



# Managing your brand and reputation during the COVID-19 crisis

For brands, it is survival of the most flexible, supportive and genuine during COVID-19. The impact of the pandemic is unprecedented and devastating, with its duration unknown. So how can businesses manage their brand and reputation during this uncertainty and more importantly, start preparing for post-pandemic recovery?

The answer is multifaceted – a people-centric, transparent approach with a goal to create an environment for best possible recovery. It requires a pivot on strategy to maintain business as usual while adapting to the reality of life during and after the global pandemic.

Like all crises, the focus for brands should not be on managing the crisis, but rather on managing through the crisis. This future-centric thinking will ensure business continuity.

## **Create an environment for best possible recovery**

**Make a plan – a pathway to navigate through the crises**  
Design an iterative roadmap that outlines your brand's plan for a) physical safety, b) reputation and c) finances. Understand that the COVID-19 pandemic is changing constantly with frequent federal government and health official updates, and you need to be agile, sensitive and realistic.

Review your business objectives and existing strategies. Stay true to your corporate brand and vision for the business, but understand the temporary limitations, and what flexibility is required to continue driving towards those objectives in the changed environment.

What adjustments are required to ensure you are still on track to achieve your objectives post pandemic? Changes might include extending timeframes, re-orientating financial and operational priorities and modes of engagement.

## **Create an environment for best possible recovery**

To manage effectively, some organisations are creating teams to manage the crisis at hand and act as a central decision making group, with a focus on responding quickly using a unified and consistent voice, while a second team focuses on the path to recovery.

Both internal and external stakeholders need evidence of strong leadership to build trust. Strong leadership is best exhibited through action and clear, firm decision making. Definite decisions made during times of uncertainty build reassurance and comfort in you and your brand.





### Cement your brand positioning

Crystallising your brand message is more important than ever. Stay true to your corporate values and who you are as a brand, as this will ensure your voice is heard among the saturated consumer market.

### Find the balance

Since the pandemic began, COVID-19 social and digital mentions online have soared in Australia to tens of thousands daily. During a crisis, it is important for brands to always add genuine value in as authentic a way as possible. Post with purpose.

Customers are deterred when brands come across as opportunistic during crises. True value means helping communities, not leveraging vulnerability. Sometimes, to retain loyalty during a crisis there needs to be a shift in communication from product/service push to supportive, helpful messaging and content.

In times of national and global emergency, real time communication is more important than ever. Connect, reassure and inform employees and stakeholders so they feel supported. These audiences are your biggest advocate and their loyalty is critical to business continuity.

### Watch your tone

For most people COVID-19 is a financial and emotional issue as well as a health issue. Businesses should be sensitive to this and respond accordingly, remembering that emotional responses anchor trust. Be relatable, engaging customers effectively and empathetically resonates loudly with audiences during and after a crisis. Open and transparent decision making delivered via sympathetic messaging instils confidence, reassurance and support.

Try to also put a focus on something positive in communication. A simple message of 'you are not alone', 'we are here to help' or an example of what your company is doing to support the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, will catch attention.

Always ensure transparency in communication, both internally and externally, be honest, genuine and communicate a clear way forward while showing your support and people-centric approach with health, wellbeing, and safety as a priority.

### Tailor your content

Ask yourself, *"what do your clients/customers/stakeholders need right now"* and tailor your communication content accordingly. Perhaps customer needs are unchanged, but there is an underlying concern for the pandemic. In this case, you may continue business as usual communication, but add in a line to reassure customers.

For other businesses, their audience may no longer need their service under these circumstances. In this case, communicate that you are with them throughout the pandemic and will be there for them in the future.

Only share imperative information – ensuring it is accurate and relevant to your audience.

Alternatively, show your support by sharing your story – what is your company doing during COVID-19 to give back to the community? This provides an uplifting and valuable content contribution and provides an opportunity to reach out.

Regardless of what you communicate during COVID-19, reiterate your commitment to health in every message to audiences and ensure consistency of messaging.

Be genuine as people seek connection, calmness and certainty, under extraordinary circumstances.

Content must be sensitive to the crisis at hand – be aware of photographs and messaging such as images of people not social distancing in your social media posts, or language such as 'stock up' being used in your latest blog post.

### Where to communicate

During COVID-19 messages should be disseminated through all your relevant platforms. Message amplification on all platforms will ensure all stakeholders are reached no matter the individual's preferred platform.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has a significant impact on your business, you may consider creating a dedicated COVID-19 landing page on your corporate website, or producing a video message from the CEO affirming your company's commitment to health and safety, while thanking healthcare workers and your team.

#### Are you prepared for post COVID-19?

*Should you and your team need support, please contact Stephanie Paul on:*

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