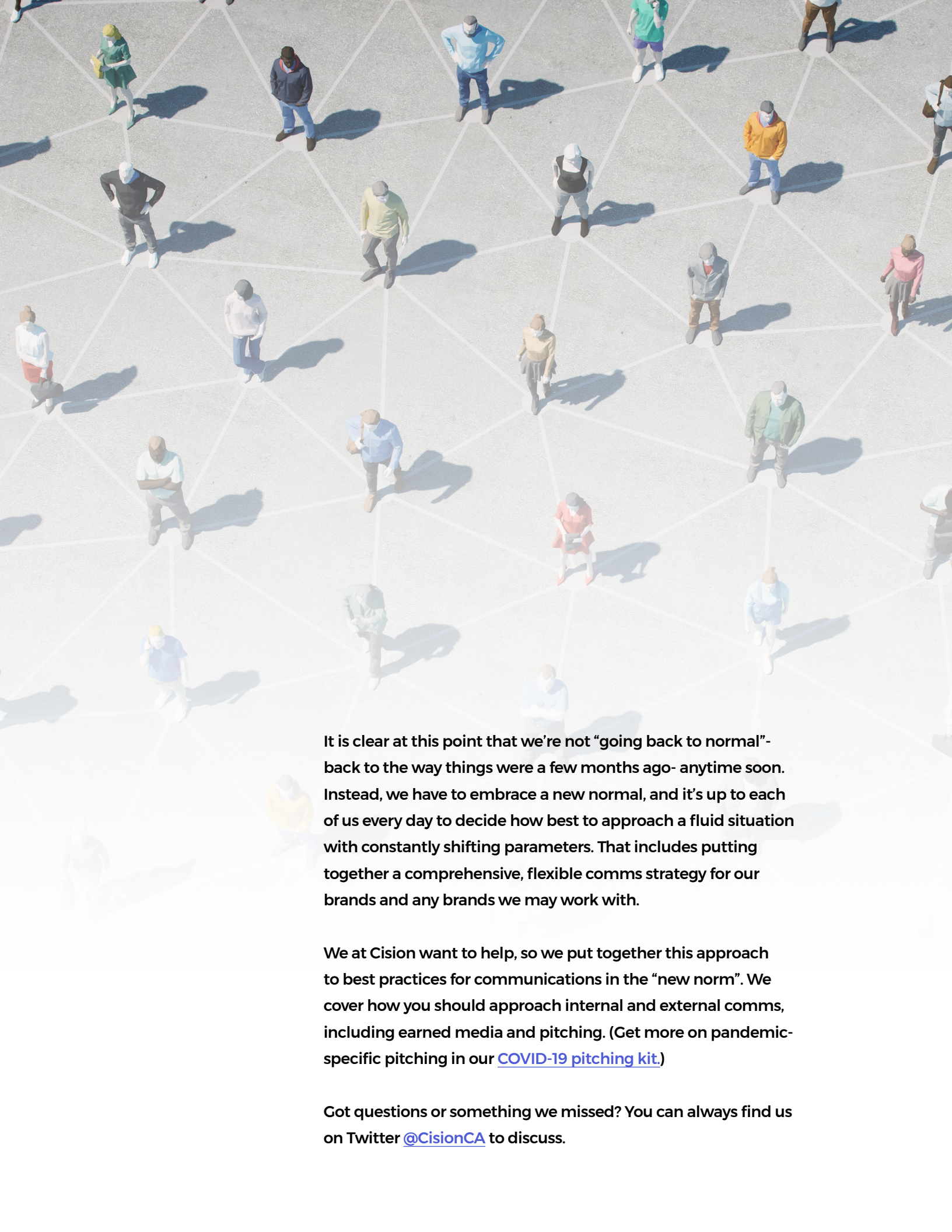




CISION®

THE NEXT STEP

ADAPTING YOUR COMMS STRATEGY
IN CHALLENGING TIMES



It is clear at this point that we're not "going back to normal"- back to the way things were a few months ago- anytime soon. Instead, we have to embrace a new normal, and it's up to each of us every day to decide how best to approach a fluid situation with constantly shifting parameters. That includes putting together a comprehensive, flexible comms strategy for our brands and any brands we may work with.

We at Cision want to help, so we put together this approach to best practices for communications in the "new norm". We cover how you should approach internal and external comms, including earned media and pitching. (Get more on pandemic-specific pitching in our [COVID-19 pitching kit](#).)





Got questions or something we missed? You can always find us on Twitter [@CisionCA](#) to discuss.



