

# Certainty in uncertain times

It can feel like there's no marketing playbook for the COVID-19 crisis, but there are lessons we're all learning to change gear in uncertain times.



# Contents

- 03. Introduction
- 04. Listen to audience needs
- 05. Authentic empathy
- 07. Separate the signal from the noise
- 09. Accelerate your insights
- 10. Helpful hints on themes and topics
- 12. The best formats and platforms
- 14. Lead from the top
- 16. Repurpose your events budgets
- 17. Start forward planning

## Introduction

Right now, the very idea of marketing can feel redundant. COVID-19 has brought unprecedented levels of anxiety, uncertainty and volatility to our daily lives. But the world hasn't stopped. We're all living in challenging and confusing times, but people are adapting. Brands need to adapt too. Now more than ever, it's crucial to communicate with clarity, conviction and purpose.

Here at Editions Financial, we don't have to go back far to find another period of global uncertainty. The financial crisis of 2008 was a defining moment for our industry, for our clients and for us. Working together to restore faith in a broken sector, we learned valuable lessons around rebuilding resilience, trust, transparency and integrity.

That period shaped our own value proposition – content with intent – and our promise to create purposeful solutions that build deeper relationships between brands and their audiences by helping those audiences make better financial decisions.

Today, we're working together with all our clients to adjust their content strategies to an even greater 'new normal'. Content with intent has never been more critical, and marketers have a key role to play.

It can feel like there's no playbook for COVID-19, but there are lessons we're learning that can help marketers change gear in uncertain times.



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## Listen to audience needs

The crisis is global, but its impact is individual. COVID-19 has disrupted the personal and professional world of every individual and institution in the world. New needs are being uncovered every day at every level.

In volatile times, we're all actively looking for clarity, information and direction that helps us understand what measures we should be taking. Look at everything through the lens of what's most needed to your target audiences and calibrate your messages around them.

Research from the Brunswick Group on [Connected Leadership](#) shows more customers are turning to brands for actionable insights from expert voices they can trust. Remember, a lot of people are taking additional time right now to expand their own knowledge and expertise.

PwC has created a [tool on its US site](#) to help businesses understand where they are in terms of a crisis response to COVID-19, including a section on brand and strategy. This may be useful if you're not sure where to begin.

## Actions to take right now:

01. Analyse website queries and phone call logs for common help requests to gain insights into different customers' needs in the current climate.
02. Use those insights to create a stakeholder map of all external audiences and communicate targeted support and business continuity messaging to different stakeholder segments.
03. Consider how each audience will receive that messaging – should it be placed in local newspapers, online, or in direct e-mail (or even physical) communications?
04. Spend some time conducting a high-level overview of competitor activity on social media – are they doing anything different? Are they experimenting with different formats? Have they chosen a theme of content to specialise in?
05. Enquire within your organisation for hidden expertise – now is the time to bring out talents and insights that may be going unused.
06. Consider external expert voices to support your efforts. A trusted advisor can make all the difference.
07. Think about what makes your brand stand out against competitors as a go-to place for expertise and knowledge – this is where your unique value proposition comes into play.



## Authentic empathy

Consumer confidence has [not yet fallen to the levels seen at the 2008 financial crisis](#) and post-recession period, so there is hope that spending will spring back.

However, businesses and individuals are currently being fiercely judged on how they have reacted to the crisis in their communications and actions.

It is well known that difficult decisions have had to be made, such as redundancy and furloughs, but how this is communicated has been a matter of public opinion and debate. Examples of internal messaging to staff have been posted on social feeds, resulting in lists of “companies-to-avoid” being drawn up and circulated.

It is easy to make mistakes in the current climate, but social distancing has meant a greater number of people are available to see these mistakes and comment in real-time. This requires immediate reputational management work in the short and long term.

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## Actions to take right now:

01. Ensure any messaging, whether internal or external, is aligned with your brand actions, brand image, and culture.
02. Think about the tone of the communication – how would it make someone feel if they received it? Does it provide genuine sympathy? Does it provide reassurance?
03. Does it leave any gaps in knowledge that will breed unhelpful speculation? Internal and external stakeholders need a full picture, so consider how to build that balance.
04. Focus on relevant, rewarding messages that are alert to your audience's immediate concerns. Be a trusted, transparent resource to help people to keep from making impulsive decisions.
05. Many customers may feel powerless in the face of the crisis. Empower them with specific, practical actions they can take and concrete resources from the company or elsewhere.





