Right Message.
Right People.
Right Time.

Best Practices for Communicating

During COVID-19

ONSOLVE

Today, right now, we face a pandemic, the severity of which hasn't been seen in over a hundred years. Business disruption is widespread, affecting our supply chains and our customers. Deliveries have been stopped. Orders aren't fulfilled. Our workers are staying home.

But one thing hasn't been disrupted: the channels over which we communicate. We can still reach out to our entire universe — staff, customers, shareholders and suppliers — and maintain relevant communication with them while we await the return to normal.

Business communication during the COVID-19 crisis focuses on these core missions:

✓ Keep employees informed about status, changes, and policies and procedures that may shift as your business struggles to maintain continuity.

✓ Open a solid communications channel with your suppliers that helps ensure you get back to full speed as soon as the lockdown is lifted.

✓ Assure shareholders that you're taking all the right steps to ensure you return to business as usual as quickly as possible.

✓ Maintain customer attention and loyalty: a paramount goal.

You may have been fully prepared for the pandemic, or (as is the case with many companies worldwide), you may have been caught — to one degree or another — flatfooted. Either way, now that the pandemic is upon us, workers have been sent home, our supply chains have been cut and our shareholders are troubled, we want to share some best practices for establishing and maintaining quality communications with them all.

01

Ensure Every Employee Is Ready to Roll

In many cases, you're asking your people to do things they've never done before. If you hadn't trained them before the crisis hit, they may be still struggling with basic things like learning conferencing tools, home computers that can't run your remote-work software, or simply finding ways to stay focused while at home. Despite the fact that most workers are at home now, not everyone is likely to use all the available resources and productivity tools. It's not too late to reach out to them, with general notifications, to point them to resources you provide that can help them get up to speed.
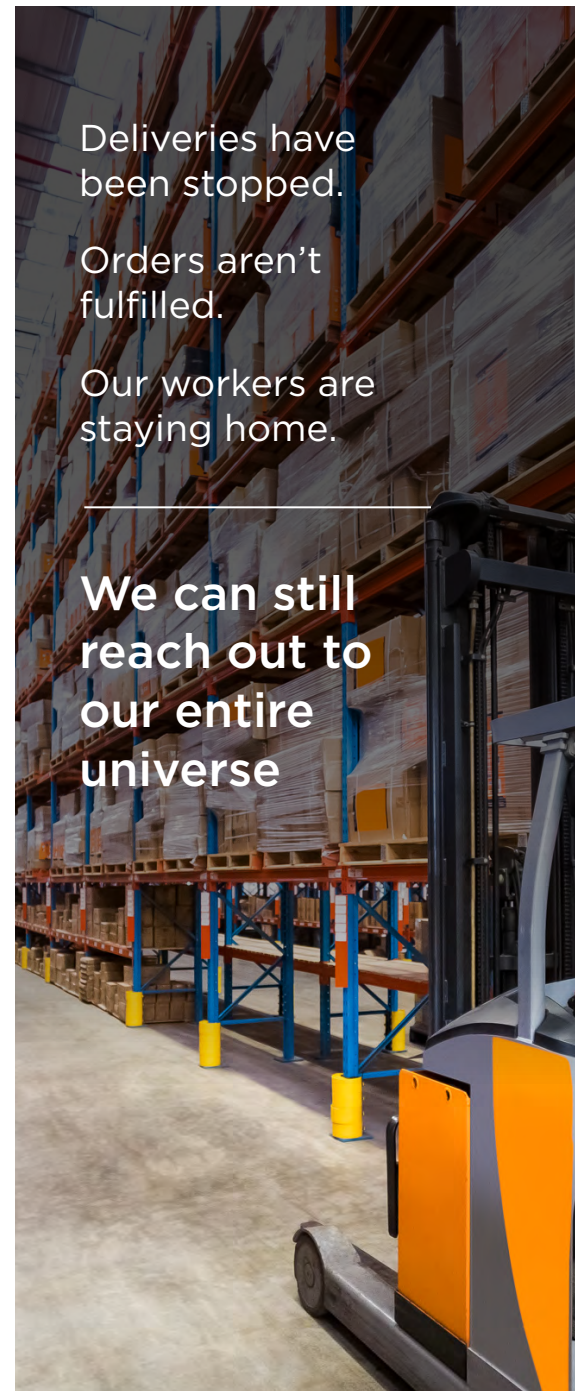
Deliveries have been stopped.

Orders aren't fulfilled.

Our workers are staying home.

We can still reach out to our entire universe

02

Listen as Well as Talk

Communication is not just an outbound thing. Establish channels where your workers can query you and where they can formally interact with colleagues (think Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram). And keep in mind that there will be significant repetition in inbound queries. You can predict questions about return-to-work dates, benefits, procedures and more. (You've already very likely received a lot of them, so you have a good starting point.) Create canned, FAQ-like answers to common questions that you can send without writing anything from scratch.

