



During times of crisis silence and going dark is not an option

COMMUNICATIONS
FOR ASSET
MANAGEMENT FIRMS
DURING COVID-19

By
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For financial services firms communicating with investors, advisors, clients and partners during Covid-19 is an imperative. It is also an opportunity to bring a human touch to your communications.

As more events and conferences are cancelled, travel and external meetings cut back due to Covid-19, entire organizations going virtual and markets behaving volatily, the question arises of how financial services firms can and should continue to communicate with investors, advisors, clients and employees.

Let's for a moment look back to the 2008/9 recession. Firms that were quick to communicate, did so continuously, were transparent and "human" were perceived to be more trustworthy retaining and strengthening their relationships. And in the long run were better able to retain assets, protect brand equity and create value from a reputation opportunity.

There is nothing more damning than a firm that hides when things go south. During times of crisis the best brands step forward and quickly, key leaders speak up and communicate about the issues, and let their constituents know what it means to them. At the end of the day, people want to do business with other people. Silence, flat corporate speak and lack of visibility during a crisis is a surefire way to unsettle and lose clients.

So, what
should firms
do?

Following are
five critical
steps:

1. Control the narrative
2. Act quickly, be nimble
3. Get creative
4. Go virtual
5. Be human

Control the narrative:

Respond authentically and in relevant ways. It's important to know what people are saying and the more you know about the sentiment of your clients—the more likely you will be able to respond in meaningful ways. Monitor social media for that sentiment and for reputational risks.

Control the narrative – or someone else will. Make your statement, be proactive and be heard, it's what your constituents want. Don't let news about your firm hit the media before you have communicated to your constituents. If you have news—good or bad—you think could leak to the media, get out ahead of it, communicate to your constituents first and manage the press.

Act quickly and stay nimble:

When communicating during a crisis, problems occur when there is no plan or when there is a plan – but one that comes with a multi-level review and approval process. Firms need to act quickly and be nimble, leveraging creative ways to communicate. And depending on the situation “once and done” may not be the best strategy, engage with stakeholders as conditions evolve.

Deploy creative strategies:

For firms today, there is a wealth of options and technologies available to engage, that can all be done remotely. Audiences want to hear from key leaders in real time, in fact a recent survey by Brunswick, found that the use of digital media to hear from CEOs is up 21% over the year before and that increase is even more significant among sell-side analysts.

Again, the human factor is indispensable here. Take, for example, the video just released from Robert Isom of American Airlines—he stood up was clear, aware and human. As well, the use of podcasts among investors has been steadily on the rise over the last decade and approximately 50% of investors reported using financial podcasts as a source of information about markets and firms.

About the authors

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The idea is to go wide and go deep, using various media and channels and even do it the good old-fashioned way, pick up the phone and call. Of critical import though is that the messages should be authentic, clear, consistent and on brand of course.

Go virtual for events and meetings:

While in-person conferences and events may have to be cancelled, there is the opportunity to go virtual and take it online and still serve your constituents.

Investment managers are already turning to video and audio for investor calls.

Live online events could replace investor and client days. There are many options and technologies available to help you, that can all be done remotely. Constituents won't be left in a vacuum and your firm has the chance to provide valuable content and information—which will become even more critical in a rapidly changing world.

Be human:

Covid-19 is disrupting many of the societal structures we have taken for granted. People are being impacted in multiple ways. Communicate in ways that are considerate, compassionate and kind as well as demonstrate leadership.

So in the end:

Building a strong and enduring brand reputation in the investment management business is both an art and a science. The pursuit involves three essential pieces: understanding the true and authentic identity of the firm, being credible in all you say and do and knowing your key audiences to unlock what they need to hear to engage in meaningful ways.

**"In the real world, you either
hold yourself accountable or
someone else will."**

— *Nigel Dessau*

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