

ALIGNND  
ON PURPOSE

# toolkit.

A resource for small and mid-sized companies  
communicating amidst coronavirus and other crises.

**Please find included inside:**

- Tips for communicating during a crisis
- Communications toolbox
- Do's and Don'ts
- Preparing for media interviews



## tips for communicating during a crisis.

During a crisis, information is constantly evolving and it's hard to prioritize time and resources. However, amidst the turmoil, it is important to remain open about the things you know and to communicate with your audiences in a timely manner. Here are a few tips for business leaders communicating during a crisis.

1. **Share what you know.** In times of crisis, there will always be more questions than answers. It's important to stick to the facts and tell people what you know when you know it. Link to credible resources and avoid rewriting or reinterpreting them.
2. **Identify people, channels for sharing information.** Designate a person who will be responsible for communicating updates related to the situation. Additionally tell people where to go to get the most recent and accurate information, particularly as it relates to closures or changes to regular business operations.
3. **Establish a crisis team and/or manager.** Letting people know there is a person or a team dedicated to the situation creates a small sense of relief and can reduce redundancies. Remind people that they should focus on doing the best they can in their role, while the team focuses their attention on the crisis.
4. **Prioritize impact.** Not all people and projects will be impacted at the same level and most likely there aren't enough resources to address all of them. Identify high impact stakeholder groups. Then, craft a plan for reaching the remaining groups as soon as you can.
5. **Care for yourself / your leaders.** A crisis can be mentally and physically exhausting, which makes it even more important to care for the health and well-being of those closest to the situation. Difficult decisions will need to be made, so it's imperative to manage your health as a leader or the health of the leaders in your business. This may mean working from an off-site location, self-quarantine or mandatory breaks and rest.
6. **Empathize.** Recognize that people may be worried, confused and scared. Avoid making promises or guarantees, instead share factual information and be honest about what you don't know. Thank people for their understanding, patience and support.
7. **Give people an opportunity to help.** Ultimately, people will request opportunities to help those around them. When the time is right, provide options for people to donate money, time or resources. Leverage third-parties who already have the infrastructure to provide the most appropriate help.



## crisis communications toolbox.

Below are a few important tools you may want to develop to aid in your communication efforts:

**Email Updates:** Provide regular written updates via email as information becomes available and decisions are made that affect employees, customers or the public. Consider using free resources, like Mailchimp or Constant Contact, to communicate with external audiences. These tools can help you comply with federal guidelines for email marketing and provide analytics to help gauge readership.

**FAQ:** Track commonly asked questions and prepare an FAQ. Attach it to an email or post it for people to access online. This can save your team time and effort responding to commonly asked questions.

**Public Statement:** Consider whether you need to craft a public statement. If so, once the statement is approved by leadership (and your legal team if appropriate) post the statement to all communication channels. Include the date and time, so people can assess the timeliness of the information.

**Social Media:** Social media is a great place to post updates or your public statement. This is also a good time to review your content calendar. You may want to stop posting content unrelated to the current situation.

**Text Messages/Voicemail:** Text messages or a voicemail system may be a great way to reach people off-site, field workers and those who don't have access to email.

**Point of Contact:** Tell people where to direct questions or concerns to manage the flow of information. This could be a general email address and a phone number. Make sure you designate someone to manage these questions and ensure they receive timely responses.



## the DOs and DON'Ts of communicating during a crisis.

**Do** share information in a timely manner, even if it's not what people want to hear.

**Do** tell people what you're doing about the situation or what your process is for handling it.

**Do** focus on facts and cite credible sources.

**Do** collaborate with others, especially health and government officials and protective agencies.

**Do** communicate across channels with the same information.

**Don't** speculate.

**Don't** diminish the concerns or frustrations of colleagues or customers.

**Don't** neglect rumors. Clear up misinformation as quickly as possible.

**Don't** bad mouth others.

**Don't** cover up your mistakes. Acknowledge them, apologize and share how you will avoid repeating them.



## preparing to speak to the media.

What to do and know before speaking to the media:

- 1. Identify your key messages.** Keep with the rule of three. Establish three key points you want to get across during the interview. Stay focused on what's most important.
- 2. Develop a Q&A.** Draft or have someone draft for you a series of questions and answers before the interview. Be sure to address difficult and unflattering questions. Preparing answers to easy and hard questions will help you feel more confident going into the interview.
- 3. Rehearse.** Practice reading the questions and answers aloud. Or, find someone you trust to ask you questions and as your rehearse your responses.
- 4. Prepare yourself physically.** Do your best to rest or take a short break before the interview to clear your head. Wear something professional, but also comfortable. It's important to be yourself.
- 5. Know your boundaries.** Consult your legal team, communications team or local officials beforehand, so you are clear about what you can and cannot say about the current situation. Always stick to the facts that pertain to you or your business. Never speculate. Instead direct people to the appropriate officials, agencies or websites for specifics.
- 6. Know your story.** The most important part of preparing for the interview is to know your key messages. If you lose your place during the interview or get flustered by an unexpected question, these messages are your home base. Continue to refer back to them as often as needed, while you prepare your response.



## COMPANY PROFILE

### about alignd.

Karen Bailey is a brand purpose advocate and experienced marketing communications leader. She has more than 15 years of experience in corporate and agency public relations and brand marketing. She has spent her career working with executives and business owners to define and share their stories.

Karen is the founder of Alignd, a consulting firm specializing in helping businesses define their purpose and align their organization around it. She is also the founder of Purpose Greater Than Profit, a blog dedicated to building the business case for brand purpose and offering resources for anyone interested in purpose-first business.

Before becoming an entrepreneur, Karen led the communications and marketing department at Glimcher Realty Trust (NYSE: GRT), where she oversaw the communications, brand creation and marketing integration during the merger between Glimcher and Washington Prime Group (NYSE: WPG).

Karen also worked for public relations agencies in Atlanta and Columbus leading and supporting campaigns for well-known consumer and business brands. She has a depth of experience in media relations, executive media training, thought leadership and event marketing.

Karen is a member of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), past president of the Central Ohio Chapter of PRSA and a professional advisor to The Ohio State University Chapter of PRSSA. She holds a B.A. in communication arts and a minor in business administration from Ohio Northern University.