



CROSSING THE COVID-19 CHASM: 11 SOLUTIONS FOR HEALTHCARE MARKETERS

COVID-19 RESPONSE RECOMMENDATIONS

> MARCH 26, 2020

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Situation Overview

Uncharted Working Environment

In light of COVID-19 current events, day-to-day personal promotion of healthcare therapies has sharply changed. Many sales forces are not currently able to meet in person with their HCP customers, and live events are being postponed or canceled for HCPs and patients.

“The secret of change is to focus all your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new.”

— Dan Millman, author

Solutions for Proactive Messaging

Business as usual is not an option. The first step in showing up for your HCP customers and patients is to become relevant in the COVID-19 environment through your existing communication portals.

COVID-19 POV

PROVIDING EDUCATION WITH EMPATHY

This is a difficult period, especially so for those with heightened risk, and the people who interact with your brands may be seeking information more urgently than ever before. While we can't promise a solution to COVID-19, we can help direct them to

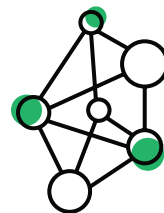
places where they can get credible and timely updates about the evolving pandemic. This simple gesture may provide a small token of support and reassurance as part of their brand experience.

- Share content from respected sources such as the CDC and relevant patient advocacy organizations on existing corporate, branded, and disease state websites and social media platforms
- Take an additional opportunity to create your own content by garnering and communicating a POV from a panel of HCPs to keep a pulse on emerging patient needs



TIMING

2-3 weeks



COMPLEXITY

Low/Medium

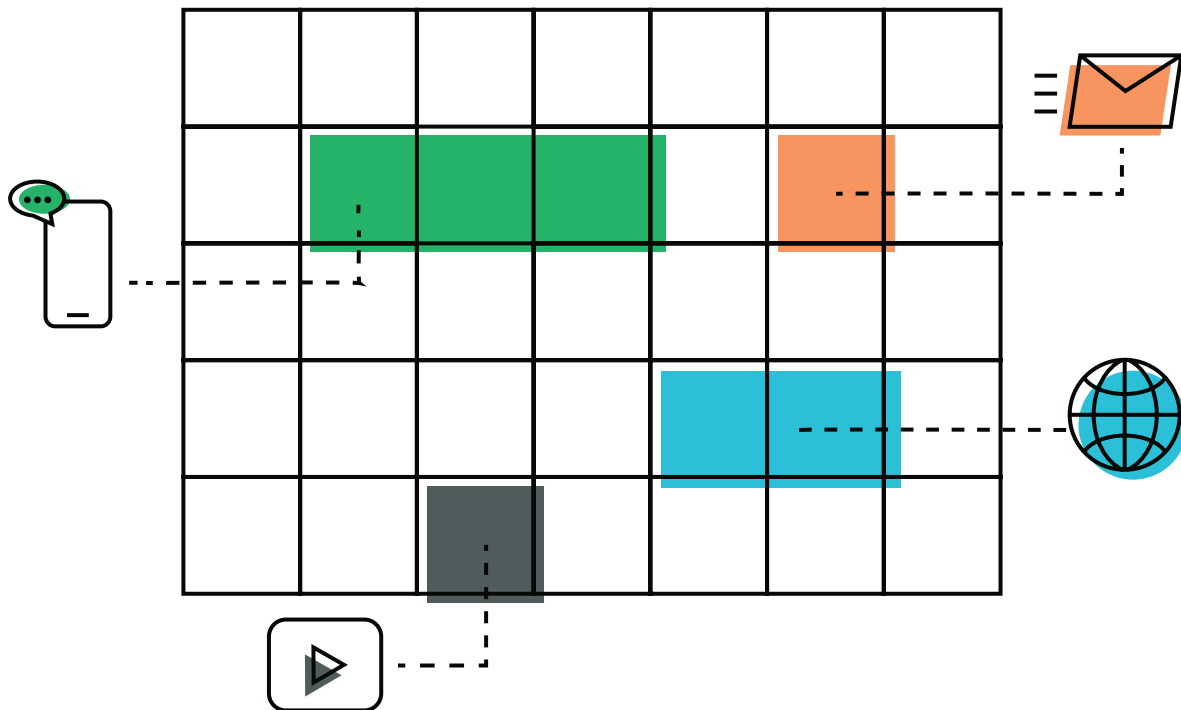
Confidence Calendar

CREATING A PLATFORM FOR PROACTIVE MESSAGING

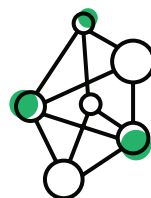
Few could have predicted how different this year is progressing from how it started. Most brand plans and message platforms certainly didn't account for the current environment that is causing a lot of questions, confusion, and uncertainty for both patients and HCPs.

