



**RECOVERY AND RESURGENCE  
COMMUNICATIONS:  
what tech sector pros  
need to do now**

Research, insight  
and thinking about  
responsible messaging  
in 2020 and beyond



Working in communications in 2020 – grappling with a global pandemic, economic meltdown, and now an outpouring of righteous emotions focused on eradicating institutional and systemic racism – has left comms pros dealing with one of the most difficult communications, and frankly ethical, challenges of an entire generation.

On the one hand, so many organisations have been trying to save, adapt, pivot or reimagine their business — strategies less aimed at building a thriving, diverse and fair company, but more focused on surviving a global pandemic.

On the other hand, we’ve borne witness to the abhorrent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery and are grappling with the social and economic impacts of a global pandemic. In this context, employees, customers, policymakers and community leaders all expect tech companies to take a stand, adapt and evolve their behaviors, and do everything possible to support the extraordinary demands and needs of this most critical of times.

So much of the narrative of 2020 is rightly about how tech companies are dealing with the sector’s deep-seated challenges around Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; how they’re treating employee needs; whether they’re making commitments to support front-line workers; and where they’re providing their software or solutions to help customers deal with the challenging environment.

In short, recovery and resurgence communications in 2020 is not just about economic survival and revival. It is now about social reckoning, emotional recovery, the resurgence and emergence of doing what’s right, for all of society and all stakeholders.

Not surprising then, research we commissioned at the start of May, even before race and equity rightly became the focal point of our collective minds, outlines a renewed focus on values, culture and purpose on the part of employees. They are telling companies to rethink more than just financial expectations and immediate challenges like returning to

the workplace. There will need to be a new contract and a new responsibility-focused, values-led conversation between employer and employee moving forward. And race, diversity and inclusion will have to be core to that conversation.

So how do tech sector comms pros navigate all of this? How can they help shore up their company’s immediate-term survival, while also keeping one eye not just to the people who will enable its long-term success — employees, customers, partners and the wider stakeholder community — but also on the critical importance of eradicating entire systems and structures that exclude or disadvantage certain communities?

This report clearly does not have anywhere near all the answers. But in it, we aim to share practical insights and advice on how to navigate the rest of 2020, acknowledging both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. There will be a reckoning for tech when it comes to race, diversity and inclusion. There is bound to be a reappraisal of techlash. We’ll need to evolve comms team infrastructures. There will be an evolution of employees’ expectations on where, when and how they’ll work. And we know there is already a radically different media and events landscape to navigate.

In short, we look to help comms pros not only do what’s needed for business survival, but also do the right thing, on behalf of all stakeholders. ■



**Sophie Scott**  
 Senior Partner and Global  
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# CONTENTS

- 04 RACE AND THE TECHNOLOGY SECTOR'S RECKONING: QUESTIONS TO ASK NOW**
- 06 RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
- 10 HOW TO 'BUILD BACK BETTER' WHEN IT COMES TO THE EMPLOYEE IMPERATIVE**
- 12 EVENTS ARE DEAD! WHAT TO DO IN A PANDEMIC WHEN YOUR COMMS STRATEGY RELIES ON PHYSICAL EVENTS?**
- 15 THE 2020 CEO CHALLENGE: HOW TO SET THE TONE AUTHENTICALLY FOR RECOVERY AND RESURGENCE**
- 17 FIVE TECH-ENABLED TRENDS IN YOUR MEDIA PROGRAMS IN 2020 AND BEYOND**
- 19 TOP TIPS FOR LAUNCHING A PRODUCT IN A PANDEMIC**
- 20 LESSONS FROM ASIA: VALUES KEY TO MANAGING RESURGENCE BALANCING ACT**
- 22 DESPITE TALK OF THE END OF TECHLASH, THE DEBATE IS FAR FROM OVER**
- 23 WHY YOU NEED TO PREPARE YOUR TECH COMMUNICATIONS TEAM NOW FOR THE POST-COVID-19 MEDIA LANDSCAPE**
- 25 THE HEIGHTENED IMPORTANCE OF LOCALISATION DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC**
- 26 THE CASE FOR CREATIVITY IN REEMERGENCE**





## RACE AND THE TECHNOLOGY SECTOR'S RECKONING: QUESTIONS TO ASK NOW

Emily Graham, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, New York

The technology sector has an outsized role to play in supporting health and economic outcomes, and in enabling people to live better lives. The industry itself has created that expectation, with the promise of improved well-being so often highlighted by tech leaders when they talk about their products and services, partnerships, job creation and investment growth.

