



COVID-19 Communications Toolkit

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The Health Science *Experts*

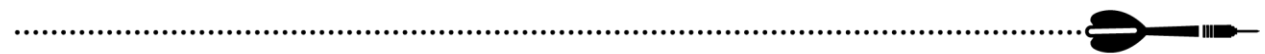
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INTRODUCTION

In times of uncertainty and rapidly changing events, like the current COVID-19 pandemic, people look to leaders for guidance and confidence. Your employees will take their cues from you. Your customers and the market will want clarity and confidence. As a company leader, you have a duty and an obligation to communicate appropriately and skillfully. It is not necessary that you have *all* the facts. What is required is that you communicate what you can, when you can, definitively.

This brief toolkit is intended to provide an overview of best practices that will apply to most organizations. Your business is unique, and you know your employees and your customers best. We at SCORR encourage you to review this document, and other valuable resources, to ensure that you are communicating the right information to the right people, in a suitable way and at a reasonable cadence.

What a situation like the COVID-19 pandemic highlights is the need for an overall communication strategy, and specifically, a crisis communication strategy. Effective day-to-day communication in the current crisis environment and robust crisis communication plan development are most effective in tandem. If you need assistance beyond this toolkit, SCORR can help you develop the communications that you need right now while building a full-fledged crisis communication plan in parallel.



COVID-19 COMMUNICATION

As a leader, it's important that you are communicating in times of uncertainty and change. The tough part is knowing what to communicate, and to whom. The who, how, what, and when of COVID-19 communication, below, can provide some guidance.

- **Who:**

It is important to keep in mind who your audience is, as that will dictate much of the content and tone of what you are communicating. Not every communication will go to all audiences, so defining up front who the recipients will be for each piece is important. Creating a simple communication grid is an easy way to help you clarify who will receive what. It also enables you to look back and remember which communications were delivered to whom. Here are some key stakeholders to consider:

 - **Employees:** This applies to all companies. Keep your team informed.
 - **Customers:** Another obvious audience, often requiring nuance. Some clients require 1-1 attention, while for others, a mass update will suffice. Know your customers' needs and communicate accordingly. Ask them how you can help.
 - **Investors:** For publicly traded companies, the market is watching.
 - **Vendors:** Understand any issues that may affect your ability to serve your clients.
 - **The public:** Depending on your size and scope, evaluate and understand your obligation to keep the public informed.
- **How:**

Your tone and manner of communication is nearly as important as what you say. As you receive information, be empathetic. As you communicate out, be transparent and genuine. Customers and employees will look to leadership for cues, so be prepared, not panicked. In the famous words of Winston Churchill, "Keep calm and carry on."
- **What:**

Share what you know – and be okay with not knowing it all. Things are changing rapidly; don't feel you need to have all the answers. Transparency is helpful. Steer clear of speculation. As different decisions arise (e.g., travel, work-from-home policy, customer visits), evaluate who needs to know and communicate them promptly and clearly. Keep your communication to your area of expertise. For information specific to COVID-19, refer people to trusted resources (see [Resources](#) section).
- **When:**

"Be quick, but don't hurry," was a frequent quote from legendary basketball coach John Wooden. Be under control, know what to communicate, and then act quickly and decisively. As much as the situation allows, be proactive; better to communicate smaller bits of what you know more frequently than to wait until you have all the answers in hand and miss an important opportunity. In times of rapid change and uncertainty, it's okay to say, "I don't have that answer right now."





EMBRACE VIRTUAL

The number of companies that are allowing – or increasingly requiring – employees to work from home is growing by the day. If remote work is new to your organization, realize that in addition to current health concerns, there is the stress of our natural resistance to change, especially during times of confusion or crisis. Also understand that for many, this will be a gradual change, not just a flip of the switch. Many workers will be juggling childcare along with work as schools close for a time. Lead with compassion while still holding your team accountable. As described earlier, open and frequent communication is critical. Utilize [resources](#) on remote work and get creative. Some approaches to consider:

- **Institute a Remote Leadership Team:** Particularly if remote work is new to your organization, establish a team that can provide direction, gather feedback, adjust policy, and provide ongoing guidance and communication to your employees.
- **Define Communication Paths:** Clearly define whether employee questions and concerns should run through the Remote Leadership Team, HR or direct supervisors. Hold short, periodic meetings to inform and receive feedback. Hold similar meetings with customer management leaders to hear questions and concerns coming from customers.
- **Keep Them Informed:** Your guidelines for remote work will likely change as you gain feedback from your team. Create a central location where FAQs, updates, and useful information can be found, and make sure everyone knows where to find it.
- **Consider Video:** The difference between an audio-only and a video call can be substantial. Don't underestimate the power of seeing a face along with hearing a voice. There are a variety of [video conferencing tools](#) that can be utilized at the company level, but also encourage the use of tools like FaceTime and Skype that your team is likely already using in their personal lives.
- **More Communication:** Nobody wants more meetings added to their day, but during a transition like this, use more one-to-one and team meetings. Get creative; break out of the 30- or 60-minute mold and schedule some 15-minute touch bases to ensure communication continues without disrupting productivity.
- **Don't Forget IT:** Consult with your IT expert or internal team to ensure employees have the equipment, set-up and tools needed to work remotely. Make sure team members regularly save their files to a shared company server.
- **Stay Flexible:** Be prepared to flex as the situation inevitably changes. Realize that workers who once worked nine-to-five may need to break up their day into chunks, allowing them to attend to other responsibilities while still getting their work done.



RESOURCES

COVID-19 and Remote Work Resources	
Description	Web Page
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	CDC COVID-19
World Health Organization	WHO COVID-19
Daily updates and reports from WHO	WHO Situation Report
A plain language guide from TeleHealth Services	Two-minute video – COVID-19 guidelines
A central hub for the best resources on remote work, from tips to articles to company policies	Remote work wiki
G2.com guide to video conferencing software	Video conferencing software

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