

A black and white photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, walking through a modern office space. She is holding a white mug with a logo on it. The office has exposed ceiling pipes, long fluorescent lights, and white cubicle walls. In the background, there are posters on the wall, one of which says 'KUNST' and 'EUM'.

Moving You Forward: Engaging Key Audiences Amid Disruption

June 2020



COMMUNICATIONS

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Introduction: Disruption, Accelerated

We are living in an unprecedented and transformative time. The world around us has forever changed.

If the past two months have taught us anything—as entrepreneurs, communicators and people—it is that the worst of times have the opportunity to unlock the best in us all. And these trying times are doing just that.

Even when daily facets of life and work are disrupted, positive disruption still happens, and often at an accelerated rate. Companies have been moving toward a highly-digitized state of business for some time now, but timelines have truncated and barriers have broken down to ensure not only business continuity, but also vitality. Innovation, collaboration and communication are all thriving in ways we never could have imagined if a pandemic hadn't forced us all to work differently and, yes, even virtually.

While some uncertainty remains as we all adjust to a so-called 'new normal,' there does seem to be one thing everyone can agree on: the need to move forward. Some may view the adjustments brought on by disruption as a burden, but the reality is that those who view changes as an opportunity are the ones who will have an advantage well into the future.

Are you ready to move forward?

Read on to learn V2's latest insight into the current communications landscape and how organizations and their leaders can best leverage new technologies, techniques and channels to engage with three critical audiences:

- Prospects & Customers
- Employees
- Media & Influencers

Nurture Leads and Foster Loyalty: Engaging Customers & Prospects

The sudden and sweeping impact of COVID-19 was a stark reminder for many organizations that even the best laid plans can be totally upended in a matter of days. With everything from sales calls, services requests and new product demos now happening via Zoom and both industry and customer conferences going digital, many planned campaigns for getting net new leads, nurturing prospects down the funnel and keeping customers happy will no longer be effective. Without the tried-and-true techniques to engage audiences and create air cover for sales, marketers must get creative when communicating to and with this critical audience set.

That doesn't mean starting from scratch, but it should prompt a question that brings a marketing organization back to its core: what are the most important goals? The answers—and supporting tactics to deliver—will vary by organization. However, the execution should start with a clear articulation of the messages that will thread all activity together and demonstrate a consistent story from your brand.

Because communications sits at the nexus of messaging and amplification, it plays an important role in helping a company pivot to new strategies that bring stories to life for audiences in a way that works given new dynamics.



Novel Challenges Require New Responses from Brands

“Now more than ever, people need extra information, guidance, and support to navigate a novel set of challenges...They want a resource they can trust, that can make them feel safe when everything seems uncertain and that offers support when so much seems to be overwhelming...The way organizations step up to play this role for their customers, their employees and the broader community is likely to leave lasting memories in customers' minds.”

- Rachel Diebner, *McKinsey*

Some of the ways we are supporting clients with customer and prospect communications include:

- Shifting costly conference sponsorship investments into branded podcasts and video series or virtual roundtable events—which includes both tapping customers to advocate for the brand via their own success, as well as engaging influencers as guest speakers that can both impart expertise and act as a megaphone for the message in promotion
- Increasing executive touchpoints with customers and prospects—recognizing that a well-timed and thoughtful email, video message or even “Zoom bomb” can go a long way to help this audience feel valued and supported
- Putting aggressive product marketing campaigns on hold in favor of increased thought leadership—especially in industries where buying cycles have been slowed due to economic implications and for technologies still early in their hype cycles but where education is critical because coronavirus has hastened adoption

Focus on an Emerging Priority: Engaging Employees

While attracting and retaining top talent is often a top priority for organizations, internal communications has historically been a largely overlooked function. That is, until recently, when effective communication with employees became mission critical to ensuring business moved forward. Now more than ever, employees need and expect information, as well as social connection and emotional support, from their employer.