We believe it is critical to establish a confident brand presence by creating a communication map and developing ongoing messaging that integrates the latest information, research findings, patient recommendations, and tips and tricks into your brand's communication platform.

- Create a content calendar or enhance an existing calendar to identify relevant messages and a timely cadence
- Develop messaging and execute across relevant digital platforms



TIMING
4-6 weeks



COMPLEXITY
Medium



Solutions for Conference Presence

In the healthcare industry, a lot of time, effort, and budget can be spent on brand and corporate presence at conferences and events. The cancellation or postponing of these events was one of the first major changes implemented post-COVID-19.

In the wake of these changes, we've seen the promotion of many digital solutions as a result, all purporting to be the answer in these difficult times. But before you can select a solution, you must first identify a solid strategy for communication around these opportunities.

Real-World Conferences

LEVERAGING DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

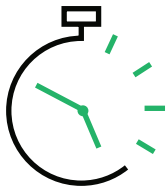
Every postponed and canceled conference will be taking extensive measures to capture the attention of its previous attendees. How can you assist in adding real value to this highly targeted audience of former conference goers by providing educational content and leveraging sponsorship opportunities for any of their digital endeavors?

Whether it is through simple online advertising within their ecosystem or by creating new content specifically for their use in online newsletters, videos, or live-streaming events, each brand must consider how to leverage the groundswell of interest in supporting these events during this time.

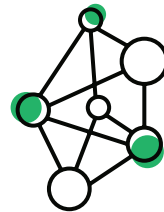
Additionally, one must consider that the real value of continued support of these forums will last far past the current health crisis. Renewed efforts will only deepen ties and create a more meaningful relationship with both the organization and the audience.

POTENTIAL EXECUTIONS COULD INCLUDE:

- Digital ads on conference websites, newsletters, and social channels
- Pre-recorded video or live-streaming of corporate-sponsored courses, symposia, state-of-the-art sessions, workshops, pro/con debates, and allied health sessions
- Exclusive digital content partnerships for articles, research, and white papers
- Creation of virtual poster sessions to highlight key research topics



TIMING
8-10 weeks



COMPLEXITY
Low to Medium

Each brand must consider how to leverage the groundswell of interest in supporting existing events during this time.

Your Virtual Conference

BRINGING YOUR MESSAGE DIRECTLY TO HCPs

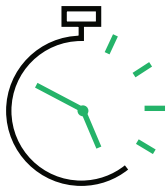
If attendees aren't going to live conferences, and the landscape of conference-going continues to change over time, it begs the question "what else can we do?" One big idea that sounds overwhelming, but really doesn't have to be, is creating your own online virtual conference experience.

As an independent offering, unattached to any actual real-world conference, your brand would be able to create its own digital space to deliver your unique and impactful core messages directly to your target audience through a specialized branded event. Yet another advantage to going virtual is that all of this digital content can be captured and utilized post-show in much the same manner, creating real value and engagement over time.

Launching this experience would be a live virtual summit, which would be run and promoted like most any conference (registration, multiple sessions,

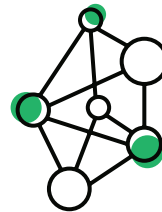
keynotes, etc.), all targeted around a specific date. This allows for pre- and post-show communication, typical of any conference, while also building buzz and anticipation for the event itself. Then the event takes place, with a combination of pre-produced videos, live-streaming of keynotes and breakout sessions, polls, audience participation, and content delivery.

Sound daunting? It's actually not. Most of the content preparation you would need, you're already doing. Not to mention there are several software packages that exist, which will make setup, hosting, and streaming a breeze. With a solid tactical plan and the right tools, this solution's practicality rises dramatically.



TIMING

2-4 months



COMPLEXITY

Medium to High

Create your own digital space to deliver unique and impactful core messages directly to your target audience.



Virtual Presentations

EDUCATING WITH SCALE AND MEALS

Not ready to take on your own conference? Or do you want to supplement one large event with more frequent opportunities to provide valuable content and engage with your target customers? Leverage existing technology platforms to recreate valuable engagements and present educational and branded content to target audiences.

