



brand strategy  
brand content  
brand communications

# surviving and thriving in a post-pandemic world

A Communicator's Playbook  
Revised January 2021

Learn about the 100-Day COVID-19  
Communicator's Reset Plan





# introduction

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*We developed this resource for our partners and colleagues in the early months of the pandemic as COVID-19 infiltrated the United States and we endured an unprecedented nationwide shutdown. As we turned the page on 2020 and found the first chapters of 2021 to be fraught with the same narrative with new twists and turns—the foundation and best practices of strategic communications remain unchanged.*

*Effective communications are as vital as ever. Whether communicating about shutdowns and social distancing or messaging about vaccines and returning to work, this playbook and reset plan will serve as a helpful guide.*

The COVID-19 pandemic is life-altering and world-changing. And its effects are not yet fully known.

Change is uncomfortable and unsettling, and perpetually hearing terms like “uncharted territory” does little to settle nerves.

Strategic communicators should view uncharted territory as unrealized potential.

Few businesses included a “global pandemic scenario” in their crisis communications plans. However, good communicators understand that the foundational tenets of strategic communications still apply.

**Vehr Communications’ approach to every challenge and opportunity follows a disciplined, three-phase process.**

We applied this process to build this **Communicator’s Playbook**. It addresses broad topics and offers questions intended to ignite discussion, challenge conventions and remind business leaders that simply “picking up where they left off” is not an option. The Playbook is intended to prompt forward-looking discussions.

You can also learn about a **100-Day COVID-19 Communicator’s Reset Plan** designed to translate long-term planning into actionable strategies and tactics that focus on a business’s most pressing needs. It resets communications, whether tackling new challenges, maximizing revealed opportunities or discovering an organization’s new normal. Vehr is helping businesses bring clarity to complexity as the effects of COVID-19 continue to change the world around them.

Disruption always presents opportunity. How will you find new opportunities for your brand?

## 1 Think Brand Strategy

Informed by key insights; market and competitor analysis; and data and analytics to identify the who, what, when, where and how behind strategic communications programs.

## 2 Create Brand Content

Developed with passion, deep understanding, empathy and expertise to create narratives, assets and programs to effectively connect with key audiences.

## 3 Engage Brand Communications

Implemented, delivered and measured across paid, earned, shared and owned channels to engage the right people with the right message at just the right time.

# think: brand strategy

**Informed by key insights; market and competitor analysis; and data and analytics to identify the who, what, when, where and how behind strategic communications programs.**

Businesses often are judged on the effectiveness of their communications output, yet it's the input, planning and positioning — the behind-the-scenes work — that determines success or failure. As businesses envision their emergence from the pandemic, they must gain a fresh, 360-degree view of their post-COVID-19 reality by:

- Reviewing company policies and protocols to ensure relevance, compliance and sensitivity.
- Gathering employee insights to identify engagement opportunities, concerns, outages.
- Conducting a post-COVID-19 SWOT analysis to assess internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats revealed during the pandemic.
- Assessing their brand reputation, value proposition and promise.
- Conducting a market assessment (industry sector and/or geographic region).
- Observing changing behaviors, attitudes and needs of target audiences.
- Reviewing the competitive landscape to identify changes and opportunities.
- Noting status changes and challenges faced with suppliers, vendors and partners.
- Revisiting crisis plans to capture the learnings, and any required adjustments, from COVID-19.

Finally, businesses need to dust off their 2020 strategic communications plans and ask some hard questions. All communications strategies and tactics should be assessed for their ability to support and advance the priorities of the business.

## Phase 1 Sample Questions

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Have our business objectives changed?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Are new competitors emerging? How do we solidify our position?                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> If yes, how have those changes impacted our communications objectives?            | <input type="checkbox"/> How has COVID-19 affected employee culture, morale and engagement?                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How are customers' needs, buying habits and expectations changing?                | <input type="checkbox"/> Do we have the right partners, suppliers and employees for the opportunities ahead?    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> How are we addressing an even greater focus on a digital-first consumer approach? | <input type="checkbox"/> How has COVID-19 affected our reputation and our stakeholder relationships?            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are new customer opportunities emerging from COVID-19?                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Is our brand still relevant?   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Which competitors are thriving? Which are not? What can we learn?                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Were our crisis policies and procedures sufficient? What revisions do we need to make? |

## create: brand content

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**Developed with passion, deep understanding, empathy and expertise to create narratives, assets and programs to connect effectively with key audiences.**

Communications have always been critical to business success, especially in times of change and uncertainty. But now, a business's actions, communications and tone become even more important. As the virus made its way to the U.S. and business, community and political leaders began to sit up and take notice, advertising began to shift. Advertising no longer depicted cheering crowds, dining in restaurants or grandparents getting hugs from grandchildren. Brands felt comfortable only honoring front-line heroes and pushing out reassuring messages like, "We're in this together."