But 2020 has brought with it the beginnings of a real reckoning that will see the tech sector grapple not only with its own industry challenges, but also with some of the most difficult moral and ethical questions of our time.

From the privacy concerns associated with the contact tracing tools needed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, to active debates about the degree to which the lack of diversity in tech builds inherent bias into products and services, it is time for tech companies and leaders to ask themselves how serious they are about lifting up all people equally and improving society.

The research described in this report is focused on the recovery from the global pandemic, and its implications for business and society. But between the time our research was completed and released here, the reality of centuries-old, institutionalized racism and injustice has forced us to take a deep and painful look at our societies and demand that we take urgent action.

The murder of an unarmed Black American named George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, was brutal and shocking, but unfortunately, not a surprise to millions of Black Americans who know that they — or someone they love — could easily have been in his place.

Mr. Floyd's name was brutally added to the list of killings that includes Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and too many others over too many years. Sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, friends. Too often America — especially White America — has ignored the value of their lives and the truth of their deaths.

But George Floyd and the 8 minutes 46 seconds that ended his life have not been ignored. They have instead sparked outrage and, as momentum builds behind protests all over the world, the first seeds of optimism that this time change will be real and lasting. The cellphone video that bore witness to Mr. Floyd's murder generated a call to action and a breakthrough in public awareness, evidence that technology will be instrumental in achieving meaningful change.



Every company has the obligation to take sustained action that will bring fairness and equity to people who have been attacked and excluded for no other reason than the color of their skin. However, as Henry Timms and Jeremy Heimans describe in their book on new power dynamics, the technology industry plays a part in transforming power into current rather than currency and making it available to people regardless of race, class and economic status. That can have a bigger impact on ideas, information and the economy, and thus creates a bigger ethical obligation for tech companies to use their strengths for good. They can do that through the visibility of their words and their substantial donations to good causes, but it must go much further and start with getting the industry's house in order.

Actions that diversify talent pipelines, increase representation of Black and Brown people, offer pathways to executive leadership and create a true culture of belonging are no longer nice to have. They are central to building trust and reputation.

**Here are some of the questions businesses and leaders must ask themselves in order to ensure they are fit for purpose now and in the future:**

- What actions are you taking to build a real pipeline for a diverse workforce?
- What additional programs and resources will you put in place to recruit and develop more people of color as talent and leaders?
- How are you defining diversity and considering intersectionality? Are you thinking about women of color and people of color in the LGBTQ+ community? Have you narrowed your focus to board diversity or are you thinking holistically?
- Have you considered actions to help ensure you have diversity in your supply chain?
- Are you thinking about converting your contract workers into permanent employees and offering them better compensation as one path to reducing economic inequality?
- What other actions are you planning to take, if any, that will meaningfully contribute to justice and equity, internally and externally?
- Are there policies and practices you need to address in order to be more inclusive?
- Are you committed to regularly listening to your Black and Brown employees?
- After listening, even if what you hear is unfavorable, are you committed to action?
- Are you willing to use your voice (including executives), your platform, your channels and your influence to fight against injustices, stand in solidarity with Black and Brown communities and advocate for their rights?
- Have you been present, passionate leaders or willful witnesses?
- Have you as individual leaders or as an organization donated to political PACs or candidates that may be perceived as being at odds with commitments to inclusivity and justice?

At FleishmanHillard, we have committed to taking action and accountability in our own organization. We join with leaders in the technology industry calling for equity, and for an end to the passive expectation that things will change over time. Whether it is justice in a court of law, or economic and social justice, justice delayed is justice denied. ■

# RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our research, carried out by FleishmanHillard TRUE Global Intelligence, surveyed 1,000 full-time employees in the U.S. (n=502) and U.K. (n=498) who are working remotely. The survey was fielded online May 8-11, 2020, to understand the perspectives and experience of the remote workforce as organizations consider their return to the physical workplace.