YOU ARE HERE

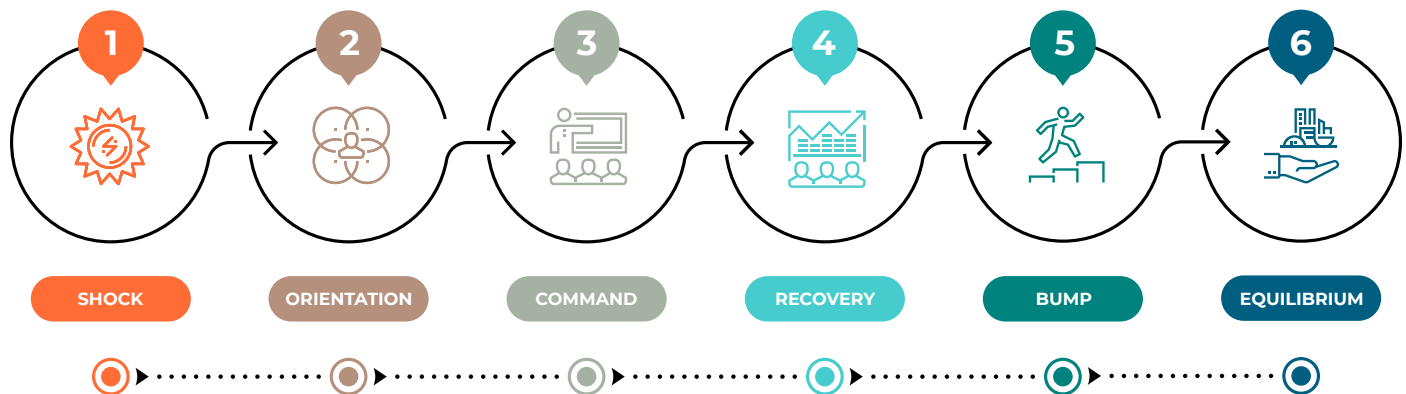
In our webinar series [Best Practices for Brand Communications in Times of Uncertainty](#), several of our speakers touched on the phases of the pandemic and how comms needs to be adjusted depending on which phase of the pandemic your brand, industry and/or geographical area was in.

Our Insights team built a chart that helps visualize the different phases:

STRATEGIC GUIDANCE				
COVID-19 A GUIDE TO PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATORS: USA EDITION				
PHASES	MEDIA AND AUDIENCE	CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS	MANAGEMENT COMMUNICATIONS	PRODUCT COMMUNICATIONS
 PHASE 1: DETECTION			No Changes	
 PHASE 2: PREPARATION & PREVENTION	Media and Readers in Crisis-Mode Majority of Topics COVID-19 Related	Corporate Citizenship Topics Appreciated by Readers and Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce Classical Corporate Topics to Minimum Important: Use Time to Create New, Digital Communications for Phase 3	Management Platforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Transparency, Reassurance, and Affirmation Corporate Citizenship 	IMPORTANT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unless Directly Relevant to Mitigation, "Promotional" and Product Coverage Should be moved to Phase 3 Channel-Load Phase 3 Create New, Digital Comms Formats for Phase 3
 PHASE 3: CONTAINMENT, MITIGATION & DAMAGE CONTROL	Increasing Allowance for Non-Corona Coverage People Still in Quarantine with Time for News Consumption	Begin to Introduce a Broader Set of Corporate Stakeholder Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employees Customers Investors Regulators / Legislators 	Management Platforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership Transparency, Reassurance, and Affirmation Corporate Citizenship 	Run New, Digital Formats Provide your Customers with Alternative, New Formats Promote Digital Sales: Contactless Business will be Trending
 PHASE 4: RECOVERY & REPAIR	Less Time for News Consumption Back to Work	"Resart/Reboot" Topics: Start of Production, Sales, etc. Focus on the Positive Outcomes of the Crisis	Management Platforms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stronger Out of the Crisis 	IMPORTANT: There is No Back to Normal Communications! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brand Events and Sponsorships Limited for Next Few Months, Due to Social Distancing Smaller Interactions with Journalists Emerge: Product Reviews, Test Drives, etc.

This approach to thinking about the pandemic was highlighted again by Brent Diggins, Partner of Allison+Partners, who spoke in our final webinar in the series on crafting a re-entry communications plan. He shared this graphic emphasizing the disruption lifecycle in place with COVID-19:

Understanding the Disruption Life Cycle



It's a lifecycle that's clearly applicable both to business and personal lives (especially as those overlap more now that many of us are working from home) and that can shift forward, backward or restart based on the latest events around the pandemic.

The takeaway is this: Think critically and carefully about where your industry is right now and where it might go in the near future. PR and communications professionals should try to anticipate roadblocks they will have to deal with, based on industry and incorporate any learnings from the past few months. Obviously no one had much time to prepare when COVID-19 hit, and everyone has been operating mostly in survival mode. Now is the time to prepare for as many different scenarios as possible.

Any plans will be affected by numerous other factors that should also be considered in crafting a communications strategy going forward, including:

- Has your industry been uniquely affected?
- Has your geographic area been more- or less- affected than others?
- Has your target audience been uniquely or more severely affected by the pandemic?
- What about your employees?
- Has your competition made any moves you can learn from, either positive or negative?
- Is there anything else unique you need to consider for your brand or the brand you're working with?