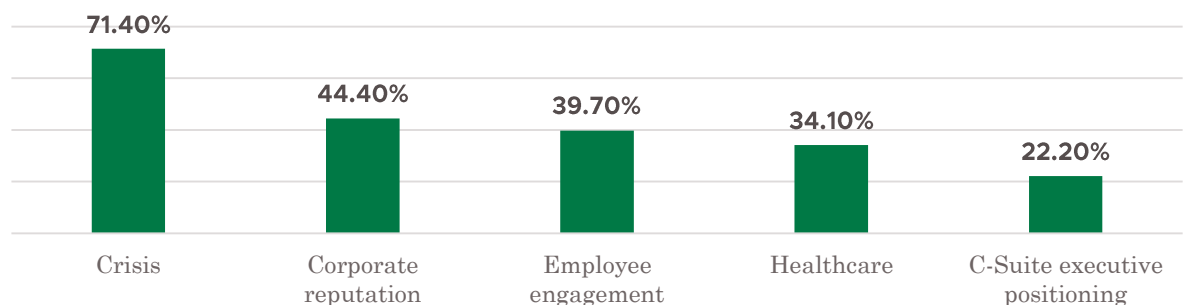
While the landscape may be changing, established best practices still hold true: messages must be aligned with business priorities, clearly communicated to key audiences and delivered across channels appropriate to your organizational structure and culture. That said, given the video-oriented environment many are now accustomed to, an email memo from the CEO may no longer suffice when employees expect to see and hear from leadership.

Among the timeliest topics for employees right now is reopening procedures: when can they expect to return to the office? How is the company following local guidelines? What can they expect the office setup to be? There is no one-size-fits all answer to these questions, nor is there a simple communications strategy. Identifying employee segments, ensuring a consistent cadence of and channels for updates and fostering connection are all critical.



Employee Engagement: A Top 3 Focus

While crisis communications and reputation management are always top of mind, the emergence of employee engagement struck us in a recent [PR Week Survey](#) on areas where agency clients are increasing efforts in response to COVID-19



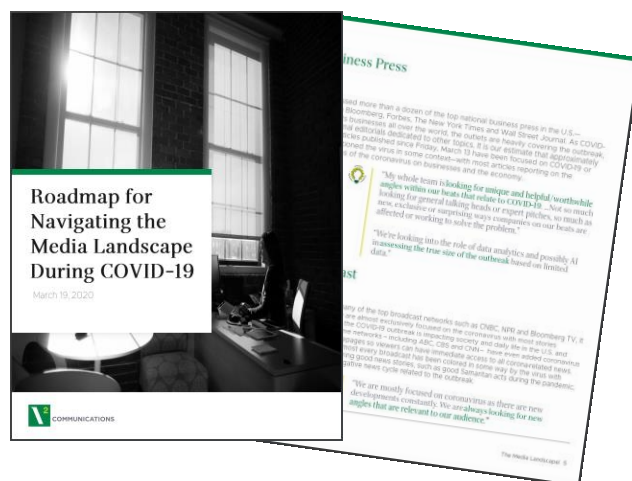
Stand Out with the Right Stories: Engaging Media & Influencers

When COVID-19 started to grip the nation in mid-March, we researched, analyzed and evaluated what the impact of that would be for media and influencer programs. What we found then was that the mainstream appetite for COVID-related news stories seemingly couldn't be satiated, while trade and vertical press coverage, unsurprisingly, tracked closely to the impact of the virus on the sector being covered.

Since our initial report, business and broadcast press continue to dedicate considerable ink and airtime to COVID-related coverage. One of our contacts at The Washington Post, as one example, let us know that even as of late April they had about 1,000 coronavirus stories in the works from about 350 different reporters. Those who used to cover beats like lifestyle, science and even food have, for now at least, been tasked with writing stories tied to the virus. Local outlets followed suite—with a particular focus on human interest stories in the relevant region and the impact of the pandemic on business, both around economic implications (e.g., layoffs) and plans for reopening.



Read our initial report:
[Roadmap for Navigating the Media Landscape During COVID-19](#)



The good news, on many fronts, is that the news cycle is starting to shift away from gloom and doom and toward what's next. While daily press conferences from local and national officials—and their trickledown impact on industry—still garner ample headlines, the business press has also shifted to stories about the “new normal” and to the trends involved with supporting the transition or a new way of life. In trade and vertical press, it is a true mix of “what's next” stories penned by both journalists and contributors, as well as the standard news a reader would have expected pre-2020: trend stories, corporate and executive features, news of the day, etc.

As a proof of that shift, **our analysis of a top healthcare vertical outlet found that less than 40% of the site's most popular stories had COVID-related angles.** A similar analysis of one of the **top emerging tech outlets found even less coverage focused on the pandemic**—though with slightly more than half of stories on tangential topics, such as work from home implications and industry events moving virtual.