As businesses look to tomorrow, they must determine what role they should play in this new phase of the pandemic by:

- Addressing the concerns of target audiences, be they employees, customers, shareholders, community partners, etc.
- Understanding and meeting the expectations audiences have for the business and brand and its products and services.
- Exploring the opportunities and areas in which the business and/or its leadership can shine, lead and pioneer.

### Phase 2 Sample Questions

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do brand narratives, vision and purpose need to be revised?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Do we have the right content format for each audience?                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are we using an appropriate tone?  | <input type="checkbox"/> Which content do we need to retire or revise?                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do the visuals we use reflect today's COVID-19 reality?  | <input type="checkbox"/> What new content do we need to develop?                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does our content address the information needs of our audiences? Can we quickly adapt our content to address emerging information needs? | <input type="checkbox"/> Are we thinking creatively and pushing boundaries to capture attention? |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> How are we using calls-to-action to drive behavior?                     |

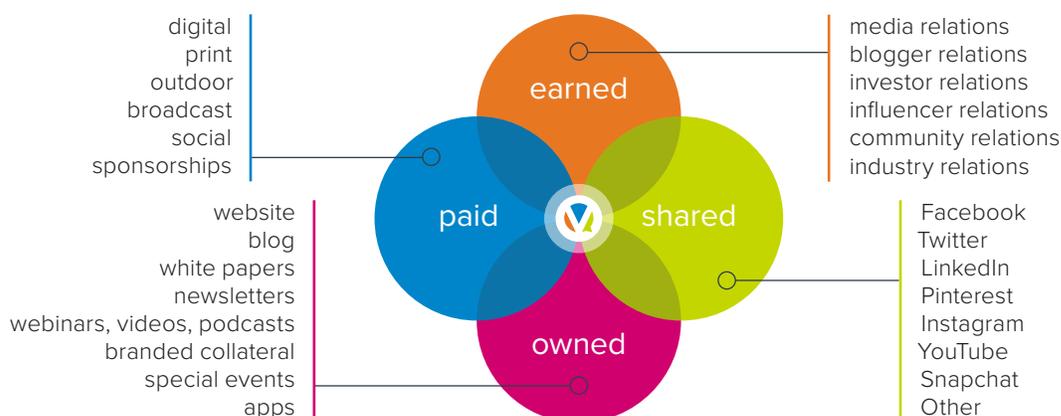
## engage: brand communications

**Implemented, delivered and measured across paid, earned, shared and owned channels to engage the right people with the right message at just the right time.**

Vehr recommends applying the paid, earned, shared and owned (PESO) model to maximize outreach for audience engagement and to ensure an integrated approach to all advertising, marketing and communications initiatives. The PESO model (shown below) evaluates audiences, desired engagements, communications channels, opportunities and resources against a brand's ability to satisfy overarching business and communications objectives.

With the foundation built, the strategy defined and the positioning in place, the business engages all audiences—internal and external—that matter to its future. And, as with pre-pandemic communications, the business must monitor efforts, measure effectiveness and adjust, as necessary.

### Paid, Earned, Shared and Owned: Integration in Today's Multi-Channelled World



#### Phase 3 Sample Questions

- Do we have the right paid vs. organic media mix?
- Do in-person sponsorships and events need to be reimagined, postponed or canceled?
- Do current media plans still make sense?
- Have we adapted to the apps, websites or social media channels audiences are using now?
- Are there new influencers in our industry or product category?
- Does our website work for increasingly digital audiences?
- How do audiences find us today?
- How are we monitoring audience conversations about our business and brands?
- How are we measuring our marketing and responding to data?



