

Roadmap for Navigating the Media Landscape During COVID-19

March 19, 2020



COMMUNICATIONS

Introduction

We have experienced a seismic shift in the way we live, work and play over the past week. While COVID-19 was in our consciousness since January and slowly assumed greater mindshare in the U.S. media over the last few months, we have seen a tremendous acceleration in the last week as businesses shutter offices, cities and states go on “lockdown” and children are out of school for many weeks.

We are enveloped in a 24-hour news cycle that, at the surface, seems wholly focused on the impact of the virus – to people’s health, safety and well-being, the economy, government response and our upcoming elections. Broadcast, print and social media have exploded with COVID-19 coverage and it has left many wondering if it is appropriate to proceed with some form of communication and, if so, how.

To help answer these questions for our staff and clients at V2, we researched, analyzed and evaluated what COVID-19 means for marketing and communications in the near term, specifically media and influencer programs. Our goal was initially to educate our staff and empower them with the information and data needed to shape client campaigns. We soon realized that this insight and analysis would be a valuable tool for the broader community – our clients, partners and peers.

In this report, Roadmap for Navigating the Media Landscape During COVID-19, we provide a summary of the current U.S. media landscape – broadcast, business, national, trade and vertical media. In addition to analyzing current headlines and news themes, we have also connected with many of our media and influencer contacts to get first-hand direction on editorial plans for COVID-19 and more.

We hope this abbreviated summary provides a useful resource as you evaluate current marketing and communications plans. Given the rapidly evolving landscape, we intend to regularly update this report as news priorities shift and we see emerging opportunities for companies to communicate – their expertise and commentary, business updates and customer experiences.

We welcome your feedback and ideas as we continue this research effort, and we are happy to answer any questions you might have.

Stay safe and be well.

Maura FitzGerald and Jean Serra
Founders, Partners



The Media Landscape

Going Straight to the Source(s)

While COVID-19 headlines dominate daily newspaper covers, the evening news and publication push notifications across devices, V2 sought to understand if that seeming focus was reality across the universe of media that matter most to our clients. To do that, we went straight to the source(s): media websites, data/analytics tools, our vendor partners, and, perhaps most importantly, the journalists and editors who are on the front lines of reporting the news.

We found that while COVID-19 is certainly a top-of-mind topic, how it is being covered is evolving and it is not the *only* subject of interest. Read on to learn how the landscape as of March 18 varies by media type.



“Right now our coverage focus is almost entirely on the coronavirus and its impact locally. We’re still **looking at the larger implications** so we’re not interested in covering an app that helps you find toilet paper. Everyone is working on stories that will **help our readers understand the current situation and make good decisions. In fact, today (March 17) was the first day when we have been able to pivot from reactive stories to bigger picture stuff, like how long will local landlords allow their tenants a grace period for rent payment or how long can small business owners go before having to lay off employees.**”

– Larry Edelman, Boston Globe columnist

Business Press

V2 assessed more than a dozen of the top national business press in the U.S.— including Bloomberg, Forbes, The New York Times and Wall Street Journal. As COVID-19 impacts businesses all over the world, the outlets are heavily covering the outbreak, with minimal editorials dedicated to other topics. It is our estimate that approximately 90% of articles published since Friday, March 13 have been focused on COVID-19 or have mentioned the virus in some context—with most articles reporting on the implications of the coronavirus on businesses and the economy.



“My whole team is **looking for unique and helpful/worthwhile angles within our beats that relate to COVID-19.** ...Not so much looking for general talking heads or expert pitches, so much as new, exclusive or surprising ways companies on our beats are affected or working to solve the problem.”

“We're looking into the role of data analytics and possibly AI in **assessing the true size of the outbreak** based on limited data.”

Broadcast

In researching many of the top broadcast networks such as CNBC, NPR and Bloomberg TV, it is clear that they are almost exclusively focused on the coronavirus with most stories highlighting how the COVID-19 outbreak is impacting society and daily life in the U.S. and further afield. Some networks – including ABC, CBS and CNN – have even added coronavirus tabs to their homepages so viewers can have immediate access to all corona-related news. Since March 16, almost every broadcast has been colored in some way by the virus with networks also sharing good news stories, such as good Samaritan acts during the pandemic, to break up the negative news cycle related to the outbreak.