For most of us in Canada, we're now almost 3 months into some form of quarantine at the time of this writing. While the subject matter of the pandemic remains extremely serious, audiences are tired of the same rhetoric from brands and communicators about how we are "all in this together" during this "unprecedented time". The messaging used in the first days and weeks of the outbreak needs to shift into a new space, without shifting into tone-deaf or alienating territory.

Now is the time to consider expanding what you are communicating about, across audiences:

- Your target audience
- Your existing customer base
- Your employees
- Your stakeholders
- Your community, or communities if you work for a global brand

Each audience will have a slightly different focus, but the overall message should still be focused on health and safety above all else. Obviously a larger global brand will have to tailor their messaging for each geographic area they have a presence in, and be mindful of local events and sentiment in an ongoing process.

While employees will obviously be most invested in how you plan to conduct business going forward, those customers with the resources to continue being customers are also choosing where to spend their money based



on how brands are handling this ongoing crisis, including the treatment of their employees.

Consider communicating the steps you're taking around employee safety- investments in technology for remote work and programs, resources and benefits around mental health, for example- in appropriate ways. Determine which channel is the right channel to communicate considering:

- Your email database(s) and/or newsletters
- Your owned channels, including your blog and website
- Your earned media
- Your social presence
 - ◆ Twitter
 - ◆ Facebook
 - ◆ LinkedIn
 - ◆ Instagram
 - ◆ Any other channels appropriate for your brand, like Reddit or TikTok



An intense, often draining news cycle has left many with a desire for comms framed in a less dire way, as long as it's still thoughtful and considerate of current events. Humor is a coping mechanism for many people and adding it into your communication strategy- only if it's done thoughtfully and is generally appropriate for your brand identity- can help bring levity in a dark time, connecting audiences important to you. This absolutely does not mean to make light of serious situations, but to apply your brand voice in thoughtful ways that your audience will appreciate. If you're not sure if it's the right move for you, don't do it.

Consider revisiting content you've planned or produced pre-pandemic and see if it can be used now with some reworking; perhaps an updated introduction or a change in messaging to make it fit with current events.

And don't overlook your earned media strategy, either. Be sure you're keeping an eye on which publications may or may not be right for certain messaging right now and be mindful of that when pitching.



MONITOR

To ensure that the strategy you're crafting is the right one, you'll need to have monitoring in place. Social media is a great place for this, since it's where many brand strategists take the pulse of an industry. You can set up monitoring to get feedback in real time around your brand specifically, your industry, and the sentiment around the pandemic more generally.

It's possible to do some tracking around geographic location, but that largely depends on where you are located, existing local regulations, the social platform(s) you're active on and whether or not a significant enough amount of your target audience has opted into sharing their location data. (A modified approach would include tracking location-based keywords, although there is a built-in margin of error for those who are joking, lying or bots.)

Couple this with earned media monitoring for a more robust strategy. Which publications have shifted the tone of their writing? (As part of this, keep in mind that many journalists have been laid off, furloughed or had their beats shifted as a result of the pandemic.) How have you been pitching reporters, and does it match this shift? What types of stories have you earned?

Use this information to craft your earned media strategy and pair it with what you're learning on social media- and from other helpful sources like customer communities, review sites etc- to craft your larger communications strategy going forward.

Finally, don't be rigid about it. The value in ongoing monitoring is that you can pivot your strategy if you get feedback that it isn't working. Which is why you also need to measure!



MEASURE

How do you know if what you're doing is working? Measure.

Be sure you're not only monitoring, but also measuring the performance of any communications you've been putting out. What messaging is resonating, and why? Was it the messaging itself, the way it was delivered, the timing, or some combination of those three elements?

Ideally you want to have a measurement framework in place that lets you tease out the impact of each of these factors individually so you can use them to inform your strategy going forward, and/or adjust in real-time.

Combining monitoring and measuring especially makes mid-campaign (or simply mid-pandemic) communication adjustment possible.

Breaking down a comprehensive measurement framework is outside the scope of this piece, but be sure you're including:

- Performance of email communications
- Performance of content pieces
- Performance of virtual events or webinars
- Performance of recent media coverage
- Blog performance
- Social metrics
- Video metrics

Let's break down measurement of earned media coverage, as a quick example. How can you prove to the C-Suite that your last three months of work have been a success in a difficult time? Show them what's working and what isn't (and how you plan to shift your strategy accordingly) based on earned media performance.

You might start by pulling together all of the COVID-19 related media coverage your brand received over the past 90 days to show that—despite the current situation—you actually drove a lot of traffic to your website.

CONCLUSION

The greatest takeaway- not just from our webinar series, but from this entire situation- is that nobody has a rule book for situations like this.

Now is the time to take a step back and reflect on what the last few months have taught us, and use that knowledge to plan for the near-future. It's also important to continue to be as thoughtful and purposeful as possible with our communications.

We hope this guide helps.

And above all, please stay healthy and safe.



Copyright © 2020 Cision Canada Inc.
88 Queens Quay W. Suite 3000 Toronto, ON M5J 0B8 | 877-269-3367