## Separate the signal from the noise

Focus on where you can add the most value to the conversation. Take a hard look at your brand and ask yourself about the role it plays in your customers' lives.

Be critical about where you have the authority to speak and where you don't. As events unfold, your audiences will need more communications from you, not less. Make everything you say as timely, targeted, relevant and rewarding as it needs to be to cut through the noise.

PwC's [Responding to COVID-19: key business considerations](#) insights recommend a 'balance of transparency and preparedness' while not being seen to over-react. Crisis communications should not lose sight of the organisation's culture requirements.

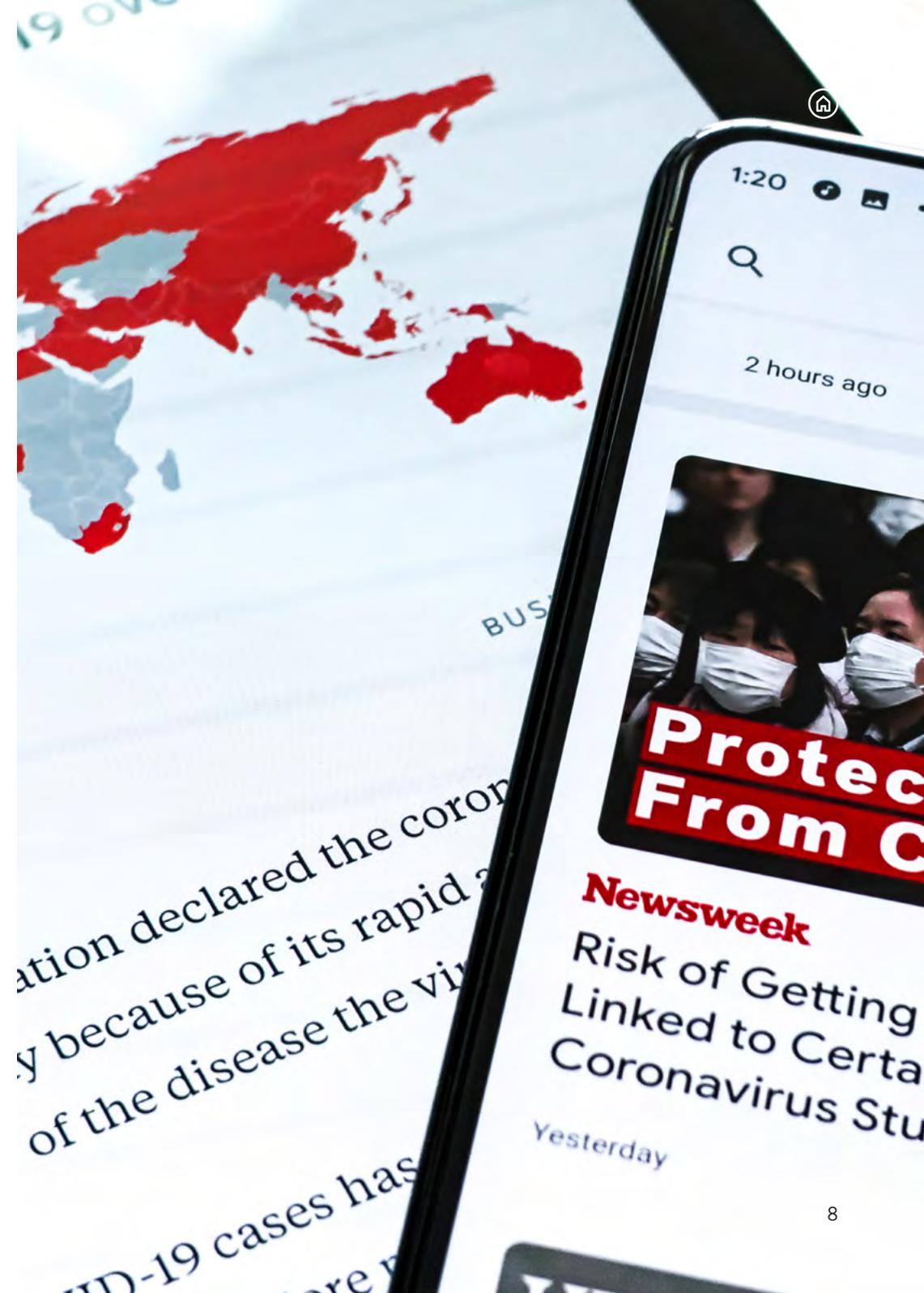
If you have thought leadership that speaks to individuals in a meaningful way, amplify it. Right now, your guiding principle as a brand is to be helpful. Don't send out messaging just to be part of the conversation.