Over now many months of quarantine around the world, discussions on how and when to return to the physical workplace have evolved into a more fundamental question: why? As companies embraced remote work overnight, jobs we previously thought could only be done from the traditional workplace have adapted, and workers have discovered they prefer parts of their new normal over their old one. Many are not eager to return to the workplace or to the way they did their jobs and managed their lives before.

Business leaders are grappling with these changes in real time and face logistical, legal and HR challenges. Major companies are announcing continuations of their work-from-home policies, and some have announced their workers can continue remotely permanently if that's what they'd prefer.

None of this means that remote work is now the perfect arrangement for workers or employers. There are benefits to in-person interaction that are not easily replicated via technology, as well as value in spending time away from the pressures of home. Experts from across disciplines are telling us that finding the balance and solving for these challenges requires a more deliberate consideration of the tools we use and the culture of use we build to surround them.

That's what the remote workers we surveyed are telling us they want to do as well — to step back and evaluate the way they do their jobs, the relationship between work and life, and the values and cultures of the organizations they work for, rather than default to the old normal.

## THE PANDEMIC IS REDEFINING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ABLE TO WORK REMOTELY

*The transition to remote work was an overnight revolution for businesses and workers.*

In the U.S., just **25%** of workers worked from home at least occasionally in 2018, with only **2%** working exclusively from home five or more days a week. As of the beginning of April 2020, an estimated **62%** of American workers had worked remotely in response to the pandemic. The shift in the U.K. has been similarly sudden and dramatic, with the number of employed workers doing their jobs remotely full time having grown from **7%** prior to the pandemic, to **55%** in mid-May.



The first half of this year also proved the ability of remote work to really work. Fully **56%** of remote workers needed to be in a specific place in order to do their job prior to the pandemic. The pandemic forced these workers to adapt, and one of the lasting legacies may be rethinking what jobs can be done remotely for the long term.

### ABILITY TO WORK REMOTELY PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC

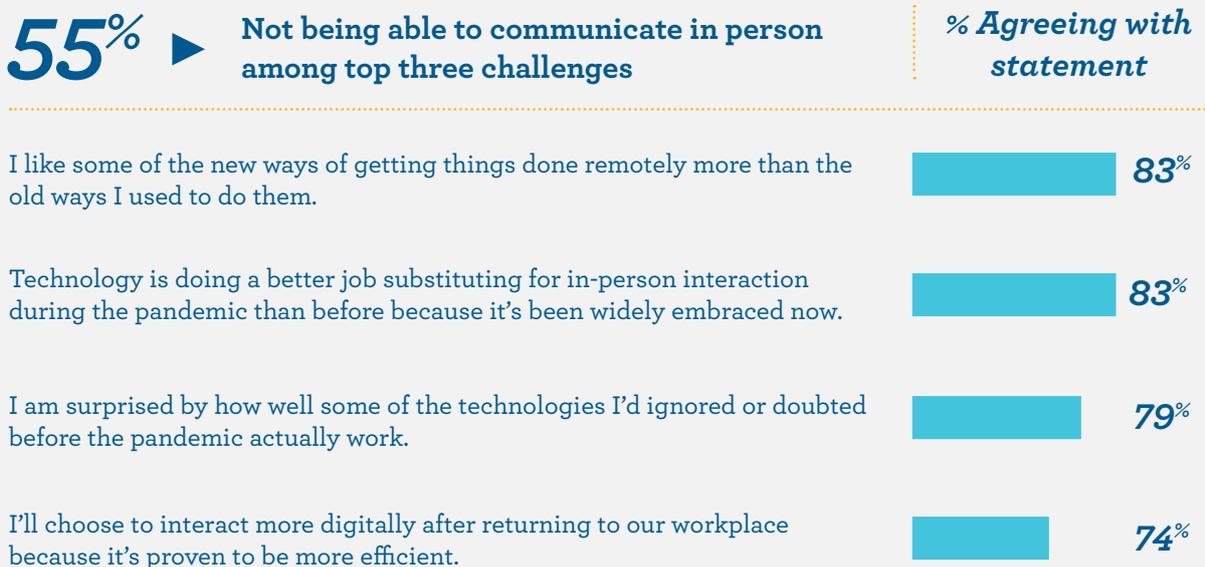


### TECHNOLOGY HASN'T FULLY SOLVED FOR WHAT'S LOST WITHOUT IN-PERSON COMMUNICATION

*The core challenge of remote work is communication.*

Eighty percent have experienced some disadvantage of remote work relating to communication, and **55%** identified not being able to communicate in person as one of their top three challenges.