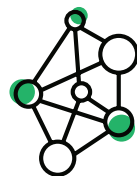
HCPs are familiar with the cadence of in-office lunches and after-hours dinner meetings. Not only do they enjoy a free meal, but they also learn critical information that can help them meet the needs of their patients. And in times when in-person presentations aren't possible or practical, why not host those presentations virtually?

To create a social experience that represents live dinner meetings and in-service presentations, simply utilize a video conferencing platform that can leverage features such as a live Q&A, interactive polls, and streaming video, all while you still provide lunch or dinner through UberEats or another meal delivery platform. Whether it's a virtually catered peer-to-peer dinner meeting or delivered in-office lunch and learn, there's no reason these engagements can't continue—and even thrive—in this environment.



TIMING

2-3 weeks



COMPLEXITY

Low

When in-person presentations aren't possible or practical, why not hold them virtually?



Solutions for In-Office Presence

One of your most valuable and impactful resources in connecting with customers and delivering your brand message is your sales force. This is unprecedented that many of them cannot meet with their customers in person due to either risk of spreading COVID-19 or office closures.

While it may seem like a dire situation, this may be the most motivating reason to create digital solutions that help expand your in-person presence both during this crisis and well beyond.

Focus on Face Time, Virtually

UTILIZING VIDEO CONFERENCING WELL

Most organizations are familiar with web conferencing; fewer, though, have much experience with video conferencing as a standard way of communicating. In a time where face-to-face interaction is restricted, the personalization and socialization of our interactions becomes even more important.

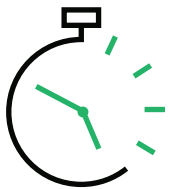
Pretty straightforward, right? But how do you properly engage both those inside and

outside of your organization whose responsibilities demand conversation with healthcare providers, patients, and other professionals? That part is simple—show, don't tell.

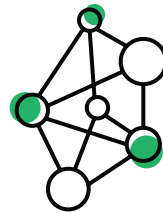
This solution focuses on what your company can do to empower these brand advocates with the right tools and training to succeed. Practically, the creation of some advisory guides (PDFs and videos) that showcase not

just the best reasons to utilize video conferencing (when do they use it?) but also focuses on the best tips and tricks on pulling it off well (how do they do it best?). Rounding out a training initiative would be guides on the best tools, software, and technology to make the videos look as professional as can be.

This is a practical, low-cost training solution that could get your teams up to speed and thriving in no time. The only question that remains is what are you waiting for?



TIMING
4-5 weeks



COMPLEXITY
Low

The personalization and socialization of our interactions are even more important.

Increased Social Presence

MAXIMIZING YOUR DIGITAL CHANNELS WITH HCPs

For many companies in the pharma and healthcare industry, social media isn't a priority when it comes to your business. Perhaps you use them when connecting your brands with patients, but more often than not the regulatory hurdles and questions about return on investment prove to be enough resistance that these media are rejected.

However, now might be the time to take a fresh look at how social platforms can work within a professional environment. Highly targetable, focused, and timely, social media—when done well—can take most of the recommendations within this document and get them to the right audience at the right time. Content generation isn't

like *Field of Dreams*; they won't come just because you've built it. It has to be pushed out, continually, to generate interest and engagement.

And to be exceedingly clear, let's clarify what we're talking about when it comes to social media. Organic social content—those things you post or share in the hopes your audience sees it naturally in their various feeds—is never bad to have, but results are far from guaranteed. For any business that wants results, especially one in the healthcare arena, paid social media should be leveraged as it allows for control around who you target, the frequency, and your message.

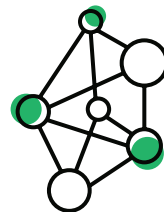
KEY NETWORKS FOR PAID SOCIAL MEDIA WOULD INCLUDE:

- **Doximity**—Largest private social network in the country for HCPs
- **Facebook**—Highly targetable and still the leader in terms of reach and content delivery
- **LinkedIn**—Professional network that allows for robust targeting and sharing content
- **Twitter**—Highly used for real-time information sharing and conversations at conferences



TIMING

5-6 weeks



COMPLEXITY

Low

Content generation isn't like *Field of Dreams*; they won't come just because you've built it.

Podcasting Your Brand

TELL YOUR STORY, YOUR WAY

In healthcare, our stories—how we help our patients and the power of our products—speak volumes. They are incredibly important, but somewhat hard to deliver. What if you could share your stories quickly and easily to audiences who actively want to listen? Enter podcasting.