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## Actions to take right now:

01. Think about what your business is known for among customers – does your content schedule reflect these areas?
02. Avoid diving into issues you have no previous ‘authority’ over.
03. Focus on finding ways to lead the conversation – leave quotidian messaging to your competitors.
04. Don’t discount your previous content activity – perform an audit of existing content that can be adapted for the moment.

Focus on finding ways to lead the conversation...



## Accelerate your insights

In the current climate, carefully crafted content that takes weeks to create will outdate quickly. You need a faster cadence of compelling content to address clients' concerns in the moment.

To keep pace, sacrifice higher production values for real-time responses. Embrace the fact that videos, podcasts and livestreams, which might be more raw, imperfect and unpolished than you're used to, can create a more intimate and honest brand interaction with audiences.

There is no better time to be real and human as a brand. Move at the speed of your audiences' needs and your 'in the moment' messages will build authenticity and trust – two valuable commodities in uncertain times.

### Actions to take right now:

01. Build a rapid response framework for all your content creation, keeping compliance / legal approvals in mind.
02. Where possible, build COVID-19 comms templates for each format type – this will increase your turnaround exponentially.
03. Create an agile schedule, to ensure content is getting out in a timely fashion and not tied up in stakeholder approvals and compliance. This is where the framework comes into play.
04. An easy agile methodology does not need a scrum master – go for leaner, streamlined project management approaches like Kanban.



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# Helpful hints on themes and topics:

## Soaring topical content:

Stock market ↑ 343%

Managing student loans ↑ 382%

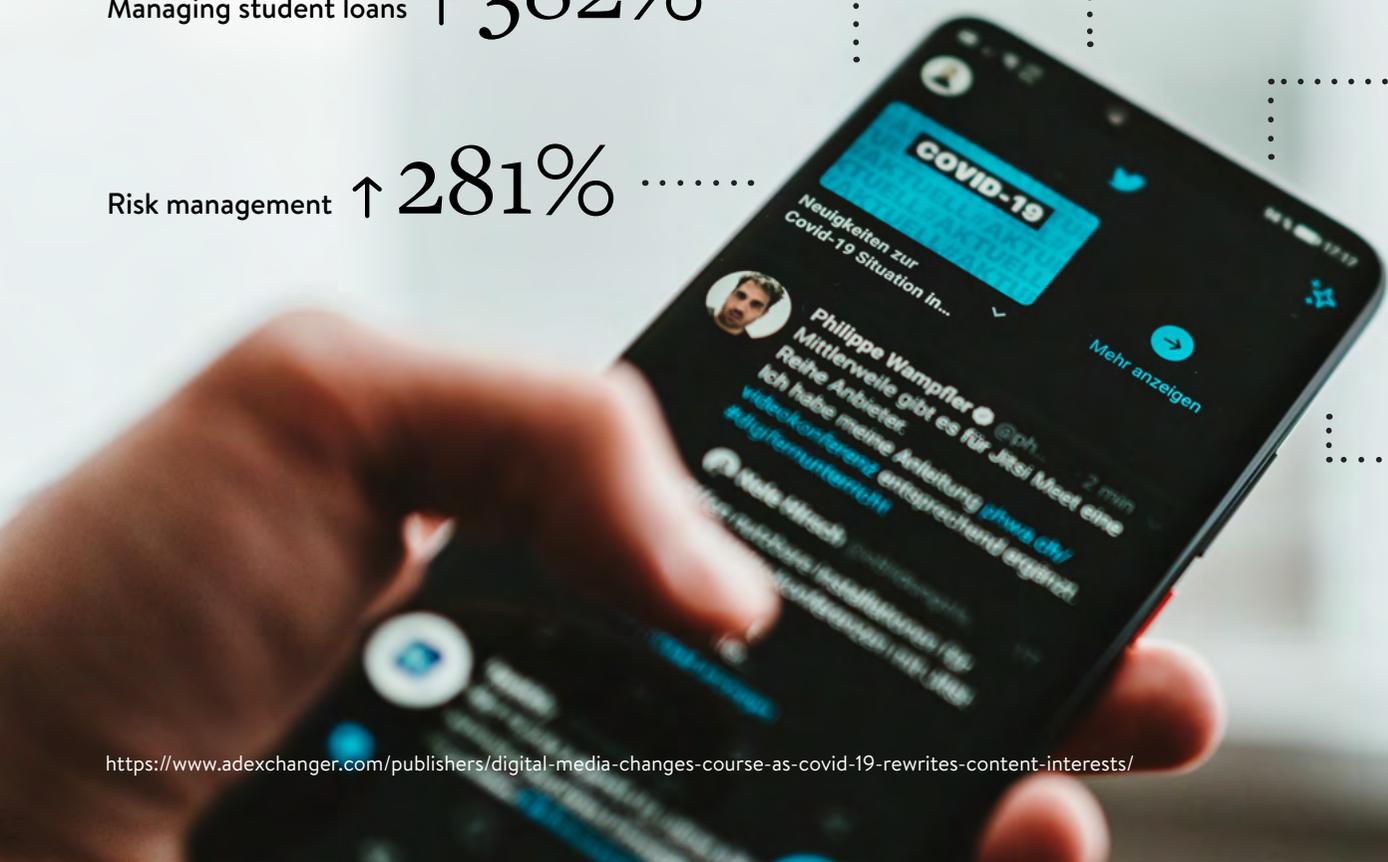
Risk management ↑ 281%

## Less popular content:

↓ Long-term planning

↓ Real-estate down 42%

↓ Retirement planning by decade born down 61%





According to recent research from LinkedIn Insights, the most popular topics across B2C and B2B audiences on LinkedIn right now are:

- Market volatility and sub-topics (up 41% between 24 Feb and 15 Mar)
- Educational content that increases understanding of market impacts
- Liquidity
- Interest rates
- Value investing
- Behavioural economics
- Mortgages
- Wealth management
- Oil and gas impacts

Demand for market volatility insights on LinkedIn can be mapped against the following audience segments:

- CEO networks
- Financial advisor networks
- Mass affluent
- Business travellers

## McKinsey and Company have produced a checklist of digital engagement tasks:

- ✓ Create and promote online financial fitness tools.
- ✓ Educate on financial capabilities through digital content and education with social media activation, call centre messages and in-branch hygiene standards.
- ✓ Respond to government measures, including a marketing response team, CSR campaigns, expert response and a crisis centre.
- ✓ Enact post-lockdown awareness including webinars on fraud prevention, wealth planning, financial literacy and cash and liquidity.
- ✓ Deliver specialised offerings – highlight credit limit reviews, debt-relief plans, flexible payments, credit availability, and terms and conditions.

