

What Does Life Look Like for PR Post-COVID?

As I considered the topic for this article, I had assumed that by the start of the new year, the pandemic would be in our rearview mirror for the most part. That is not proving to be the case, although it seems the worst may be behind us.

At the onset of the pandemic, when the lockdowns began and firms moved to remote working, several of my clients reduced their PR and communications programs. However, as we began to emerge from lockdown and remote working proved to be just as productive as working from the office, many law firms found themselves busier than ever. Firms started ramping their PR programs back up to promote all the COVID-related work they were doing.

There was no shortage of COVID-related PR opportunities having an impact on practice groups across the board, from real estate to bankruptcy to employment and more. They discussed topics such as whether to require your employees to be tested and how to deal with investigations into your use of Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. This wave started in 2020 and continued well into 2021.

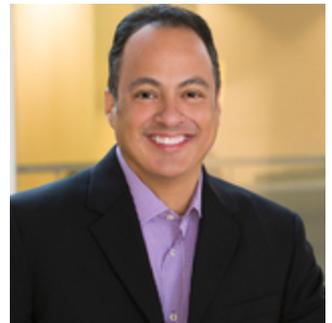
Once the pandemic does finally fade from our lives, what will the new normal for legal PR look like?

The New Normal

I believe the biggest challenge will be to preserve the compassion that many companies exhibited during the pandemic. Many firms took actions during the pandemic that made people start to embrace the idea that a company can have a soul. Add to this the many social justice initiatives that arose from the murder of George Floyd. The perception of compassion is essential to building and maintaining the reputation of a firm. It becomes even more critical in today's competitive environment for talent recruitment and retention.

All industries have been shocked into taking crisis communications seriously, and this will become a more mainstream requirement for most businesses. If you have a crisis communications plan in place, make sure to review and update annually. And if you don't have a plan in place, then you should not waste time before creating one.

The pandemic accelerated the advancements of technology and its integration into our daily lives. Social media will continue to play a pivotal role in keeping people connected. According to Business Insider, between 46 percent and 51 percent of U.S. adults began using social media more at the outset of the pandemic. Therefore, it is now important to consider brand placement and communication. Having an adaptable and diverse



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communication strategy incorporating social media, media outreach and various media channels is critical to your PR campaign's success.

It's also important not to forget about internal communications. This was crucial during the pandemic when it became necessary to stay connected to a workforce that was working remotely. While some may be eager to get back to the office, others now prefer it and will continue to prefer it working virtually. As we begin to return to the office, it's important to think about whether employee groups may have a harder time with returning to traditional ways to work, just as they did in shifting to a remote work environment at the pandemic's start. Working remotely will continue for a great number of employees into the foreseeable future.

Whatever the path, internal communication will be a key ingredient in fostering either a smooth, successful return to the office or a successful remote working dynamic. An effective internal communications program will be important in keeping a firm's culture intact.

Media Relations After COVID

On the tactical side, I don't see a large decrease in COVID-related stories moving into 2022. Many issues, such as vaccine mandates and insurance coverage disputes over COVID-related claims, will continue to linger long after the pandemic finally goes away or turns into a nuisance with little impact on everyday life.

That said, law firms still must stay in front of many trending topics or risk getting left behind. A slew of acronyms will be hot business topics next year, including NFTs (non-fungible tokens), SPAC (special purpose acquisition company) and PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances). And as the legalization of cannabis continues to spread across the country, it will continue permeating many aspects of business, such as employment and banking.

For many publications across the globe, media resources have been overwhelmed by covering COVID-19 and they are still playing catch-up. Therefore, they may not have time to get to every story they would like to cover. It's important to remember that media relations is not synonymous with public relations. Media coverage is only one tactic in a wide array of initiatives that PR firms can offer. Firms can start to amass a solid and engaged following by creating compelling content throughout social media channels.

Stay Flexible

Public relations, like countless other industries, has undergone major changes throughout the pandemic, which is why it's important that PR professionals approach our dynamic landscape with an open mind and the ability to adapt thoughtfully for and in the new year.

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