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# Adapting How We Communicate And The Way We Do Business During A Crisis



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Leadership

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GETTY

Sad piano music plays. Images of empty streets fill the screen. A voice filled with gravitas begins to speak to us about “these unprecedented times” and “times of uncertainty.” The voice talks about finding “the new normal” without actually defining what that means.

For the first couple of months of the Covid-19 pandemic, these sounds and images reminded us that the ongoing pandemic was (and still is) a human tragedy, and it is important to not lose sight of that. However, we were all saying the same thing, and I don’t think we needed to do that.

## A Different Approach

For some of us not on the front lines but still continuing to work, our jobs have changed. Marketing professionals have faced a particular challenge this year as companies that managed to keep their metaphorical doors open during the early months of the pandemic needed to remind their audiences that they were here and communicate what they could do to help. Unfortunately, much of the messaging ventured into trite territory. How do we avoid that?

The Cambridge Dictionary defines “trite” as “expressed too often to be interesting or seem sincere.” One clever YouTube user called Microsoft Sam even put together a [compilation](#) called “Every Covid-19 Commercial is Exactly the Same,” which exemplifies this challenge. (Remember back in March when your inbox was flooded with emails from the CEO of every company from which you’ve ever made a purchase?)

We’ve all had similar messages to share. They are important and sincere, but we need to start finding a unique way to express them.

### **Break It Down**

We can begin by breaking down our message into parts, starting with how we acknowledge the situation and how we validate the feelings of our audience. Overused phrases like “unprecedented times” and “times of uncertainty” eventually lose their meaning or feeling of sincerity (they become trite). You can regain the meaning by finding another way to say it.

In one of my firm’s earlier online ads, we began by reminding people that “today, we are all going about things a little differently” and that “we are concerned about the future.” Statements like these acknowledge that life is no longer the same as it was and that we don’t know what the future will bring. They acknowledge this uncertainty without falling back on stale language.

### **New Words, Same Message**

We need to rethink how we express our messages. It could be as simple as taking now commonly used words, such as “unprecedented,” and looking for other words that mean the same thing (“extraordinary,” “remarkable,” “unusual”).

Doing so can take:

“In these unprecedented times, it’s important to find a new normal.”

And turn it into:

“Life is taking some unusual turns at the moment, and we need to regain some balance.”

These two sentences don’t sound the same, but they both express the same meaning and feeling.

### **Business As Usual?**

In addition to rethinking the ways in which we communicate, we also have to look at how we operate. Businesses that have continued operating have only been able to do so because they were essential to their clients, but not all businesses or industries are the same. We can continue to remind clients that we are here for them, but we have to evolve so that we can do more.

A great example is when restaurants had to suspend dine-in service but could continue to operate by offering takeout and delivery. Restaurants that had always offered these options were able to keep going with minimal impact, but those that had never offered

them needed to either adapt or fail. Those that adapted did so with a bang — some going so far as to offer cocktails to go (an upscale Chinese restaurant in my neighborhood offers mai tais in mason jars).

My own firm is an investment firm, which has always been a deeply personal business. The relationship between a client and their financial professional is built on trust, which is difficult to build at a distance. By adapting to the current environment and embracing new technology, we can continue to support clients with the same level of service as before. Not knowing how long this situation is going to last, we've also developed a new service that provides a free consultation to those concerned about their financial situations (our own mai tai in a mason jar).

### Planning For The Future

There's no way to know how long this pandemic will last. We need to keep communicating and operating — and adapting the ways we do both. This is what will see us through to the other side of this crisis, and this is what will help us come out stronger.

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