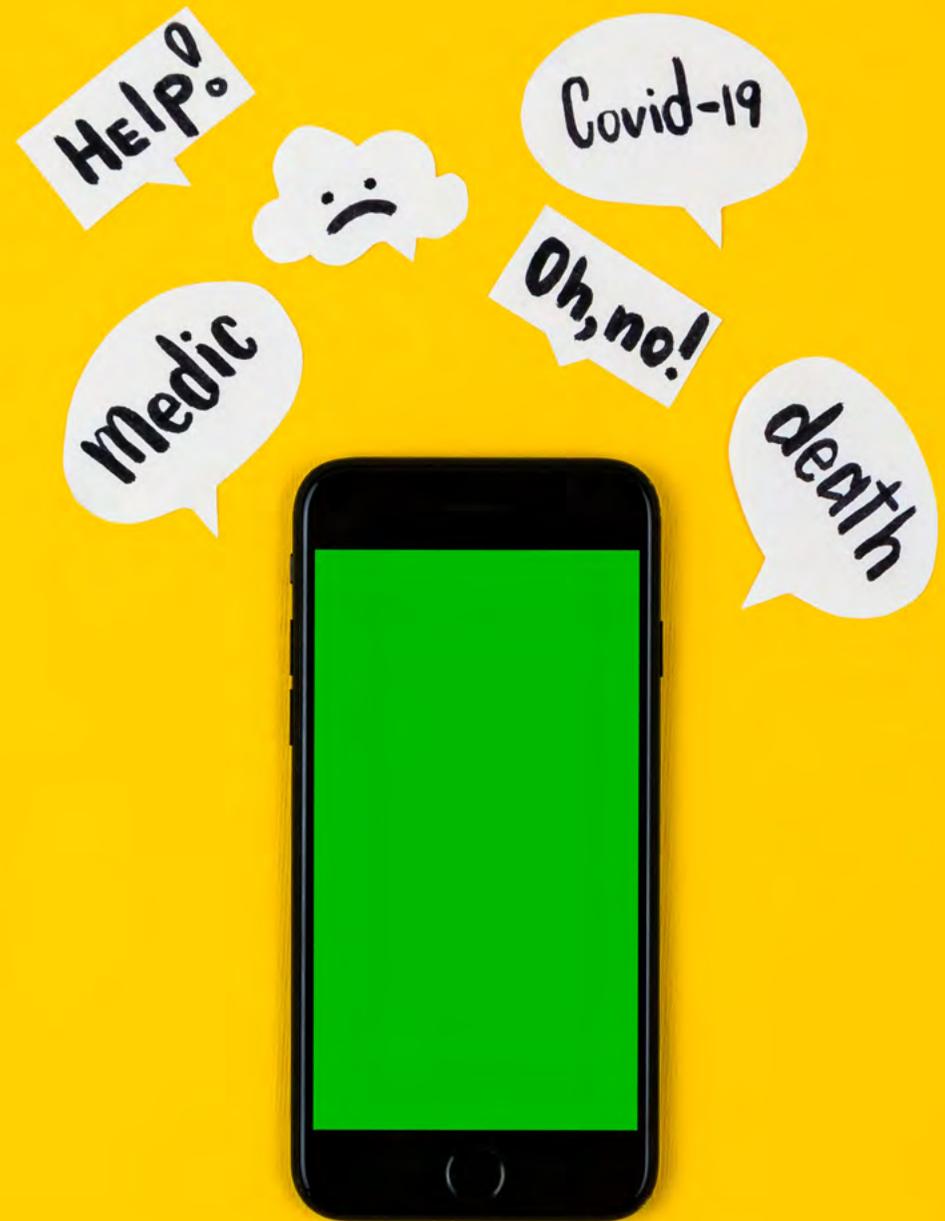
## The best formats and platforms

There is no one ‘right’ platform to use when communicating with your audiences – it’s best to go with where your audiences are present. For those using LinkedIn, [Business Insider’s Digital Trust Report](#) has placed the professionals’ platform at the top spot for three years in a row.

It found that LinkedIn provided a place for brands to ‘enhance their credibility’ across the digital pillars of legitimacy, security and community. This will be especially true for B2B brands.

Digital formats that have seen an uptick include [videos, webinars, webcasts, motion graphics and podcasts](#). The latter saw a [7% global increase from March 21-22](#) – equivalent to more than 750,000 podcast plays. Podcasts with ‘corona’ or ‘covid’ in the episode title have been downloaded more than [27.5 million times](#).

The hosts of The Unofficial Shopify Podcast on entrepreneurship reported that their audience has not seen the drops that other genres like sports have seen, due to e-commerce becoming a life-line – the podcast plans to [double down on content creation](#) to help listeners keep their businesses going.





The news genre is seeing the strongest growth in podcasting, as [consumers are seeking information that can be refreshed quickly](#). Audiences are also [seeking distractions](#) and respite from the onslaught of COVID-based information, and it's expected that useful content that can inform on the current situation as well as lifting spirits will be in further demand.

In terms of SEO, it's still important to tag and complete metadata with COVID-19 in mind – [internet searches](#) for the terms 'coronavirus', 'COVID', or 'COVID-19' increased by 553,778% in Jan 2020, versus December 2019.

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## Actions to take right now:

01. Review your format capabilities – do you have capacity or the tools to create podcasts, webinars, online streams and videos?
02. Audit your recent COVID-19 content – does it have the appropriate metadata for online and website search? Review the search terms bringing people to your website, and what is used in your website's search box.
03. Review your digital upload process – can it be streamlined for fast turnaround on content production and promotion?
04. Think about the platforms to distribute your messages – where are your audiences communicating? Where do you not have a presence but need one at this time?
05. Design a process for social media activation, including the necessary assets to accompany each piece of content. For example, create a 10-second teaser cut of a video to promote as a visual asset on Twitter.

## Lead from the top

Few CEOs in business today will have faced a sterner test of their leadership than what is required of them now. It's their responsibility to navigate uncertain times, but marketers have a key role to play too.