Despite these difficulties, the overall experience of technology, so much of which is designed to facilitate remote communication, has been positive.



## REMOTE WORK HAS BEEN A NET-BENEFIT DESPITE ITS CHALLENGES, AND WORKERS DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP WHAT THEY'VE GAINED

*Most don't miss their old normal.*

Eighty-five percent have found advantages in remote work that make for a better work/life balance, but **41%** have also found it difficult to separate work and home. Three out of five (**61%**) are worried as remote work continues, they'll be expected to be even more reachable outside of normal business hours.

Despite that tension, the advantages of remote work overcome the disadvantages for many. Eighty percent of remote workers feel healthier, less tired, more human or more connected to their family since transitioning to remote work.

As workers consider returning to their workplaces, it's not only fear of the virus making some reluctant. Seventy-three percent don't want to give up the benefits of working remotely. This attitude is as strong among executives and senior managers (**76%**) as among non-managers (**73%**). Most don't want to return to how they balanced their work and their life before.

Feel healthier, less tired, more connected to family or more human since starting remote work.



As working remotely continues, I'm concerned I'll be expected to be even more reachable outside normal business hours than before the pandemic.



I don't want to give up the benefits of working remotely when it becomes safe to return to my normal place of business.



A fresh look at company culture, values and purpose to reflect the new expectations of employees, customers and society.

## WORKERS WANT TO COLLABORATE ON A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE OR WORK

*Workers see value in using the pandemic to reconsider what work should be.*

If its employees can continue working remotely, **74%** of remote workers believe their company shouldn't reopen workplaces until there's a treatment or vaccine for the virus, and **79%** would rather see their employer invest in technology to improve remote work than in remodeling offices to make them safer to return to.

Nine out of 10 remote workers (**91%**) believe we should take this opportunity to have a true discussion as a society about how work and life should coexist moving forward, a sentiment again strongly felt among executives and senior managers (**92%**). This can begin inside companies, and many workers (**91%**) are eager to engage in a dialogue and take a new look at company culture, values and purpose.

**How helpful would each of the following be?**  
**% selecting "Somewhat" or "Very helpful" or "Is something I must have"**

An actual dialogue between the management and employees to set expectations for one another based on what's been learned during the pandemic.  **94%**

A fresh look at company culture, values and purpose to reflect the new expectations of employees, customers and society.  **91%**

*“Take it offline.”  
 Is that even possible anymore?*

.....

Seventy-four percent of U.S. and U.K. employees will choose to interact more digitally after returning to their workplace because they are more efficient. What will this mean for how we acquire, engage and retain employees, customers and key stakeholders in our supply chains? Security, safety, education, sales, service, communication and wellness are all innovation opportunities, and the list goes on and on. We sought to explore how the ability to work remotely has changed in the U.S. and U.K., to help organizations develop effective communications strategies to address the balance we seek and the work we need to deliver. ■

— **Natasha Kennedy, Global Managing Director,  
 TRUE Global Intelligence**





## HOW TO 'BUILD BACK BETTER' WHEN IT COMES TO THE EMPLOYEE IMPERATIVE

*Responsible employee messaging has never been more important*

Faith Howe, Senior Vice President and Partner, Talent and Transformation

The tragic and despicable deaths of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, together with the devastation of the COVID-19 crisis, have sparked a revolution that is taking hold across the developed world. A revolution that calls for the reevaluation and dismantling of the systems, authorities and hierarchies that have taken hold in society creating deep inequality and injustice.

Organisations now have an immediate choice to make. Become leaders in this revolution or lose relevance and equity in a new normal where only by taking positive action can we meet the heightened expectations of customers, employees and stakeholders. Expressions of solidarity and support are simply no longer enough.