# 100-day COVID-19 communicator's reset plan

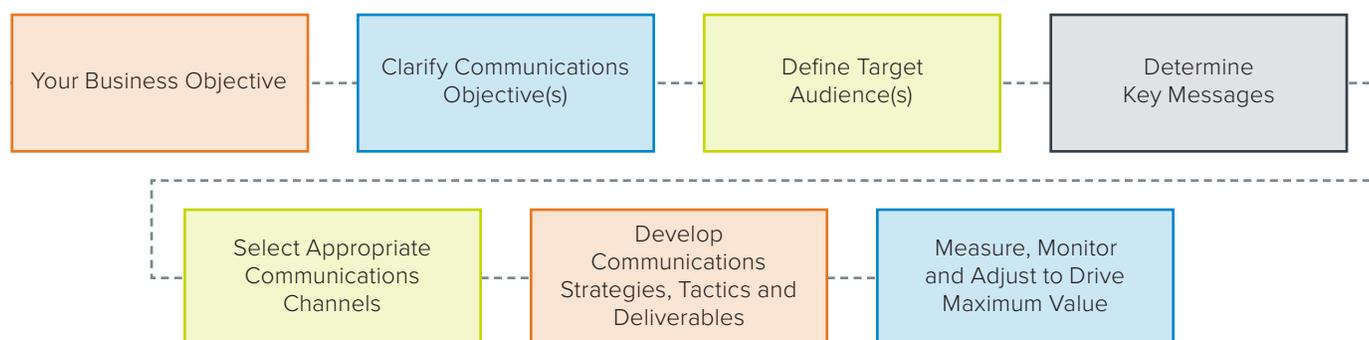
As indicated earlier, strategic communicators should view the uncharted territory handed to us by the COVID-19 pandemic as unrealized potential.

Vehr is working with businesses to do just that ... to harness post-COVID-19 learnings to effectively position or reposition brands and engage or re-engage their key audiences to increase their chances to win.

In the **100-Day COVID-19 Communicator's Reset Plan**, we map out communications strategies and tactics for development and implementation over 100 days.

We will apply insights gleaned through this Communicator's Playbook to understand what success looks like for your organization when you get to your new normal.

The deliverable will be a customized 100-day reset plan that begins with your business and communications objectives. It follows a disciplined process (below) to assess positioning strategies and engagement opportunities, establish team accountabilities and incorporate reporting mechanisms to garner actionable insights.



Your reset plan could address a myriad of areas, including, but certainly not limited to, the following:

- Repositioning your brand and/or its expression.
- Elevating senior company officers as industry and community leaders.
- Revisiting your product or service differentiators in the marketplace.
- Enhancing customer or employee engagement opportunities.
- Revising crisis communications scenarios, protocols and plans.
- Developing new internal tools and resources or updating policy handbooks.

Our **100-Day COVID-19 Communicator's Reset Plan** can help you address the challenges and maximize the opportunities that lie ahead.

Remember, great companies find opportunities in disruption. Let us help you do that for your brand.



Learn how we can support your business reset. Contact Stacy Delk, Vice President of Client Services and Counselor ([sdelk@vehrcommunications.com](mailto:sdelk@vehrcommunications.com)) and we'll get started.



## additional resources

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COVID-19 will be documented in history books. But, for brands, whether b2b or b2c, for profit or nonprofit, its impact is felt today. An event of this magnitude may require extensive resources and external perspectives and guidance not often sought by a business.

In addition to strategic communications support to help your business lead through a post-pandemic world, Vehr Communications is an integrated agency that provides a full spectrum of services, including:

- Discovery and research
- Strategic planning
- Brand audit and positioning
- Content strategy and development
- Corporate communications (internal and external)
- Creative services
- Issues and crisis management
- Digital and social media strategy and management
- Marketing and advertising strategy
- Special events and sponsorship
- Media relations

Vehr also is a leading member of IPREX, a global network of 70 agencies with more than 1,600 professional staff members spanning 121 cities in 26 countries around the world. Collectively, our team serves some of the world's leading brands. We access IPREX partner agencies for specialized services, in-market knowledge and industry expertise. IPREX helps us to implement programs virtually anywhere in the world.

For additional insights about strategic communications related to COVID-19, visit **our blog**.

Please stay healthy and safe.

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