The creation of strong leadership platforms should be a key element of your response. 80% of employees and 90% of financial readers expect to hear from a CEO on social media during a crisis, according to research from the Brunswick Group on [Connected Leadership](#). Fairly or otherwise, their responses will be judged by customers, employees, investors and other key stakeholders.

Many business leaders have already taken highly visible roles communicating key messages to their target audiences. Brunswick also found that 42% of the Top 50 Connected Leaders among S&P 500 and FTSE 350 public companies have employed social media to communicate key messages about COVID-19 to key stakeholders, while many more have communicated via corporate channels.

As marketers, it's critical to stay calm and positive to inspire confidence across the wider enterprise. This will, in turn, instil firm-wide confidence and trust in your marketing approach, and help everyone in the organisation understand how to engage audiences in volatile times.

PwC also suggests that businesses think about how they are keeping employees up to date with guidance and showing a duty of care. Be thoughtful and intentional in your efforts. Colleague advocacy comes into its own in a crisis. If your internal and external messaging is strong, connected and on point, you'll keep the whole organisation 'on message' in periods of market volatility



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## Actions to take right now:

01. Make sure your marketing messages match customer reality.
02. If you do not already have an existing C-Suite (especially CEO and CFO) thought leadership series, invest your thinking into how this could be enabled. Short, sharp bursts of information will provide reassurance.
03. Adapt any external messaging for staff – concise internal communications are crucial as uncertainty breeds rumours and fear.
04. Update all internal communications staff lists – recent employees may not be added and it's important that no-one is left out.
05. Think about the essential messaging required by stakeholders, and stagger its release – don't overwhelm, but rather provide easily-digestible content that allows them to build a picture of the bigger issues, and how they directly impact them.



## Repurpose your events budgets

If experiential events have been a key part of your brand's engagement strategy, now is the time to re-examine your plans for 2020. Expect your target audiences to stay extremely wary of in-person events long after this heightened phase of restrictions on large gatherings ends.

More people will be communicating and transacting remotely and digitally than before. Redistribute event and conference budget into a programme of purposeful content for the year ahead.

Social media usage has grown as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, as more users go online to stay connected with family, friends, colleagues and clients, so reach out to your audiences where they are right now – online, on their phones, on social media – to build an authentic dialogue with authoritative insight.

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## Actions to take right now:

01. Planning for the rest of the year may seem like an impossible feat, but it's incredibly useful to put together objectives for virtual events. Start by identifying the cancelled events that immediately lend themselves to an online experience.
02. Draw up a plan on how you can make virtual events an all-inclusive experience – how does it benefit those who previously experienced participation barriers? Do your event materials work for those with visual and / or hearing impairments? Will you grow your audience by catering for those unable to travel to venues or access them?
03. Assess your technology infrastructure and identify where improvements are needed, such as increased server space, cloud hosting, or how to take advantage of enterprise software or new contractual arrangements.
04. Virtual events demand greater levels of content in all its forms – assess your current capacity and how this matches up with future demands. Read our playbook on [hosting a successful virtual event](#) for further support.
05. Think about what each event delivers for the attendees, and whether it can be matched or superseded by a content series replacement. Don't be afraid to survey your audience to gain feedback on what they think or suggest – after all, it's your attendees who make the event worth having.

## Start forward planning

It's hard to step back right now, but as a marketer you need to carve out time to think about how your customers will be changed by this crisis, and what your brand will need to do to meet their future needs.