To learn more about questions employees ask most frequently, see our article titled Seven Questions Your Employees Are Asking Through — a Pandemic Crisis.

03

Who Sees What? Classifying Messages

Never find yourself in the midst of a pandemic response crisis having to ask, "who should this message go to?" Establish a message matrix, identifying which people, or which roles within the organization, receive which categories of communication. Think along the lines of "Urgent, Actionable, Informational."

Along with that, as we describe in our whitepaper titled COVID-19: Get Ready for the Next Wave Now, we propose classifying and color-coding alerts and notifications by severity. These can be put in bins that might include "Eyes Only," "Management Alerts," "General Messages" and more.

04

Create Message Templates for Every Communication Type and Every Media Platform

When you're in a pandemic, there's no time to create ad hoc, new message formats each time a new alert or notification has to be sent. Instead, right now, if you haven't already, create message templates: by type of message, by recipient type, and by platform, by topic and more. And create the content for reusability. The subject line of an email can become a tweet; the lead paragraph, a Facebook post.

05

Stay in Touch with Shareholders

COVID-19 threatens your market capitalization as shareholders shrink their portfolios. One of your communications jobs is to maintain investor confidence in your business. Post information that provides assurance that you're shepherding your company intelligently during the crisis. If your business remains solid during the shutdown, let them know. If you're planning on implementing new procedures to help you stay strong, let them know that too. This becomes even more critical if a member of senior leadership or the C Suite becomes infected.

06

And with Suppliers

Stay in regular touch with your suppliers too, to let them know about your status and to learn theirs. Part of this is strategic: planning together to ramp up again after the quarantine lifts. But it's also to gauge your providers' business health continually. If it looks like they're struggling, or will struggle to regain their footing, that's a bright yellow flag to establish different vendor relationships.

"Never find yourself in the midst of a pandemic response crisis having to ask, 'who should this message go to?'"

07

And Especially with Customers

How often you reach out to your customers depends on the business you're in. Retail businesses may want to touch base occasionally to provide health and wellness tips. They may also want to offer specials, provide coupons and maybe even change delivery fee policies to stimulate sales. For B2B companies, the relationship itself is more important, as your customers interact with you throughout the life of the product. Here, let them know you're stable, still able to provide support services, and that you're working hard to be ready to hit the bricks running at crisis end.

08

Become a Point of Truth

Rumors can spread almost as quickly as a virus. Whisperings about furloughs, loss of benefits and other anxiety-inducing topics can damage morale and crush already hobbled productivity. Make sure you maintain up-to-date company information about changes in benefits, furloughs, links to government assistance and more.

09

Don't Ignore the Media

Ready yourselves for the media attention that you may receive. This will impact public companies and market leaders, particularly. Prepare, if you haven't already, message briefing sheets so that everyone in your organization knows how to answer questions according to "the company line" on business status, return to work and other critical topics.

10

Don't Overdo It

Alerts and notifications are important tools. Don't diminish that importance by overloading your staff, customers, vendors and shareholders with non-critical information. You're not a news feed, or an alternative government resource, or a social media pal. You're a voice of stability and truth through the crisis. If you send too much, you risk becoming just more noise.

Just the Start

These best practices, culled from our own experience, from the CDC and OSHA, and private organizations as well are the tip of an iceberg of communications best practices for you to follow. We hope they provide you a starting point, validate your thinking and provide new insights into how to communicate with your business universe during the shutdown.

As always, feel free to reach out to us to talk about how OnSolve solutions can be a cornerstone of your communications strategy during COVID-19.

For more information, take a look at these sites and documents:

This is a checklist of a range of topics, including communications, from HHS and CDC.
https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/pdf/businesschecklist.pdf

Customer data analysis company Gainsight offers some insight of their own.
https://www.gainsight.com/blog/5-best-practices-for-crisis-communications-during-covid-19/

Here's Entrepreneur magazine's take on communications.
https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/345759

The Harvard Business Review weighs in on the topic:
https://hbr.org/2020/03/communicating-through-the-coronavirus-crisis

Finally, please look at our thoughts on response management during a crisis.
https://www.onsolve.com/blog/best-practices-for-managing-response-to-an-outbreak/

Build a Stronger Communications Strategy with OnSolve

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About OnSolve

OnSolve delivers critical event management solutions designed to help enterprises, organizations and agencies of all sizes create the most successful outcomes when critical events occur. The OnSolve Platform for Critical Event Management™ combines leading risk intelligence, critical communications and incident management into one SaaS-based global portfolio. Our AI-powered platform is purpose-built to deliver fast, relevant and actionable intelligence, enable vital communications and allow response teams to react calmly and confidently.

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