



# MANAGING YOUR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN DURING A CRISIS

CISION

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's to expect the unexpected. Now more than ever, it's evident that a thorough crisis communications plan must include how your organization will manage a major local, national or worldwide event. While most of these events are out of anyone's control, PR professionals do have control over the response and action their brands take when an unforeseen event occurs:

## Review all scheduled social media and paid media

Whether or not the event directly impacted your organization, previously scheduled social media posts or advertising may now seem insensitive and tone-deaf. Ensure your team knows that when a crisis occurs, it's crucial to stop and re-evaluate any scheduled posts or campaigns. Keep in mind there may be opportunity to reschedule some of the content with more appropriate context.

## Review all scheduled emails or newsletters

Similarly, it's crucial your team reviews any email marketing that's been planned. Is the timing of a newsletter now inappropriate, or can your email still be sent with some necessary edits?

## Communicate with leadership

Make sure you immediately connect with leadership to ensure you're aligned on external and internal messaging. What are the key points you need to get across to your audiences and if a statement is necessary, who will make it? As the crisis unfolds, maintain regular communication with the C-Suite to keep them updated on how the plan is evolving and what's working and what's not.

## Don't underestimate internal communications

While strong external messaging is crucial to maintain brand loyalty, the importance of internal comms cannot be overlooked. How leadership addresses employees in a crisis, and how soon they do so, can make or break employee trust and loyalty. It's also important to consider that any internal communications may be leaked to media.

## Update your earned media plan

It's no surprise that external messaging should be especially thoughtful in a crisis. Stories you planned on pitching may no longer be appropriate, but that doesn't mean you have to halt pitching altogether. Think strategically about how your brand can provide a unique perspective on the event. What will be of interest to reporters and your target audience?

## Consider sending a press release

In order to ensure your brand's messaging gets shared with your target audience and media, consider distributing a press release through [Cision](#). Press releases provide your company an opportunity to share all necessary information through a trusted source. Releases can amplify your online visibility with the right people and in your brand's authentic voice.

## Respond the right way at the right time

It's particularly necessary to monitor the news during a crisis to ensure your messaging remains appropriate and relevant. As we've learned during the pandemic, things can change on even a daily basis, so it's important to consider not just *what* you're saying but *when* you're saying it.

## Monitor social media

It's crucial to track social media to get a sense of how your messaging is resonating with your audience during a crisis. Listen to your followers and see if there's any consistent feedback that you should consider integrating into your overall media plan. You may want to make edits to your messaging based on the activity you're seeing online.

## Measure earned media

In addition to monitoring your owned channels, it's important to measure the impact of your brand's media coverage. Which articles were most effective during the crisis? Which stories drove direct traffic to your website? Proving the ROI of your earned media efforts will show the true value of PR in a crisis, but it can also help inform your comms strategy in the future.

## Keep track of your competitors

While PR pros should always monitor their competitors, it's especially helpful to track their activity during a crisis. How are they responding and what stories are they telling in the media? What type of reaction are they getting from their audience on social media? Monitor what companies are doing well in order to inform your own strategy. Learn from other companies' mistakes and successes.

## Share insights

It's important to share insights throughout a crisis so that you can change your plan as the situation evolves (as we've seen most brands do throughout COVID-19). However, it's also necessary to create a post-crisis analysis to showcase the true ROI of your efforts and to share what worked- and what didn't- so you can apply those learnings to future crises.