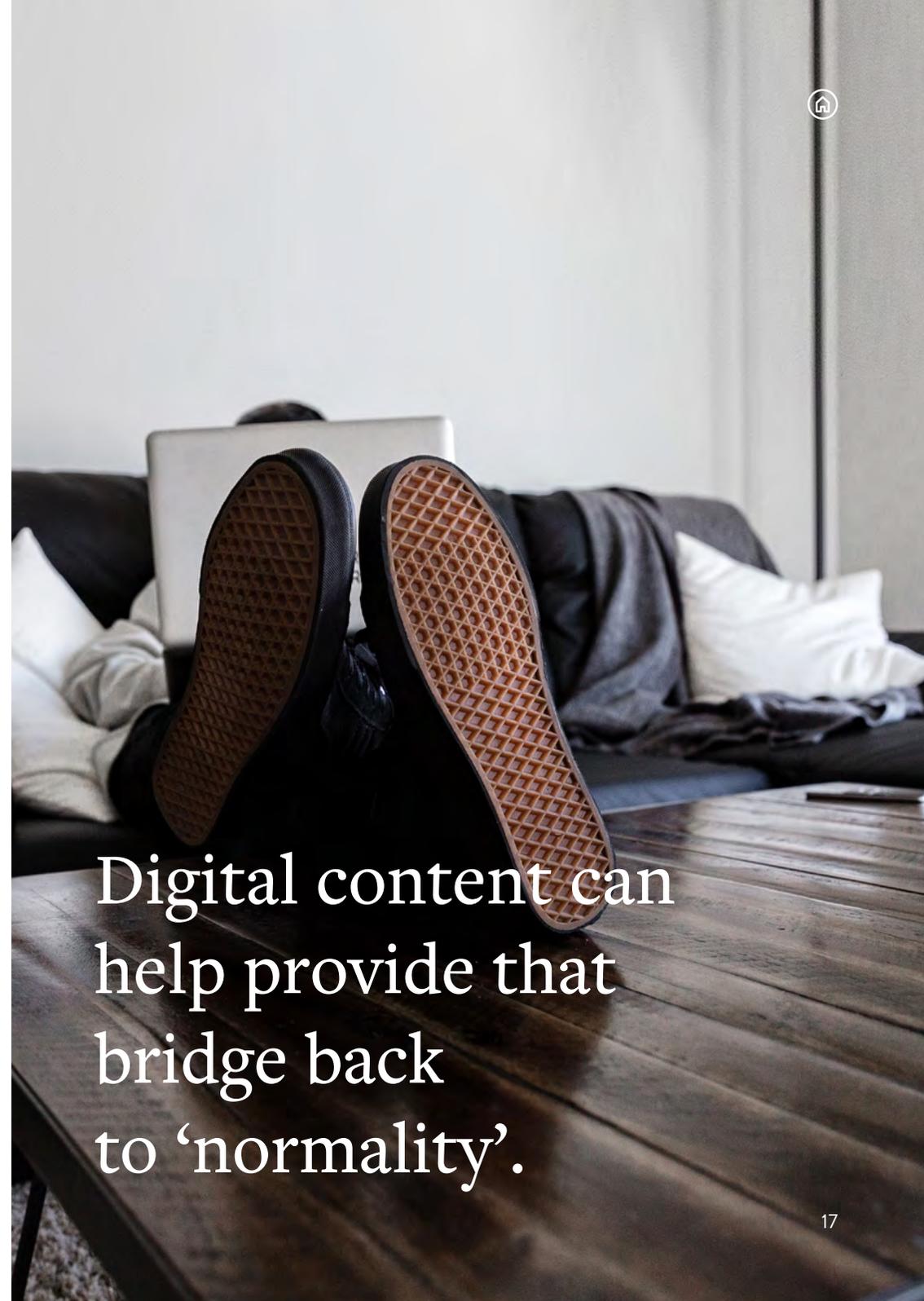
If social distancing is to continue it will have impact on out-of-home messaging and associated budgets. It may take a few months after the crisis for people to return to public spaces in the same volume, so digital content can help provide that bridge back to 'normality'.

We don't know what's next. We don't know when COVID-19 will be slowed, how far it will reach, or what its final impact will be. But we do know audience behaviours are changing right now.

'Business as usual' won't be an option. But neither is doing nothing. Bold action now will bring certainty to your response – and set you up for future success.

### Actions to take right now:

01. Think ahead to identify new and future customer needs.
02. Plan around the behaviours you think will stick in the long term.
03. Survey your customers to find out what changes they want to see in the future.
04. Review current communications models in line with risk models – pandemic modelling must now become part of those assessments. From this you can create a communications 'grab-bag' of phased content, ready to implement when or if it's needed again.



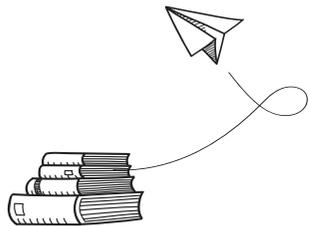
Digital content can help provide that bridge back to 'normality'.



## The best way to start exploring how we can really help you is to have a conversation.

If you need strategy, logistics and content production for your marketing response to COVID-19 – or marketing plans in general – talk to Editions Financial about how we can build you a support package.

If you'd like an informal discussion with one of our content strategists, simply give us a call on **0203 911 7530** or email [Tony.Dickson@editionsfinancial.com](mailto:Tony.Dickson@editionsfinancial.com) and we can schedule a call.



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