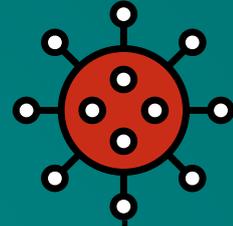


April 2020

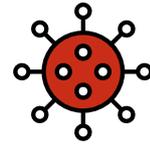


**A guide to
media relations
during the
COVID-19
crisis**



thepartnersgroup
PR • Communications • Digital

Introduction



This document offers an overview of the current media landscape in the UK alongside advice on communicating with the media, on your social channels and with the people who matter to your organisation.

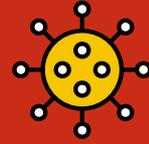
We are all undergoing a huge shift and in many cases disruption in our work and personal lives as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The media is on a 24/7 news cycle, which seems to be exclusively focused on the impact the virus is having on health, business and personal lives, alongside government attempts to control the outbreak, and so on.

Many businesses are asking themselves whether, in the current climate, it is appropriate to carry out any communication activities, and if so how.

It is more important than ever to communicate effectively with your key audiences and reassure them that your organisation is taking positive and proactive measures to ensure business continuity, both during and after the current health crisis.





Media landscape

As of April 2020

Whilst the media is dominated with news related to Covid-19, the nature of the coverage is constantly changing, and it is not the only subject of interest to the media.



National & general interest media

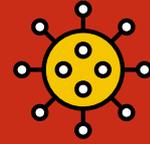
- Predominantly focused on the latest Covid-19 related developments, the impact that the virus is having on business, the economy, people's personal lives and the government's response.
- There appears to be a move to looking at how people's lives and habits are changing/being affected by this lockdown period and how people are overcoming issues that have been caused by Covid-19. There are also a lot of advice pieces emerging around 'surviving lockdown': staying well, eating well, entertaining kids, working effectively from home, keeping in touch with friends and family etc.



Regional & local press

- Again, the major focus is on Covid-19, the latest developments and figures for the relevant readership area. Much like the national media, regional titles are interested in assessing the impact on local life and businesses. There isn't currently a huge appetite for non-Covid-19 news.





Media landscape



TV

- Whilst almost solely focused on Covid-19 stories, they are open to stories about acts of charity from individuals and businesses in local communities as a way of breaking the negative narrative.



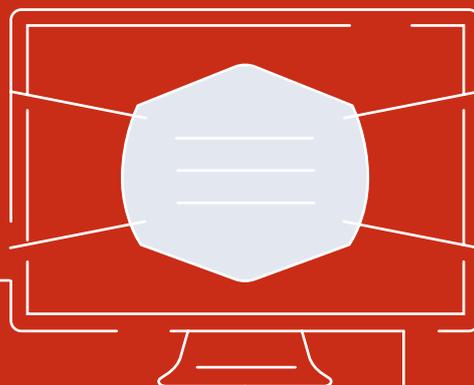
Radio

- Listener numbers appear to be up across the board as people tune in from home. More shows are being pre-recorded where possible and the majority of staff working from home means audio is taking longer to upload via VPNs.
- The earlier a story can be pitched the better, and while at the moment most listeners are tuning in for COVID-19 news, there is definitely scope for stories told 'through the prism' of the pandemic.

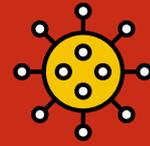


Business media

- There is a focus on Covid-19 and how it is affecting businesses and the innovative ways that companies are working to solve the challenges the current situation has brought. There is also a strong demand for 'business as normal' stories to balance Coronavirus related coverage.



Media landscape



Professional services media

- Most professional services news websites now feature sections entirely dedicated to the effect of coronavirus on their industries. Content is being adjusted to take into account the current situation, and there are a lot of articles projecting the long-term effects that are likely to shape things in the coming months and even years.



Building and construction media

- With activity in the building and construction industry slowing right down, there is a lot of discussion about whether the government should either close all non-essential sites or amend its guidance to make it clear that safety concerns must override contractual obligations.
- Many publications are leading this discussion while offering advice on how to work safely if you absolutely must. While publications are predicting long-term effects to their businesses, they continue to extol the benefits of keeping in contact with both colleagues and customers so businesses can be ready to provide services once the crisis has passed.



Manufacturing media

- Across many areas of manufacturing, it has been very much business as usual. Coronavirus is mentioned, largely in the context of how businesses are faring; how manufacturers are responding to changes in consumer trends (e.g. eating or shopping) brought about by the virus; or refocusing production to support immediate health service requirements.
- There are some titles that have been adversely impacted by the crisis through drops in advertising revenue that are either temporarily pausing publication or skipping their next scheduled issue.

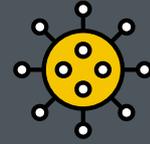


Finance media

- Much like mainstream media, the finance press is preoccupied with Covid-19 and the effect it is having on stock markets etc. There are some stories around other topics, such as buyouts etc., but these are much reduced.



Communications guidance



Guidance on communicating with the media



Be careful when approaching topics related to COVID-19, in order to avoid creating the perception that the company is 'taking advantage' of the current situation.



