication to all stakeholders and share the same talk track.

## 2. STAY UP-TO-DATE ON COVID-19 RELATED INDUSTRY UPDATES

Develop a new daily habit of checking in on COVID-19 updates – and make sure they are credible sources. Misinformation is commonplace today. We recommend referencing these accurate and reliable sources:

### **The World Health Organization (The WHO)**

Review their daily bulletins and instructions to help deal with the virus. Consider reading their Q&A webpage for current updates on how COVID-19 spreads and how it is affecting people around the world.

### **The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (U.S. CDC)**

The CDC has prepared interim guidance for businesses and employers to plan and respond to COVID-19. The CDC updates this regularly as additional information becomes available.

### 3. CREATE A CONTINGENCY PLAN

Train and promote safety procedures that employees should follow while at work using posters, banners, and intranet postings, etc. Place these reminders in common areas to continuously remind staff how they can prevent the spread of germs and practice social distancing. Consider CDC guidelines and any health directives that apply to businesses operating in your area.

Your organization may choose to implement a remote work policy to further decrease human-to-human contact. Evaluate all the critical roles necessary for your business to continue operating, and then determine whether those employees can continue doing their jobs while working remotely. Do you have the necessary infrastructure in place to allow for remote work? Are your employees equipped with devices that can access the network remotely? Be sure to clearly articulate your work from home policy and expectations that employees should follow.



### 4. PREPARE TO DEVELOP YOUR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Before developing your communications plan, there are a few considerations you'll want to make sure your response team agrees on first:

**STAKEHOLDERS:** Who are the stakeholders (both internal and external) that you need to communicate with? Who needs information first and how often do you want to communicate? Knowing who your stakeholders are is only the first step. As you build out your plan for each stakeholder group, your response team should agree on the cadence of your communications and how your messaging can be tailored to each audience's needs.

**COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS:** Do you have a communications platform in place that will allow you to keep your stakeholders informed? Are new tools needed to be able to communicate efficiently and effectively? There are many ways to share information - online meetings, intranet updates, emails, videos, and phone calls are just a few ways to stay connected. Make sure you're aware of the channels available to you and agree on what information will be distributed through each channel.

**BRAND VOICE:** What tone of voice do you want to convey in your messaging to stakeholders? Just like people, brands need to adjust their tone depending on the circumstance. Be thoughtful about your messaging and remember that now more than ever people are looking for reassurance and empathy.





## 5. DEVELOP AN HR PLAN

As a result of COVID-19, many businesses are requiring their staff adopt a work-from-home policy. In some cases, businesses have reduced hours or laid off staff as a result of the pandemic. Together with HR, the communications team should communicate on a regular basis with employees and be transparent and honest about any new developments. HR should distribute go-to resources to help share key information that will help answer employee questions and concerns. In addition, the communications team should partner with HR to review and approve all employee messaging before it is deployed.

## 6. DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN DIRECTED AT YOUR EMPLOYEES

Create an internal communications plan and process so that your employees always feel in the know as it relates to the impact of COVID-19 on your business. Make sure that your communications align with the news of the day or week as well as with sources such as the CDC. Be honest and forthright in your communications with employees in order to maintain trust in your organization.

It's imperative that your organization provide clear instructions about what to do if an employee suspects they have been exposed to COVID-19, and make sure all staff have been educated on your contingency plan.

We recommend communicating through a combination of channels, such as:

- Flyers
- Posters
- Banners
- Emails
- Letters
- FAQs
- Employee Intranet

## 7. DEVELOP A CUSTOMER / CLIENT COMMUNICATION PROCESS

Customers need to understand the impact of your relationship due to COVID-19. They likely have these questions for you, and you should be prepared with answers:

What are you doing to protect them?

What standards of operations procedures have you put in place to ensure that you have their best interests in mind?

What are you doing to make sure you can deliver your products and services that they need to continue to operate?

Inform your customers that you have a plan that considers their safety, understands their current situation, and provides them with reassurance that you have their best interests in mind, while always following CDC guidelines and health directives applicable in your area.. Be sure to stay connected to your customers without overwhelming them with communications.

A few channels to consider communicating through include:

- Company blog
- Website
- Social Media
- In-store signage
- Flyers
- Banners
- Posters
- Email

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

This is the biggest question with no clear answer at this time. It is important that the response team prepare for any and all situations. Monitor the effectiveness of your communications plan, and adjust and add to it when necessary. Equally important is preparing your business for recovery from the pandemic. When things begin to stabilize, be prepared with a strategy in place to bring back business. Some ideas could include offering a promotion, advertising to the community, or sending a postcard. Starting to strategize for it now will make your business even more prepared and ready to handle what's next.

**WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.**

