

# **Pandemic Communications and Contingency Planning Module**

## **Executive Summary**

### **The Covid-19 Pandemic: Current State**

In less than five months, the Coronavirus pandemic has already taken a horrific and lasting toll on human life and the world economy. And while the United States and most countries around the world cautiously attempt to salvage their economies and the spread has slowed, but only sporadically, the Centers for Disease Control has already predicted a second wave will strike later this year, compounded by seasonal influenza, and will be even more voracious and lethal than what we've already witnessed and are still struggling with.

This continued onslaught – complicated by myths and misinformation, petty politics, and many still unanswered questions around this novel pathogen – all point to the crucial need for corporations and other organizations to be able to provide their key stakeholders with accurate and credible information related to personal health precautions, myriad operational complications created by disrupted supply chains, and workforces that are being terminated, furloughed or made remote out of necessity.

The nearly incomprehensible statistics of more than 5.5 million individuals infected and 350,000 deaths worldwide – and with the U.S. alone fast approaching 100,000 lives lost – will already be obsolete by the time you read this. And those data points will continue to grow exponentially each and every day for the foreseeable future.

Nearly every responsible organization has been focused on communicating with their employees, customers, suppliers and the communities in which they operate in the best manner possible. Most have had to learn and adjust along the way given the rapid spread of Covid-19 and are undoubtedly gearing up for what's to come in the next six months – especially given the great toll that will inevitably occur as society seeks to salvage livelihoods and gain back some sense of normalcy.

## **Preparing for the Near Future ... and Beyond**

In terms of targeted communications during these times of crisis, most large and multinational corporation are inherently well prepared and resourced to do a good job in monitoring current news and events, planning the key focus areas of their briefs, and consistently relaying that information to leadership and frontline employees over a long period of time. Perhaps most important is being better prepared to communicate critical advisories tied to any number of contingencies that could occur.

Conversely, the very size and scope of these multinational organizations require even more diligence to be able to serve as a dependable source of information given the wide (and perhaps conflicting) range of information and directives that employees are receiving from their respective state governments, health agencies and media.

And certainly with smaller and mid-sized organizations, there is an even greater need for the tools and guidance necessary to communicate with internal and external stakeholders in the most efficient and effective manner.

## A Proven Communications Model

In 2009, when the H1N1/Swine Flu pathogen struck, I was Director of Corporate Communications for United Airlines and was tasked, along with my colleague, to develop and co-direct a company-wide system to monitor up to date news and health directives, validate that information, conduct two conference calls every day with senior leadership and key country managers, and provide briefs to the station and domicile managers for distribution to all 60,000 employees around the world.

We had the luxury of a large budget, a full team of researchers and content writers, operational experts, medical staff, and regional intelligence from airport managers and administrators in 29 countries. And we did that for 12 to 14 hours a day for more than 4 months. (Teams in Europe and the Asia-Pacific would continue monitoring customer and employee health data, and we would have the latest reports by the time we woke up to then compile and send out the first brief to senior leadership.)

**Fast forward, I was recently brought in as of counsel to assist another PR firm help its client – an operator of 15 acute-care nursing facilities in Texas – to strategize, develop and implement a robust and dependable system to communicate with its highly vulnerable residents, family members, employees, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and the respective local governments and communities.**

The goal was to help the corporate and local management teams plan and be fully prepared to quickly disseminate updates and advisories – both as a matter of course and, importantly, if/when the primary contingency risks occurred. In this client’s case, they needed to prepare for (A) if a resident or employee was suspected to be exposed to the virus and (B) if anyone in the same two groups tested positive. ***The core module was delivered to the client on a Saturday and was up and running on Monday.***

## Module and Protocol Options

### Option A: Turnkey Module and Toolkit

- ◆ Includes the core template and detailed schematic outlining the timing and order of disseminating information regarding the current or secondary Covid-19 spread, potential effects on the user's operations and supply chain, and informational updates and advisories around suspected and confirmed exposure or infection among various workforce groups, particularly sales personnel, technical field staff and other mobile or remote employee groups.
- ◆ Additional recommendations regarding existing and/or inexpensive digital technologies and other tools that can be easily assembled and put in place to create a tailored system in-house.
- ◆ Also includes 1 or 2 consultations early in the implementation process to provide additional assistance with outstanding questions, general troubleshooting and strategies, and approaches related to risks and exposures specific to the company or its industry in general.

Cost: **\$1,500.00**

## **Option B: Core Module and Detailed Operational Guidance**

- ◆ Includes all components within the core module and toolkit outlined above, plus a more in-depth consultation with the team members who will be responsible for executing and staffing the system to ensure the monitoring, two-way information flow and verifications occur in the most efficient, effective and credible manner. This can be conducted either in a half-day meeting if the company wishes to pay for travel expenses or can be accomplished via videoconference.

Cost: **\$2,000.00**

## **Option C: Module, Protocols and Contingency Planning/Counsel**

- ◆ Includes all components and the added tutorial outlined in Option B, plus assistance with mapping all potential contingencies related to employee health, sourcing/operational issues, and other potential issues that would then require specific and timely communications.
- ◆ Also Includes researching and writing the core standby statement, including additional consultation around the identified contingencies. All press statements, start of shift briefings, customer communiques, telephone scripts, etc., can be written by the client's team once the core statement is locked down and approved by management and legal counsel.

Cost: **\$3,000.00\***

## Option C (cont'd)

*\*At minimum as total fees will depend on the number of management interviews, the extent of reviews necessary to get to final draft, and out-of-pocket travel expenses as this level of engagement is much more productive by spending at least one day to meet with key subject matter experts, including a facilitated strategy/brainstorming session. `*

**Note:** I am currently exploring the potential of creating a subscription package in which I and my team would provide monthly or perhaps more frequent videoconferences to provide updates and counsel tied to communicating around real-time impacts of Covid-19, particularly as it plays out later this year.

I envision an interactive forum where, in addition to updates and a general Q&A, part of the session can be facilitated to allow participants to share best practices. Companies that purchase any of the options above will be contacted and can opt to pay an additional subscription fee to take advantage of these virtual events.

## Stephen F. Lee, APR – Relative Experience

- ◇ Accomplished corporate communications professional with more than 30 years of deep and varied experience in successfully guiding the management teams of major corporations through significant high-risk and high-visibility situations.
- ◇ Particular expertise in reputation management, crisis communications, risk communications tied to environmental, health and safety issues, emergency preparedness and business continuity, and employee engagement.
- ◇ Prior to serving as a Director with United at the time H1N1 emerged as a pandemic, was responsible for all internal and external communications for the airline's global airport operations, encompassing 20,000 employees at 90+ airports in 29 countries.
- ◇ Have been extensively involved with significant environmental and public health issues – including developing strategic community outreach programs that have been recognized by various regulatory agencies and community governments – for Bayer AG, Navistar, Hoover, PPG Industries and Ferro Corporation, among other clients.
- ◇ Served as a sitting member of the executive emergency response committees of both the U.S. holding company of Bayer AG and United Airlines.

Lee & Co.

**440.520.6073**

commandcommunicationscoach@gmail.com

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