Despite news media seeing a resurgence in recent months as citizens around the globe sought updates on the virus, the industry was not immune to layoffs. National outlets such as The Economist, Vice and Quartz all laid off more than 50 employees, while regional papers like The New York Post, **Tampa Bay Times and parent of the LA Times each let go ~10-15 staffers.** **Poynter Media keeps a running tab of layoffs, furloughs and shutdowns as a result of the coronavirus.**



What (Else) Do Key Audiences Want?

Interest in positive, feel-good stories is soaring. Sites dedicated to positive news saw skyrocketing traffic and several traditional news outlets have created their own feel-good properties. Consider:

- **2x+** - the number of Google searches for “good news,” the highest since the company began publishing search data in 2004
- **47%** - increase in on-site page views for Upworthy in March, compared to the previous month
- **2.54M** – subscribers to John Krasinki's Some Good News YouTube channel

As newsrooms continue to get smaller and reporters are increasingly pulled in multiple directions by their editors, it is more critical than ever that those on the front lines of pitching press understand aspects of the news stories journalists are covering now and figure out how to get them the information they need through their preferred channel of communication. Know this often starts with research and reading and is bolstered by having a solid working relationship so a journalist will answer your call to chat through a story idea or open your email because you have a history of offering compelling scoops. These types of relationships are particularly hard to foster and maintain when journalists are under extra pressure, but forging them should be a constant focus for both PR teams and executive spokespeople alike.

Some ways to stay engaged right now:

- **Align your angles to the issues of the day:** ensure that you're relevant to the focus of the journalists you want to engage and that the stories you tell align to their beats and article formats
- **Conduct remote interviews via video:** phone is fine, but facetime goes a long way in forging connections, even if when digital. In lieu of media tours that help cultivate long-term relationships, consider formats like Zoom and arm spokespeople with not only talking points, but guidance on non-verbal cues
- **Recognize—and account for—time constraints:** the journalists that historically replied to emails within a day or reported on news in a matter of hours may need more lead time due to shifting newsroom priorities
- **Subscribe to the outlets that matter most to your industry:** if you haven't already, gaining full access is a great way to closely follow all coverage while also supporting those who most closely cover your space



One Journalist's Reminder

“Please keep in mind: most news reporters are now COVID-19 reporters. We are lucky if we have a clear focus within the daily breaking news. We are receiving hundreds of pitches a day... And I'm not looking for sympathy! Just a little sense of what the reality of news reporting is right now.”

-Anne Mostue, Bloomberg Business (via Twitter)

Lessons Applied: Moving V2 Clients Forward

V2 has been fortunate to help some of the world's most disruptive brands share their stories to raise awareness, prompt action and cultivate champions. Here are just a few of the ways we've applied best practices from this and [our previous report](#) to seed key messages and engage key audiences that matter most to our clients.

Demonstrating How Remote Patient Management Solves Hospital Resource Constraints & Limits Spread of Infection

Overview: To best manage an influx of patients, US and UK hospitals sought one company's Remote Patient Management (RPM) platform to 1) ensure proper, continuous care for COVID-19 patients, 2) limit COVID-19 exposure to other hospital patients and employees and 3) appropriately allocate limited hospital resources.

Strategy: Mindful of the fact journalists were bombarded with sources for COVID-19-related stories, V2 knew it needed more than just an executive spokesperson to break through the noise. To that end, the team packaged client growth data with compelling customer stories to highlight the practical—and growing—value of RPM to healthcare providers; V2 also saw an opportunity to engage science reporters in addition to healthcare and tech journalists by highlighting how the data collected by RPM can enhance disease understanding and accelerate treatment. V2 devised a tangential campaign focused on the company's collaboration with a leading academic medical center to use data collected by the RPM platform for research.

Execution:

- Coordinated CEO intros to national and tech media to overview RPM applications and benefits during the pandemic
- Offered press customer spokespeople to validate the criticality of RPM during this crisis
- Developed a partner press release to explain how the data collected by the RPM platform can be used for COVID-19 research

Results Highlights

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Hospitals Monitor Some
Coronavirus Patients at Home

STAT+

Hospitals turn to remote monitoring
tools to free up beds for the sickest
coronavirus patients

VentureBeat

Current Health partners with the Mayo Clinic for
remote coronavirus patient monitoring

Showcasing a 3D Printing Company's Quick Pivot to Address PPE and Test Shortages

Overview: When critical equipment wasn't available, this 3D printing company activated designs for supplies in days and deployed them to be printed and distributed from customers and partners worldwide

Strategy: With many companies pitching in to solve for PPE and testing shortages, V2 sieged an opportunity to be part of a major news cycle, while still differentiating the brand via corporate profiles and thought leadership targeted at the business press.