“We are mostly focused on coronavirus as there are new developments constantly. We are **always looking for new angles that are relevant to our audience.**”

Local Press

Much like the national business and broadcast press, V2's research into local media found that coverage is heavily focused on the COVID-19 outbreak. This includes reporting on the latest number of presumed and confirmed cases, as well as its many implications on local life including business, transport, education, sport and health services, to name a few. There is little interest from reporters in news unrelated to the outbreak.



“We're **pretty much all-out** on coverage of the collapse of society right now.”

“Honestly things are super crazy. News is flat out...people are **trying to come up with shows on creative ways** people are passing time, and others are doing shows about communities ‘coming together’ to give back and help out.”

Technology Trades

V2 researched a number of top technology trade publications and websites, including CIO, TechCrunch and The Verge. In stark contrast to business and broadcast press, the tech media appears to be taking a business-as-usual approach to reporting. While reporters are acknowledging the effects of the global crisis and are open to pitches on COVID-19 that relate to their beats, the ones V2 spoke with also expressed interest in receiving pitches unrelated to the outbreak – industry news, trends pieces and contributed content. Only a few publications – such as TechRepublic – are heavily covering the coronavirus at this point.



“We are **still writing whatever relevant tech news there is**. Obviously, there is a shift in focus to the virus, but the news doesn't have to have anything to do with it.”

Vertical Outlets

COVID-19 impacts every industry, but the extent varies widely. While the virus has obvious and immediate implications on healthcare and hospitality, among others, for some sectors it remains mostly status quo, even if remote. As such, the media landscape in vertical press is just as varied. V2 assessed dozens of outlets across myriad sectors that matter most to our current client base.

- **Manufacturing**

The manufacturing trades are currently covering both their typical thought leadership/corporate/industry news as well as news related to economic and supply chain disruption caused by the coronavirus; publications like IndustryWeek and Manufacturing Business Technology are more weighted toward current events. Many publications in this sector – such as Manufacturing Engineering – have long lead times for articles, however, so it is possible that we will see this change as publications clear their queues.

- **Supply Chain**

Disruptions caused by coronavirus disproportionately affect the supply chain, so it is no surprise that these publications are weighted to covering its effect on the supply chain and transportation and logistics sectors. Some, like Material Handling & Logistics and Supply Chain Dive, are focused on news related to new closures and disruptions; others, such as Logistics Management, are more balanced between news and thought leadership on multiple topics.

- **Marketing/Advertising**

Given the diverse sectors cover in marketing and advertising trades have a handful of stories popping that cover aspects of how the coronavirus is impacting marketing, advertising and sales teams' strategies. We're seeing some reporters, like those at Martech Advisor, ask for an expert source where it makes sense to comment. However, it's not solely what these trades are covering, and otherwise they are operating as usual – something we heard directly from Marketing Land editors.

- **Education**

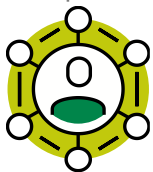
Due to the closure of schools across the country, the education press has been widely covering the impact of the coronavirus on education with only a few publications covering stories unrelated to the outbreak and closures, such as Campus Safety.

- **Finance**

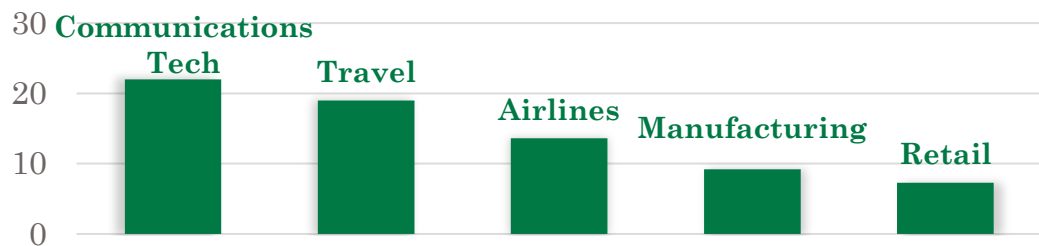
The financial press was a little slower than the business, local and broadcast media on their coverage of the coronavirus but publications are now generally focused on the COVID-19 outbreak and its implications on business, the stock market, private equity and M&A. While some outlets like peHub and American Banker are still reporting on news unrelated to the virus, these articles are becoming less frequent as the virus brings many areas of business to a standstill.