Podcasting has grown in popularity over the past years, with a third of Americans listening in 2020 according to the Infinite Dial's 2020 report. But it's not all celebrity interviews and true crime serials, as businesses and brands are capitalizing on this rising opportunity.

From panel discussions to research presentations, from patient interviews to conversations between physicians, consider all the ways you could bring these stories to life through podcasting. And while production value is still important, this simply means utilizing good equipment, techniques, and editing. It doesn't have to mean expensive studios or licensed talent.

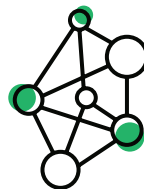
Podcasts can be captured live in safe environments, through online voice chats, or custom physical recording kits that could be mailed directly to patients and doctors. Regardless of the method, capturing engaging conversations and sharing them with the right audience could prove to be even more impactful than any typical in-person discussion.

And don't let regulatory issues and fears kill an idea like this before it's been vetted. There are creative solutions for both content and delivery. While there is room for more patient-focused podcasts available to the public, consider that they can also be delivered privately through secure verification systems, rather than using publicly hosted platforms.



TIMING

6-8 weeks



COMPLEXITY

Medium

Podcasts could prove to be even more impactful than any typical in-person discussion.

An Easy Button for Your Brand

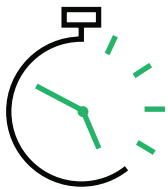
JUST TAP AND WAIT FOR THE CALL

What if you could have your salesforce, help desk teams, or other key contacts ready to respond to customer concerns at the press of a button? For that dream to even have a chance of coming true, you would need to have a way to be there the very moment an issue arises. In this day and age where being there in person is not feasible in even the best of circumstances, we feel that technology may have the answer.

The power and potential of Amazon web services are news to no one. There is one specific solution, however, that has captured our attention: Amazon's IoT 1-click technology. This simple little piece of technology allows us to set an action, along with a series of reactions, and have it trigger at the press of a button.

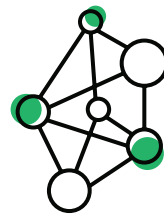
These buttons can be physical, utilizing either local wifi or built-in cellular, or virtual. Each compact physical button (think of the original Tide buttons that launched instant orders a couple years ago) can be branded and shipped directly where you need it. And on the other side, a virtual 1-click button could exist in an app, website, or even within Alexa.

This service captures that unique button click, in whatever its form, and sends notifications to whoever internally needs to respond. It also sends an immediate text message back to the user so they know their request has been received. When you add a small amount of CRM-like communication strategy around managing these inquiries and responses, you are left with a solution that is incredibly robust, even while being surprisingly straightforward.



TIMING

6-8 weeks



COMPLEXITY

Medium

Have your salesforce, help desk teams, or other key contacts ready to respond...at the press of a button.



Solutions for Direct Patient Communications

We're all in this business to help patients, and in times of crisis, they need more communication and information than ever. Many of you already offer patient resources but a recent survey by Human Care Systems contends that 80% of people with chronic conditions were unaware of pharma patient support programs but almost 2 out of 3 (63%) would eventually opt into pharma services.

Consider the following methods when expanding the reach of your current patient resources, along with creating new, meaningful content and engagements for your brand.

Facebook Live Events

BUILDING COMMUNITY AND PROVIDING REASSURANCE

We've talked about how important leveraging social media is within both this new landscape and the greater marketing mix already. Likewise, we've talked about the importance of video conferencing—now more than ever. So while it might go without saying (but we're going to say it anyway), we have to mention Facebook Live as a viable, robust tactic that should be considered.

Connecting with your followers through a live-stream event that lives on long after the stream has ended is a powerful way to deliver your message. It can help build a virtual feeling of community between all of your audiences, all while positioning your brand as a leader within its space.

From simple education initiatives and virtual discussion panels to comforting messages that provide reassurance in uncertain times, the possible use cases are almost limitless. Whether led by internal staff, patient advocates, or partner HCPs, these video forums combine the excitement and urgency of live events with the energy and longevity of mini-conferences.

And while COVID-19 may be the reason you start broadcasting live on social media, which is a worthwhile cause on its own, this medium can evolve over time into a full-fledged platform for other issues important to your patients, customers, and brand.



TIMING
4-5 weeks



COMPLEXITY
Low

Facebook Live Streaming can help build a virtual feeling of community between all of your audiences.

