



COVID-19: Effective digital communications during a second spike

The initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on people's consumption of digital media. Use of social media and digital platforms rose sharply, with many of us continuously seeking information, whilst looking to remain connected and communicate with each other during lockdown.

In the event of a second wave, people are unlikely to respond in the same way they did the first time around. Patience and tolerance for the unknown could be rapidly replaced by increased scrutiny of corporate responses and a demand for clear, immediate communications as people scramble to process further uncertainty to their livelihoods.

With this in mind, we look at the practical steps corporates can take to ensure their online communications are prepared for further crisis:



1. Help your leaders shine on social

CONTEXT

- Customers, clients and employees will increasingly turn to online platforms in place of physical spaces to find guidance, support, and active leadership.
- Of the 52 FTSE-100 CEOs active on social media, 22 commented on the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis directly, and many continue to actively share their insights, benefiting from high levels of audience engagement with more personal, authentic content.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Add a personal touch:** Leverage your spokespeople on your corporate channels to provide transparent updates with a personal, relatable touch.
- **Optimise leadership channels:** Work with your leaders to make the most of their own social media accounts by providing corporate updates, guidance and support to their wider network of followers.



2. Prepare and practice online events

CONTEXT

- With in-person conferences, meetings and events cancelled, companies will need to look to take their events online, including significant corporate milestones such as AGMs and capital markets days.
- Virtual and livestreamed events have already become more popular and accessible to audiences amid the first wave, giving companies the chance to reach even more people than before. This means being prepared to face a range of questions, challenges or engagement from a wider audience will be essential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Test the tech:** From live-tweeting to LinkedIn and Instagram livestreaming, explore each platform’s virtual services ahead of time to find the best fit for your event.
- **Get comfortable:** Rehearse with the hosts of your live event to ensure they are comfortable in front of the camera and thoroughly prepped with key talking points to ensure a seamless event on the day.
- **Record it:** Make sure you record your virtual event – not only does it allow people to attend on ‘catch-up’ in their own time, but it will also make great content for your social channels.



3. Listen, adapt and be hyper-targeted on social media

CONTEXT

- Even within the first wave of the pandemic, a Twitter survey of UK users showed that audiences in March valued a concise, informative tone which provided clear guidance during a confusing time. By June, audiences showed they expected brands to change their tone to be more caring and supportive ([Campaign Live](#)).
- Therefore, what might have made a good message during the first wave may not be appropriate in the second, as an extended lockdown will likely cause further shifts in audiences’ moods and morale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Read the room:** Use social listening to stay on top of crisis developments and tap into changes in audiences’ sentiment.
- **Adapt:** Instead of simply copying the same approach from the first wave, brands should be ready and flexible to adapt their messaging to consumers’ fluctuating emotions.
- **Hyper-target:** Ensure paid advertising is hyper-targeted to remain relevant and sensitive to multiple audiences. Consider putting a temporary pause on broader paid activity or ensure you’re agile enough to switch things off if there’s a rapid change in public sentiment.



4. Provide clear, correct information online for your customers and employees

CONTEXT

- With people increasingly turning to social media as a news source ([Reuters Institute](#)), the rapid spread of misinformation poses a risk for corporations as concerned audiences seek out and spread the information which is available to them.
- For example, claims that coronavirus was known about before the outbreak in Wuhan were amplified across social media after a photo of a Dettol bottle containing a label that mentioned it kills “human coronavirus” was shared on Facebook over 1,000 times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Keep it clear:** To ensure that your company doesn’t fall victim to this cycle of misinformation, ensure accurate information is easily accessible and communicated on your online channels, including social media and your website.
- **Keep it consistent:** Make sure your messaging is consistent and aligned for both internal and external audiences. In confusing and uncertain times, corporate reputation can depend on a company remaining clear, unified and reliable.



5. Have a response framework and social listening in place

CONTEXT

- Without the option to gather in public spaces, activism will increasingly move online, with social media sites proving the perfect place to share opinions and quickly generate momentum among wide audiences in real time.
- For example, more than 23 million posts used the hashtag #BlackOutTuesday and the #StopHateForProfit hashtag has been used over 180,000 times globally.
- Amid this rise in online activism, many brands benefited from a reputational uplift by sharing their stances on societal issues. For example, Lloyd Banking Group’s stance on ethnic diversity in response to the #BlackLivesMatters movement was explicitly linked to its credit positive rating ([FT.com](https://www.ft.com)).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish a framework:** Ensure you have online monitoring set up and an up-to-date response framework in place, including indication of who responds, with what messaging, and escalation protocol.
- **Embed ESG into messaging:** With a second wave increasing consumer and investor scrutiny into company ESG policies, this is the time to clearly communicate how you are working to rebuild a better, more resilient world.

In the event of a second spike of the COVID-19 pandemic, digital and social media will become more important than ever to help keep us informed and connected. With the learnings from the first wave, combined with preparation for a continually shifting landscape and audience sentiment, these practical steps will ensure corporate communications remain effective amid further crisis.

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