- **Transport**

Almost all publications are operating as they normally would with only a few featuring one or two articles on their news sections about the coronavirus. There are a few exceptions to this rule such as Transport Topics, StreetsBlog USA and CityLab who have been widely covering the implications of the outbreak on public transit.



5 Industries most represented in COVID-19 stories (as % of total COVID-19-related coverage)



Source: Cision Global Insights Team (Feb. 25-Mar. 3)

Research Methodology

V2 conducted research between March 12 and 18, 2020. This included qualitative audit of media websites and quantitative analysis using tools such as Cision and NetBase. We also directly contacted journalists we work most closely with to get their direct perspective. This report represents perspective from staff at outlets such as:





Guidance

Keep Moving.

Armed with this insight on the current media landscape, the natural question is, “So, what should I do?”

While the world may be changing, it is still moving. And marketing and communications activity should, too. V2’s current guidance on how to do just that includes:

Wade very carefully into COVID-19-related angles

Avoiding “ambulance chasing” is not new or unique counsel. However, it also doesn’t mean that COVID-19 is entirely off limits or inappropriate to address. V2 advises assessing these storylines on a case-by-case basis to ensure the pitch angle is contributing to the conversation or overall market dynamic in a meaningful and value-add way. There is potential to appropriately weigh in if a brand:

- Has a product/solution directly involved in the response or can offer a customer that has deployed that product
- Can collect or aggregate data to analyze the issue. This information helps the media extrapolate potential scenarios or trends.
- Is armed with an expert who can provide truly non-promotional analysis and outlook

Pursue pitch campaigns with heightened awareness of the current dynamics

While the business and mainstream media are focused heavily on COVID-19 storylines, there is still a desire for non-coronavirus pitches in the trade and vertical press. In fact, some reporters expressed extra bandwidth given they are not traveling, taking in-person meetings or attending events. Because the dynamic continues to evolve quickly, it is more critical than ever to review both outlets’ websites and reporters’ recent stories and social media profiles before pitching to ensure relevancy.

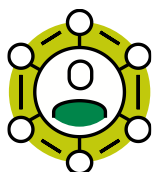
Evaluate announcement strategies based on content and target audience

Releases are still going out over the wire and some financial items and other mandated/regulatory releases will need to go out regardless of any market shifts moving forward. V2's guidance is to consider providing news releases to trade outlets on a limited or exclusive basis and to use wire services on a discretionary basis for the time being.

Align with the brand's values and comfort levels

The best course of action for your brand ultimately comes down to what you are comfortable with. Each brand will have different values, tones and other factors that influence if they prefer to tread more carefully, operate as normal or find a path to be bolder.

If much of this guidance sounds familiar, that is because it reflects our – and the industry's – standard best practices. Just because a crisis is emerging doesn't mean those strategies should be abandoned.



Social Media Guidance

Augmenting our look at news outlets, V2 also conducted an audit of five tech brands' social channels, with a focus on how March activity compared to typical cycles. It shows that a regular cadence of communication and release of content is still relevant for brands not directly involved in COVID-19 activity, but remember to:

- Review previously created content for current relevance to avoid appearing tone deaf or insensitive
- Stop or limit prescheduled posts, which run the risk of pushing live at an inappropriate time amid fast-moving news cycles
- Listen to the conversation around the clock – and tap monitoring tools to flag emerging issues in your owned feeds and across key communities
- Stay true to your brand tone and voice



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V2 Communications is the public relations and digital communications firm for disruptive global brands, redefining what it means to be a strategic communications partner. The agency helps brands navigate the complexities that define communications today to drive business success and growth. V2's skilled professionals combine a business mindset and creative thinking to provide the strategic counsel, campaign ideas and results that move businesses forward.

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