Execution:

- Tapped partners and customers printing and distributing the design to tell our story
- Penned and placed CEO op-ed
- Engaged media across business, tech and 3D printing press to articulate many dynamics of story to differing audiences

Results Highlights



Markforged: 3D Printing Is The 'Killer App' To Re-Imagine Your Factory, Not Just Your Products



Private tech companies mobilize to address shortages for medical supplies, masks and sanitizer



Opinion: Here's how 3-D printing can help in the fight against the coronavirus

Creating a Resource Center to Foster Resiliency Among A University Community

Overview: A national university that recently introduced a satellite campus in Portland, ME, wanted to support the community during this uncertain time.

Strategy: With everyone struggling to make sense of the pandemic and an overwhelming amount of information out there, a single hub of the University's very best resources could serve prospective students, corporate partners and other community stakeholders alike—from how to be resilient to dealing with homeschooling while working and remote team management.

Landing Page

Navigating the COVID-19 Crisis

Navigating these times of uncertainty is challenging. To help, Northeastern University is making many of its resources available and easy to access for our partners and community. The Four Institute Resiliency Center is a central resource for organizations and individual members of our community to help everyone during these difficult times. This site will be updated each week with new content and serve as a growing reference library for the time. It is our hope that our partners across business, academia and the broader community will find these resources helpful and share them with their networks.



What to Expect

- Virtual courses, workshops, and other programming focused on building resilience and addressing the needs of the day.
- A mix of curated and original content and resources, developed by faculty, students across the Northeastern network and collaboratively with companies here in Maine.
- Free resources are a priority.
- Freely shared for a variety of audiences that the Four Institute supports and engages—including business and community leaders and employees, regional Northeastern alumni, prospective graduates of the college and university, and students, teachers and parents at the K-12 level through school-to-career models of learning.

Execution:

- Developed content calendar to map resources to audience needs as pandemic unfolded
- Crafted web and email copy for weekly content modules and featured faculty experts
- Ensured alignment with University-wide priorities, messaging and branding

Sample Weekly Email Metrics

>40% open rate
~4% click thru rate

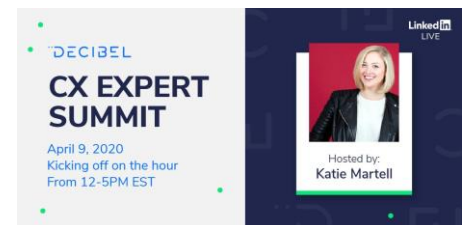
Filling the Gap Created by Cancelled Industry Events

Overview: When a marketing tech company's entire event strategy was cancelled by COVID-19, it needed a new way to attract new leads and cultivate existing ones.

Strategy: On the heels of the biggest industry conference of the year getting cancelled on short notice, V2 sprang into action to line up a compelling half-day of replacement programming to amplify the company's vision and expertise in digital customer experience to would-have-been conference attendees.

Execution:

- Concepted the CX Expert Summit, a half day of LinkedIn livestream sessions during when the main event would have happened
- Tapped industry influencer Katie Martell to host the event and lined up a series of influencers to discuss varying facets of customer experience in live, 30-minute sessions
- Parlayed event's success into regular webinar series to optimize lead capture



5 sessions livestreamed
in a half day

550k+ total followers
across participating
influencers' Twitter and
LinkedIn channels

6000+ views within 24
hours

Showcasing How Automation Can Enhance Productivity During- and Post-COVID-19

Overview: As organizations across industries faced new business pressures and challenges as a result of COVID-19, one software company helped customers quickly create automations that could effectively manage new and evolving processes.

Strategy: Amid unprecedented disruption, V2 identified continuity as a key theme of interest to federal and business leaders reading top-tier press. To help journalists fulfill that need, V2 identified customer stories that showcased how automation had helped maintain business and government continuity amid internal and external change. Practical applications were complemented by the client's vision via thought leadership on the value of automation in an increasingly digital world.

Execution:

- Offered customer stories exclusively to top-tier journalists to showcase how automation is currently being used to swiftly manage new demands
- Leveraged analyst reports on the rise of automation in a post-COVID world to re-engage media and offer executive perspective on evolving market needs and opportunities
- Penned and placed bylines on how automation can accelerate digital transformation efforts

Results Highlights

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Businesses Expected to Lean on Automation for Recovery

VentureBeat

RPA is helping health systems and governments respond to the coronavirus

AXIOS

The next wave of job automation will be virtual



See More Highlights

V2 has driven considerable coverage for clients for their COVID-19 campaigns. Click on the image to view the video of our results:



PR During COVID:
Relevance, Relationships
and Perseverance

How V2 Can Help

We recognize both organizations and the individuals driving marketing and communications within them are grappling with a totally new set of challenges and needs right now. Status quo communications programs won't suffice. We have tailored a series of offerings to help organizations deliver better outcomes when communicating with and across key audiences.