In this emotive and highly charged environment, the already established links between employer brand, company brand and corporate reputation have become even more pronounced. As organizations take steps to ensure the safety, well-being, equality and inclusion of their employees, as well as their commercial futures, the threat of whistleblowers, employee activists and trial by media — not to mention trial by tribunal — are all too real for those that misstep when it comes to their authenticity and their duty of care.

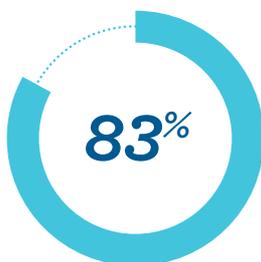


of consumers expect companies to take steps to help workers stay healthy, and one in four employees say that a company's response to the pandemic will impact their consideration of current and future employers.

This is putting the efficacy of company values, ethics and purpose to the ultimate test. For organisations where these amount to little more than carefully crafted straplines, they've served only to highlight the gulf between positioning and reality. But for others, with strong leadership and embedded values, they've served to guide actions that will ultimately prove differentiating when it comes to talent — and brand equity — in the months and years ahead.

### Change is happening on every level

While there's higher order change in the making, we also can't ignore the fact that on a practical level the COVID-19 crisis has freed organisations from long-established working norms, that maybe in hindsight were holding them back. Technology naysayers have been disproved in a world where it's technology that is enabling human interaction, not threatening it. And innovation has helped drive efficiency at a time when no one can afford waste — least of all employees who in many cases are juggling challenging home circumstances, as well as their work.



of employees agree that technology is doing a better job substituting for in-person interaction during the pandemic than before because it's been widely embraced now.

Of course, forward-looking organizations are not just evaluating their successes in the context of crisis management, but recognizing that new ways of working will have positive business impact in the long term. The breaking down of silos, a renewed sense of focus and greater agility are benefits of the new ways of working that have materialized for businesses in different ways.

## So, as we emerge from this period of extreme challenge, emotion and uncertainty, what are keys to ‘building back better’ when it comes to the employee imperative?

Firstly, being deliberate about reshaping your future as an employer. Our research showed that as a result of COVID-19, a staggering **91%** of employees want their company to take a fresh look at culture, values and purpose to reflect new expectations. The rules have changed, and so it’s time for the playbooks to be rewritten. This means it’s critical to see the next phase as we return to the workplace and ‘reopen,’ not just as another operational hurdle to clear, but as the first step on a journey towards a better future.

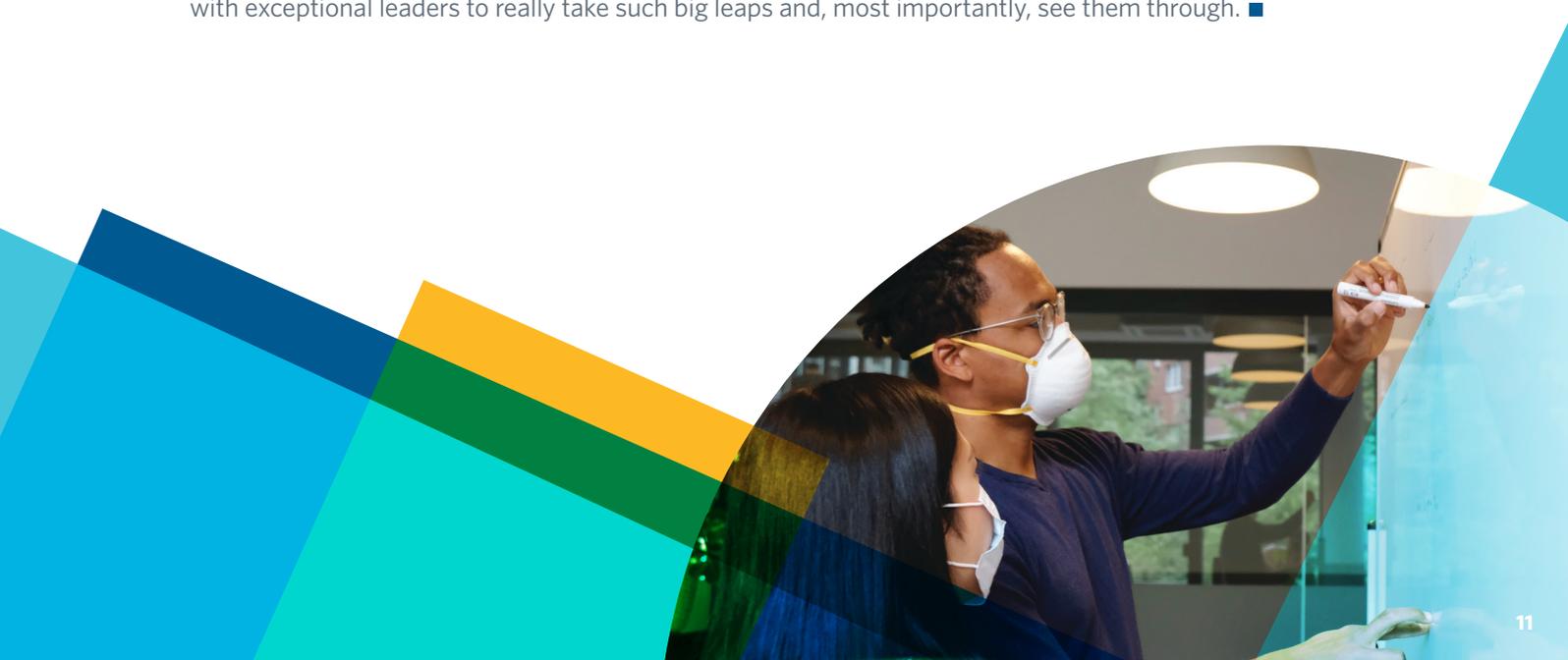
This starts with deep introspection to identify and address the barriers to diversity, equal opportunity and inclusion that will exist overtly or covertly within every organization, to varying degrees. And recognizing that this work is never done.

