



CISION[®]

5 Problems Communicators Can Help Brands Solve

At this point in 2020 we have run out of new and interesting ways to convey just how different this year has been from past ones— so we won't try to do that. What we will do is help highlight the unique problems this year has presented to brands and offer our best advice on how to solve them.

After all, these problems won't disappear when the clock strikes midnight on December 31st; they'll only be further compounded the longer they're left unaddressed.

Read on- and, as always- find us on Twitter [@CisionCa](https://twitter.com/CisionCa) if you'd like to discuss further.





1. Keeping teams connected while you're working from home

Many of us won't find ourselves back in a traditional office setting anytime soon, and while some teams have adapted well to going fully remote, others continue to struggle. Some are doing okay but know they could be doing even better with the right tools to streamline comms from everyone's home offices.

Every team has to balance demands of staying organized and connected on projects while also making time to connect on a more personal level and keep camaraderie and company culture alive and well.

The tools available to any team will of course depend on available resources, but this is the perfect time to take stock of your tech stack and consider what is and isn't working for your team. Are any contracts coming up soon? Review available options and discuss with your team to see where you could be closing any communication gaps and smoothing out workflows.

If your team is currently using a variety of lower-cost tools, it's also possible that you could combine all of those into one more comprehensive tool for around the same cost and save everyone the trouble

of juggling multiple log-ins and scattered to-do lists and project reports.

Depending on the KPIs that are important to your team, being able to access everything you're responsible for in a single dashboard can also be a game-changer; particularly if you're able to easily produce reports to share across the team and with collaborators and higher-ups.

When it comes to PR software and tools specifically, you want something that can do multiple things to keep your team connected and engaged across projects and outreach:

- Keep PR teams on constantly evolving media requests by connecting journalists' emails to the entire team in one inbox to review
- Visibility into what outreach has worked (and conversely what has fallen flat) and tap into best practices to test effectiveness
- Track if someone else on the team has already pitched a journalist or has notes on how to best reach them from past experience



2. Reaching the right people

Over and over again in our pitching kits we hear from journalists that the biggest thing PR and other comms pros can do to pitch better is do their homework first, or in other words be sure they're pitching the right person.

Be sure you have access to the most up-to-date information possible for journalists or other media influencers before you pitch them. Things change faster than ever during a tumultuous time- and we are certainly living through one of those- so what was true even last week may not be true now. If your team is building comprehensive media lists but they're not getting shared correctly or updated as quickly as needed, you risk ruining relationships with journalists from pitching them one too many times about the same things.

A consistently updated database is the best option but isn't always available to every team. Just be sure you're double-checking details before you hit SEND. But if you do have the resources to invest in a well-maintained media database, it can save you and your team an incredible amount of time and effort in reaching the right people with your story.

And timing is everything when it comes to getting some stories told.

For maximum impact, pair this with monitoring: You can have the most up-to-date info for the media and media influencers, but with insights into what your competition is earning stories around and what's important in your industry through comprehensive monitoring, you can create a pitch that fits what journalists want right now.





3. Always be prepared for a crisis

Most of us are used to preparing for a crisis in terms of something brand-or-industry-specific, but 2020 taught us all that sometimes there's something big enough to spring everyone into crisis comms mode in one way or another.

Your team absolutely needs to have a comprehensive crisis communications plan in place, including who is in charge of responding in what mediums and/or on what platforms, what the messaging will be, who is in charge of crafting that messaging, and who the backup parties are for all of those responsibilities (and this is just the short version; for more see our [Crisis Communications Toolkit](#)).

Whenever possible, run your team through some mock crisis situations to see where hiccups arise in the process so that you can be as prepared as possible when the next thing happens—because unfortunately it's always a question of when, not if.

Consider how things might play out differently for your brand, if it's an internally caused crisis vs. an external one. Would your response strategy be different? What about internal vs. external comms? Treat all internal content like it could eventually become external, because there is always a chance something will leak and become public-facing.

Coupling your comprehensive crisis comms plan with a comprehensive monitoring

strategy should keep you just enough ahead of any crisis that your team can meet it confidently and head on.