V2 Virtual View

Our **virtual presentation training** ensures the transition to video formats doesn't get in the way of delivering results. Led by V2's resident public speaking expert [Elise Simard](#), these custom sessions arm spokespeople, executives and sales teams, among others, with the techniques they need to "present" well, build rapport and motivate audiences to act when in person isn't possible.

Right-Now Narrative Workshop

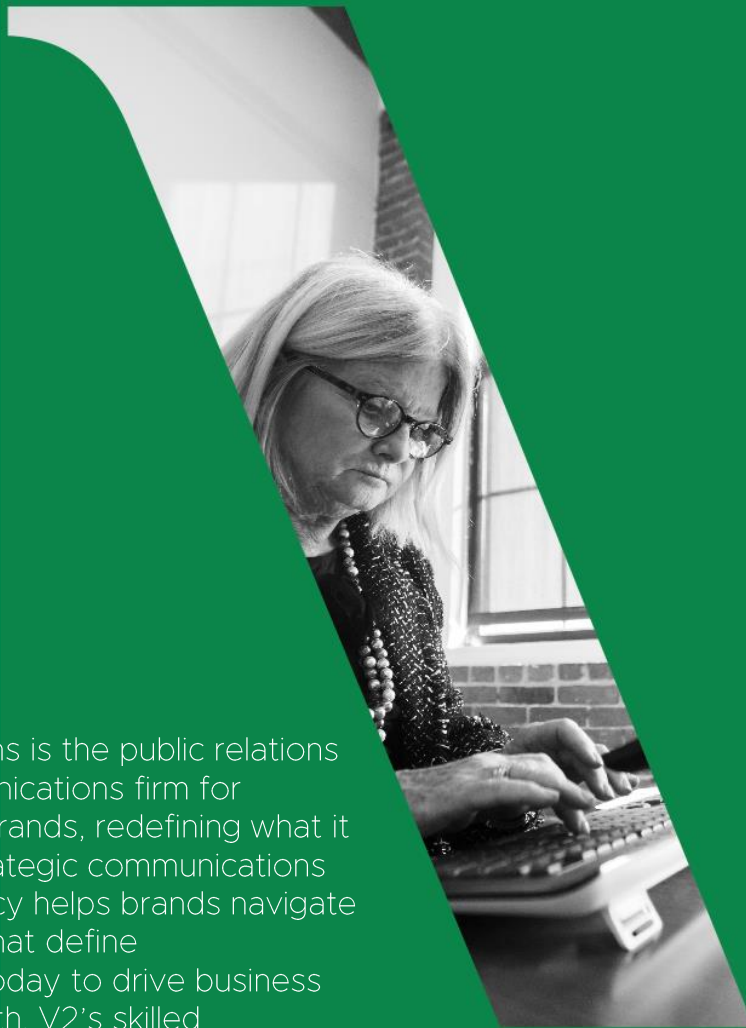
This **tailored take on our popular storyline session** takes the proven formulas we've developed for drawing out differentiated narratives and supporting angles and applies them through the lens of the current media and market landscape. The output is a set of compelling story angles to fuel integrated marketing communications campaigns that are mindful of the dynamics at hand without losing sight of your value proposition and unique points of view.

Back to Work Communications Program

Employee concerns and issues are some of the most significant considerations for businesses looking for continuity and growth right now. V2 can step in to support **internal communications** for our clients during this critical time, working with senior leaders, HR and legal to provide communication strategy and execution.



V2



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.

www.v2comms.com

Digital Studio

Our **podcast, video series and livestream solutions** fill the gap left by cancelled conferences and roadshows. From conception and influencer “casting” to production and distribution, V2’s creative team can bring your thought leadership, content assets and expertise to life in the virtual formats audiences are engaging in now.

Turnkey Creative Content

Our **creative content services** enables brands to quickly engage experienced writers and turn up the volume of material that will fuel demand gen and thought leadership channels. From blogs and bylined articles, to whitepapers, case studies and research reports, V2’s wordsmiths translate key messages into engagement.