Next, it’s about understanding the changed expectations of the workforce, establishing a new north star and articulating ambitions that will resonate with employees and galvanize people behind a fresh sense of meaning and direction.

Finally, once these intrinsic needs have been met and employee trust is truly established, exceptional organisations will have the opportunity to capitalize on momentum to accelerate business transformation. The situation has forced operational change, and **83%** of employees now appreciate new ways of getting things done remotely, compared to the way they were done before.

Employees and leaders have had to let go of a previous reality and in many respects people’s resilience and ability to adapt has proved out. The ‘future of work’ trends that have been creeping upon us for decades have come to pass in a matter of weeks, and now, getting in front of change and owning it will define success as businesses target recovery.

There are real reasons to be optimistic, therefore, about the significant role that employers can play in establishing a better future that transcends their own organizational boundaries, but the challenges are also significant. As we look forward, it’s exciting to imagine the possibilities for realizing human potential that could emerge out of these awful human tragedies. But, as ever, it will take enlightened organizations with exceptional leaders to really take such big leaps and, most importantly, see them through. ■





## EVENTS ARE DEAD!

*What to do in a pandemic when your comms strategy relies on physical events?*

David Goldman, Senior Vice President and Partner, Los Angeles

*“The outbreak of COVID-19 has spelled doom for the global events market, with around \$135 billion of the total economic output unlikely to be generated by the end of Q2 2020. The global events industry is likely to head toward a slowdown.”*

— Exhibition and Events Market - Global Outlook and Forecast 2020-2025

### Events are dead ... at least as we once knew them.

Will we miss them? Do you know anyone who truly enjoyed events? The cab lines, the cavernous convention halls with recycled air, the parades of briefings and hospitality events. Interview-packed days and sleepless nights writing, editing and posting stories.

What we sometimes forget is, it was never about the event. The best communications campaigns are just that, campaigns. A process of communication that begins well before an announcement and continues beyond it. The fleeting moment in time that is the event is only one part of a well-executed communications strategy. Conversations, briefings, thought leadership, sponsorships, websites, blogs, announcements and reviews all will continue, and events in some form will carry on as a critical element in the communication chain.

Virtualizing an event can have many benefits: you can still communicate what you planned to communicate IRL. You can own the moment without having to compete with other brands and activations IRL. You can execute the event whenever and for however long you want. You can extend the audience beyond IRL attendees. You can facilitate one-to-one interactions, deepen relationships, create memorable experiences and measure it all. Virtual events also present an opportunity to reach even more people — expanding the audience, helping communicators control the message, all with an ability to measure and evaluate engagement.

