



Communications Best Practices, for the Coronavirus Outbreak

Developed by Gregory FCA

**The coronavirus
outbreak presents
a wide range of
communications
challenges for
organizations.**

Gregory FCA produced this guide to help companies deploy communications best practices for meeting those challenges.

What is the role of leadership during the coronavirus outbreak?

Above all else, employees, customers, and stakeholders want leadership, and the role of leadership in this environment can be distilled down to one simple word: communications. The more leaders communicate, the more they engage, the more they are transparent with their audiences, the better their organization will weather the storm.

That means organizations must overcommunicate by increasing their communications cadence to reduce risk, quell fears, and assure the continued vibrancy of the organization.

What are the biggest mistakes that organizations can make right now in their communications strategy?

That leadership goes dark. The C-suite becomes so consumed with the challenges at hand that they fail to make themselves visible within the organization and externally to customers. This is the time for leaders to come forward, be visible, communicate openly, and serve as an inspiration to clients and customers.



How can you build a communications plan when time is of the essence?

In the current environment, half a plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow. Unfortunately, the crisis is upon us. Organizations must act now to build or update their communications plan to meet the challenges of the coronavirus outbreak.

Start by ticking the following boxes:

1. Establish a communications committee. Crisis communications committees share information, approve messages, and streamline response time. For one client, we set a protocol for a once-a-day, 15-minute committee meeting that, in the first week alone, increased the internal communications cadence four-fold. The structure of your committee could include:

- CEO
- Vice President of Communications
- General Counsel
- Outside Counsel
- Vice President of Human Resources
- Vice President of Corporate Communications
- Head of Social Media
- COO
- Operational/Divisional heads
- Public Relations Agency

2. Create protocols and procedures. Who has the authority to speak for the organization, both inside and out? How often do you plan to update the organization with regard to coronavirus issues? What will be the tone and content of your messages? What is the communications cascade that brings information from the top to all levels of the organization?

Under normal conditions, protocols and procedures might take weeks to establish. You can't afford to wait. Communications professionals need to document protocols and procedures now. Start by dusting off and updating any previous communications plan you have in place. If none exists, follow this checklist to create one:

1. Collect names and contact information for all members of your communications committee.
2. Schedule regular times for the committee to meet.
3. Identify your key spokespeople by subject area.
4. Establish an abbreviated approval process for communications.
5. Document who controls and manages every communications channel at your disposal (intranets to home addresses, social media to Slack or Google Hangouts Chat).

If you're concerned about your communication and its effectiveness during this time, feel free to contact us at info@gregoryfca.com.

3. Identity key audiences and constituents. The first rule of communications is simple: Know your audience. Create a matrix of each of your key audiences along with their points of pain.

For instance, employees are concerned about their jobs and ongoing employment. They want to know what the organization is doing to keep them gainfully employed and safe. How is the company adapting to meet their needs? What's the work at home policy? What remote tools are you making available so they can continue to work? Will you suspend sick leave or PTO to encourage those who might feel sick to stay home?

Empathy. Leadership. Vision. More than anything, that's what employees want from their employers when challenges arise.

4. Determine your communications channels. There have never been more channels available to communicate with employees and customers. Use them. Inventory them, and determine how best to use each.

For instance, you might want to consider pinning your daily or weekly coronavirus update to the top of your Facebook or Twitter pages so it's the first thing employees and customers see. Or you might want to publish updates on your CEO's LinkedIn page and use Twitter or Facebook to drive employees and customers to LinkedIn and its ability to tell longer, more complex stories. Each channel has its nuance and capabilities. Leverage them!

5. Consider the tone of your communications. When bad news is everywhere, customers and employees don't need more. What they need is open and honest communications that help them continue to perform their jobs or for customers to continue to benefit from your company's products or services. No need to be Pollyanna.

But leaders need to lead, and that means delivering positive and hopeful communications. For instance, while rare, this is not the first emergency American business has faced. The markets, the money, and the mojo each returned to the American economy after the dot-com bubble collapse, 9/11, and the financial crisis of 2008. Remind your people of that fact often.

The most important message of them all? We will get through this crisis together. As colleagues. As professionals. As team members who support one another!



6. Develop sample standby statements, press releases, and employee and customer communications in advance. Identify the most likely challenges the organization may face. Write messaging for each, now, in advance.

For instance, if you're a customer-facing business, perhaps you will have to temporarily shut down a retail location. What will you tell employees? The local press? Investors? If you are in financial services, and your clients are panicked, what is your investment philosophy and approach? Are you adjusting it? What's your message? Get it down on paper so you can respond more quickly when situations arise.



7. Speed content creation. Under normal circumstances, we, as communicators, can take time, consider nuances, accept edits and rewrites. But in a crisis, time is of the essence. Consider ways to shorten the content creation process for employee and customer communications.

Video can help. It's instant, high impact, and humanizing. Video is a perfect way to meet the unique communications challenges presented by the coronavirus outbreak. Consider using it for:

- **Market updates to clients.** The markets are panicking. Here's a way to stay front and center in your clients' minds to quell their concerns and educate them about what's going on.
- **Employee updates and education.** Your employees want to see and hear from you. Video allows key members of your management team to be present, visible, and accessible.
- **Informing customers.** You're here, aware, and ready to serve them. Emails are fine. But the impact of seeing and hearing from the CEO or other members of the management team is undeniable.
- **Fill in lost opportunities.** Trade shows and conferences might be cancelled. But that doesn't mean you can't still deliver your message—smartly, quickly, and convincingly. Video fits the bill.

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Gregory FCA stands ready to help. Our Here+Now video offering allows our clients to produce video in real time from the comfort of their homes or offices. The concept is simple. It uses the same technology as major TV networks to interview guests remotely and create content for use internally as employee communications or externally for customers.

We have compressed the time it takes to script and produce these videos, relying on the same techniques used by CNBC or Fox Business. In fact, we have former on-air broadcasters on staff who prepare and conduct the interviews. Clients simply answer the prepared questions, relieving any stress of having to do a cold read from a teleprompter or having to carry the entire video on their own.

And finally, if we at Gregory FCA can support you in any way during this trying time, please let us know. Our staff of communications and public relations professionals is here to help you craft your message and deliver it. We're all in this together. And we will all get through this together.

We're experts in precisely what's needed at this moment in time: the communication skills needed to support your employees and put customer minds at ease.

For more information about how Gregory FCA can help you with your communications during this time, call us at 610.642.8253 or email info@gregoryfca.com.