



drp^g COMMS MASTERCLASS

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The technology that brings us together (or drives us apart)



Communication in times of crisis is imperative to both business continuity and success. The appetite among our various audiences for communication doesn't decrease when the heat is on, it intensifies. The challenge we're facing is that with so much financial and societal uncertainty, businesses are finding it hard to know how to proceed and how to deploy the right technology for their messages, especially if some of the options are alien to them.

This has led to a widespread call for the virtualisation of events, and this is where the problems start. By transposing one content format to another, without recognising there are significant differences, then businesses will fail to reach people even a fraction as effectively as they could in a live environment. The right approach is to put content first. Once messaging and content have been fully realised, then a broadcast, digital or virtual solution can be deployed to reach people in the right way.

Audiences who are expected to sit in front of a screen for four hours while a presenter reels through slides to an empty room will turn off immediately. In 2020, our audience has an array of intuitive, engaging and professional technology in their office and home. They also know how to use it.



Designing for device

Our audience's devices should be at the front of mind when we design content. Now that virtual environments can function as exhibition halls and amphitheatres, or even entire cities can be built, our imagination is all that limits us, so eye-catching and meaningful content can be created to get the most out of these incredible tools.

Our audiences can choose to access digital environments in their personal time, and most will have experienced AR through Facebook Messenger video or Snapchat. If AR is viewed as a tool, then businesses have to be aware that the audience could deliver their own live broadcast infused with AR within three keystrokes of the home screen of their phone. This is where professionalism makes the big difference. When using broadcasts to reach people in this way, acute awareness of media habits plays a huge role.

TV's second golden age has heightened people's expectations, with YouTube, Vimeo, Twitch, TikTok and countless other digital broadcast mediums turning what used to be a difficult and expensive task into something that can be done in a garage or living room.

To stand out, organisations need to introduce surprising content, using the latest tech-like projection tracking and mixed reality so their content can be as impactful as possible under the spotlight of the main plenary. An event's length also doesn't transpose to this setting, so to maintain engagement, broadcasts need to be shorter, sharper, punchier and need to deploy an array of tools to meet the audience's eyeline and measure their engagement effectively.

Existing platforms

We know that brands across the world have been challenged by this crisis. In a lot of cases, existing comms campaigns, live events and planned delivery channels have been cancelled, postponed or altered beyond recognition. It has also often been impossible to recoup all of the initial investment, if any.

In these situations, it's difficult for businesses to divert another chunk of their budget and invest in an entirely new delivery platform. While it may be clear to most that the cost of falling silent in a crisis is higher than reinvestment, existing technologies can still be used to deliver messages.

Those organisations operating on cloud-based platforms like Office 365 have a ready-made deployment tool, including an array of app services they haven't really explored. Stream, Sway and Power BI can all be deployed in this arena to great effect, while even Yammer, Slack and the humble intranet can pull their weight in these trying times. It's about finding balance between what is needed to elevate the professionalism and what can be used straight away to reach audiences quickly and intuitively.

Opportunity

This crisis has provided many organisations with a few opportunities that could help secure their comms strategies as we emerge from the current situation. While many communications practitioners across various disciplines find themselves having to take a crash course in a whole new array of skills, some of our largest challenges pre-crisis should hopefully become easier to navigate thanks to the need for a quicker reaction.

Tech-driven comms channels, legacy systems and internal IT challenges often stop concepts such as these in their tracks; this is typically because there are so many other business-critical updates being carried out that comms can take a back seat. But, it's now evident that an organisation's ability to communicate with a remote workforce in a crisis is about as business-critical as it gets.

By taking the steps now to make a broadcast or digital comms strategy not only easy to achieve via IT infrastructure, but part of our collective expectation, we can future-proof our communications for the next 10 or even 20 years.