Review and analyse storylines on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the content is actually contributing to the conversation in a meaningful and valuable way.



Consider pitching content if:

- You have a product/solution that is directly involved in the local response to the crisis.
- Can collect and offer data to analyse the situation and help the media write about potential scenarios and current trends.
- Can offer access to an expert spokesperson who can provide truly non-promotional insight and thought leadership.



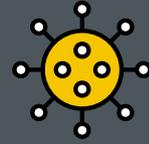
Use the opportunity to be creative and imaginative in your communication strategy, for example by leveraging as much as possible the tools that digital and online technologies have to offer.



Push forward with pitch campaigns only within the context of the current dynamic.

- Monitor publications' websites and journalists' most recent stories to make 100% sure the pitch is relevant.





Communications guidance



Evaluate announcement strategies depending on content and target audience.

- Consider offering press releases to key journalists on a limited and personal basis, and avoid newswire services where possible.



Stay within your comfort zone

- Each brand or company has different values and comfort levels which should determine how much they want to engage with the media during this period.

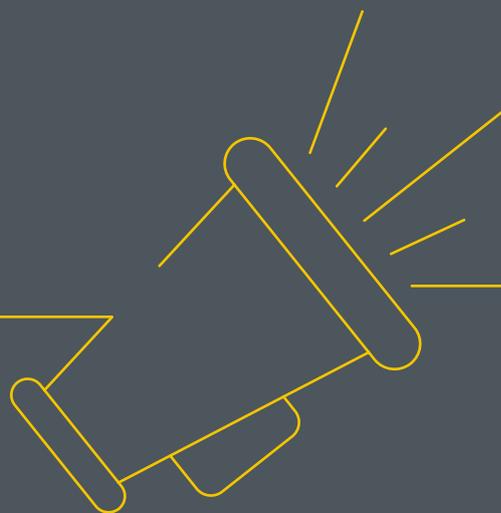


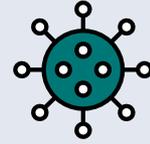
Make sure your internal communication strategy and tools are used to maximum effect to reassure staff about how the situation is affecting the business.

- If you don't have an internal communication strategy, define one as soon as possible.



Ensure that the decision making and content approval processes are as quick and agile as possible, to avoid stories being overtaken and undermined by changing events.





Using social media



Social media



Review previously created content for relevance to avoid any potential insensitivities with hindsight.



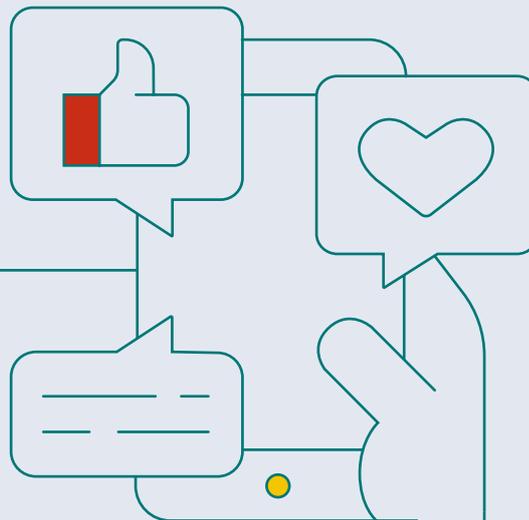
Stop or limit the use of automatic prescheduled posting, to avoid the risk of inadvertently posting content that is inappropriate to the current situation.

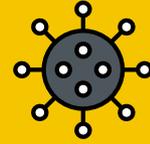


Monitor the conversation all the time to keep an eye on emerging issues in your own feeds and those of your key communities.



Stay true to your brand's tone and voice, and don't try to change the way the company engages with its followers.





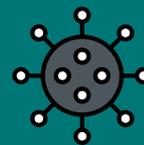
How do you want your organisation to be remembered?

- Although much has changed in the world recently, it is still moving, and communications and marketing activities should continue moving too.
- When the crisis is over, it's important to think about how you want your organisation to be remembered. Will your staff speak highly of the way they were kept up to date on the steps the organisation was taking to survive the crisis? Did they feel engaged and valued, or left out in the cold?
- How will your customers feel about your organisation, post Covid-19? Was there an impact on the service they received from you during the pandemic, and were they kept up to date on the action you were taking to minimise that disruption and continue to serve them?
- Will you be seen as a valued partner within your supply chain? Did you continue to pay suppliers within the agreed payment terms, or speak to them to negotiate new terms that would help both parties through a difficult time? Or did you simply cut off payments with no prior warning or communication? Will they want to continue supplying your organisation when the crisis is over?

During times of change, communication with the people who matter to your organisation is key: employees, clients, suppliers, partners and other stakeholders. Sharing what you are doing to mitigate the impact of the current situation on your business and on their interactions with you, and keeping them up to date as the situation evolves, will help make sure they stay with you as we come through this global crisis.



And finally...



Remember that we are here to help, not just in dealing with the crisis but in helping you plan future communications. Get in touch if there is anything you need.

Stay positive, stay home and stay healthy!

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