Patient Advocacy Sponsorships

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR TARGETS

Cause marketing isn't new, but it is smart. And the importance of patient advocacy groups within the healthcare and pharma industries cannot be understated. These groups often may not have the greatest reach, but the influence they do have is highly targeted to an active and engaged audience, making it invaluable.

In times like these where there is so much noise within the digital space, another key avenue for getting your message across can be engaging existing patient advocacy groups and co-opting their channels for content delivery.

Groups like these often have some form of printed publication that might be used for an advertorial or sponsorship opportunity. Digital newsletters and

emails are other useful channels that are always in need of relevant content. And don't forget about the opportunities around fundraising activities for these patient advocacy groups.

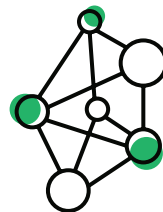
Taking a fundraising and awareness walk from physical to online could be a fun way to keep an effort like this alive for at-risk audiences in times like these. The creation of viral challenges for awareness, such as the ice-bucket challenge, could also be leveraged for a big digital splash.

Whatever the end result, the fact remains that this avenue needs to be explored. Patient advocacy groups can be critical in ongoing marketing efforts, and might provide interesting creative opportunities for brands willing to take the risk.



TIMING

6-8 weeks



COMPLEXITY

Low to Medium

The influence patient advocacy groups have is highly targeted to an active and engaged audience, making it invaluable.

Patient-Centered Communication

MEET THEM IN THEIR MOMENT

When we look to communicating with our patients, we've already discussed a lot of great options. However, there's a myriad of ways to meet the patient where they are with our messages. While any list we created would never be exhaustive, there are a few tools and techniques we wanted to highlight that could prove useful.

First, podcasting. Yes, we devoted a whole section to that already, but the focus there was around more professional HCP communication, not patient focused. When we consider both the rising popularity of the medium and the unique method it allows us to tell a story, the use case for patient communication rises in both interest and importance.

Utilize the stories of patients, patient advocates, and even select HCPs to reach patients suffering from these diseases. These publicly available podcasts could be corporate-sponsored initiatives, but the content would be completely patient focused.

Second, video conferencing. Do you see a pattern yet? While these strategic initiatives all have great merit when focusing on our HCP audiences, they have just as much value when it comes to engaging our patients. So the specific problem we're looking to solve here is how we leverage this technology for this unique audience.

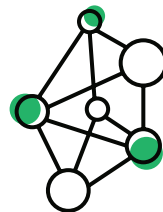
Consider setting up a branded video conferencing solution just for patients and patient advocates. Not only would you create training

demos and documentation for patient advocates on best practices around utilizing video chats, but also you could create the supporting materials for HCPs to distribute or for online activations that will raise patient awareness of this opportunity.

Lastly, think about other social platforms. Beyond just Facebook Live, where else can you create content tailored specifically for your patients? Is it a clever take on a viral Tik-Tok? Is it engaging in more serious dialogue through Twitter? Regardless of the platform, the key takeaway is to try something new. The time is ripe for sowing your message on new ground. The only question is if you'll be bold enough to try.



TIMING
8-10 weeks



COMPLEXITY
Medium

The key takeaway is to try something new. The time is ripe for sowing your message on new ground.

Conclusion

What Do You Do Next?

TAKING IDEAS FROM CONCEPT TO EXECUTION

We understand that this is a difficult time for many, both personally and professionally. And the rapidly changing landscape can be paralyzing. When it comes to scenario planning, it's always smart to start with the end in mind. What are we trying to accomplish, what is our roadmap to get there, and what could get in our way? Building from a solid strategic foundation and understanding your options with alternative tactics is a good way to prepare, especially considering the uncertainty of an emerging global pandemic.

At MERGE, we're here to help your brands connect with HCPs and patients in new, virtual ways. We can develop a digital strategy to optimize your brand's presence and engagement with your customers and patients across this wide digital landscape. From excellent execution to performance metrics, we are here to help you navigate these turbulent waters.

ABOUT MERGE

We are a full-service independent agency focused on being an integral part of the growth and transformation of our clients. And in doing so, we want to provide you with the best agency experience you have ever had. Ever.

- **30+ years of Healthcare expertise in biopharma, device, and specialty therapies**
- **Deep experience working with emerging and established companies**
- **Distinct ability to blend Healthcare and Consumer marketing**

Our flexible model allows us to effortlessly pivot to address shifts in the marketplace and customer mindset. Our combination of subject matter expertise and fresh thinking gives MERGE insight into best-in-class communications that transcend verticals, enabling us to more effectively engage customers throughout their journeys.