What should you monitor? Aside from the standard things like your brand name and handle, consider:

- Common misspellings of your brand name and any handles
- Any branded hashtags
- Prominent company spokespeople, influencers or brand advocates (both internal and external)
- Key industry terms
- Competitors (and any common misspellings of their brand names, handles, hashtags, etc)
- General news (If 2020 has taught us anything, it's the importance of staying on top of all news, even if it isn't explicitly related to your industry)

If you're checking in regularly on these topics you should be able to track anything that looks like it could become trouble, use the data to help put context around an emerging crisis situation, pivot as needed (especially if general breaking news is drowning literally everything else out of the cycle for the moment), and so much more.

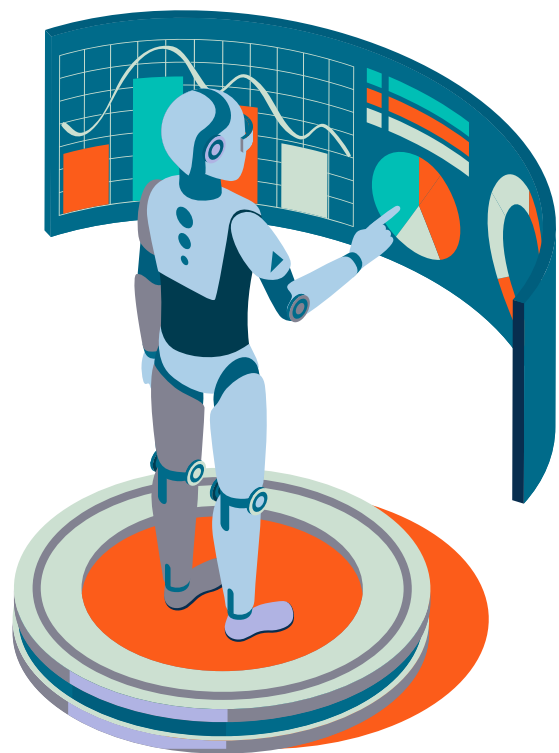


4. Human review of automated processes

While the predictions of robots and computers taking everyone's jobs keep getting renewed each year, they still aren't a replacement for the nuances of human speech. That's why technology paired with human insights is always the best combination.

As you look at your tech stack also ask: Who on your team has the expertise to run these programs and interpret the data that comes out of it? Data science is a form of storytelling and isn't something every person is able to do. If you don't have someone on your team with this skill now, think about how you can incorporate it in the future either in-house or by otherwise tapping into necessary talent. You don't have extra hours to spend building out reports yourself as you learn to translate the data.

Even better? Get a team of experts on your side putting everything together for you so that you can put that data- and the story behind it- to work for your brand.



5. Cohesive messaging

COVID-19 also very quickly made it abundantly clear which companies had workflows that enabled them to get their messaging out clearly and cohesively both internally and externally. Remember what we said about internal communications becoming external; a highly stressful and uncertain situation like the earliest days of COVID-19 makes it more likely that any employees unhappy with internal messaging might share it externally to put pressure on a brand to change their course.

Always assume that anything you distribute internally could be leaked externally and plan your messaging accordingly.

You also want to be sure that all teams are on the same page with messaging so a press release that goes out in support of a public program isn't contradicted by social media posts, for example, but instead amplified and reinforced by them.

Be sure your team has regular meetings between all content stakeholders so that your brand voice and messaging are clear across platforms and mediums.

And don't lose focus on your customers in crafting your content— customers are expecting companies to communicate with

them. By not being proactive with your communications, you risk losing people. Be sure you're clear and thoughtful about your brand's relationship with your customers during any time that might be impacting them (and you'll know what's impacting them if you have comprehensive monitoring in place, as we discussed earlier).



Looking ahead

There are obviously more than five problems any brand is facing at any one time, but these are the biggest and most salient that brands are facing at this moment. Without integrated teams drawing on established processes for dealing with internal and external communication, you're much more likely to shift into panic mode—and that almost never ends in good things for brands, their employees, their customers or any other stakeholders.

If you think Cision could help solve any of these- or other- problems for your team, please don't hesitate to reach out.





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