However, moving offline to online doesn't mean events will require any less work or investment. In fact, they will be even more challenging and demand the development of new communications 'muscle.' When consumers, customers and journalists have been staring at their screens all day, communicators must over-rotate on creative content production and delivery strategies that really grab and hold attention.

As we pursue this new path of storytelling, we need to remember that all events are not the same. They never were, and taking them online doesn't change that. Many consumer technology events have come to rely on the physical product demonstration or a hands-on experience with a product or service. Some are based upon the dissemination of information at scale or focused purely on relationship building. Others are intended to reach the media, designed for customers, or aimed at reaching the consumer directly. The needs of each of these audiences will still need to be satisfied to ensure the success of the event and ultimately the communications campaign and business objectives.

As we navigate our new normal and shift from offline to online, there are a number of mandates companies must consider to be successful:

### **The Right Partners**

- Experience, creativity and dependability matter just as much in this new environment. Whether you're exploring a content partner or technology platform partner/solution, make sure they share your company values and have the right experience to amplify and deliver success.

### **The Right Distribution Platform**

- Make sure the technology solution being used caters to your needs. Does the software have a hard cap for participants, attendees and contributors? Do you need capability for surveys, live questions, chat? Do you need live editing, live graphic transitions? What kind of content do attendees need to see and/or interact with? Where do you hope for attendees to connect post-stream? Will you disseminate assets via mail or through a portal? Do you need a secondary breakaway channel for media to interact with stakeholders? Do you need to coordinate product delivery with an embargo? Not all platforms have recording functionality either. Working with the right partner to ask the right questions will help confirm the best platform for you.
- Communicators should also think more broadly. You could even take it to another level and produce a documentary or film as a way to convey new information.

### **A Creative Approach**

- The best approach to events has always been through multitiered, multifaceted campaigns that build before and continue with a steady cadence after. This should not stop.
- Be COVID-19 conscious. Know your audience. Some will care most about the news you have, others will care more about the pandemic and how your news impacts or disregards the public's health and/or economic impact.
- Consider themes — a talk show, news format or even a game show? Keep it engaging and appropriate.
- Embrace the new normal and the informal. We're all at home (and many of us are in sweatpants). While brands should come across professional, always, it's time to 'loosen the tie' or better yet, take it off completely. Connect with the audience in a way that feels relevant, timely and approachable.



### The Right Speakers

- Representation matters. Make sure you incorporate a diverse set of speakers and that all remarks reflect an inclusive tone. Any talent you feature — whether it be a member of your executive board or a third-party consultant — must represent the customers and community you serve.

### Mix of Live + Prepared Content

- Live content delivers a sense of energy and news-worthiness.
- Pre-recorded content provides a deeper level of engagement through elements like animation and even visual effects.
- Interactive content allows participants to engage with speakers and even each other beyond the chat function.

### Content and Creativity Are Still King but Brevity and Snackability Are KEY

- No more long keynote addresses. If you have a single speaker, keep it at 10 minutes or less before moving on.
- Consider virtual ‘panel’ discussions to demonstrate different perspectives.
- Create lots of assets to accompany your virtual event that are easily downloadable and can supplement and amplify the message you want to get across.
- Use your entire owned digital ecosystem to distribute content.
- Keep in mind the content created can be used for long-term SEO potential too.

### Surprise and Delight

- Just because your audience is at home doesn’t mean you can’t integrate an element of surprise. Can you incorporate ‘home deliveries’ in real time? How can you add value IRL?
- Engage your stakeholders/audiences and create a memorable experience for them. Think of it like they’re on a journey with your brand/product/story and you can direct, fulfill and delight them at every touchpoint.

Live events will come back, without a doubt. But when they do, they will look different than ever before. In the meantime, successful brands will win with creativity. ■





## THE 2020 CEO CHALLENGE: HOW TO SET THE TONE AUTHENTICALLY FOR RESPONSIBLE RECOVERY AND RESURGENCE

Diane Poelker, Senior Vice President and Partner,  
Reputation Management, St. Louis

At a time when we've had growing discussion about a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, a wave of another sort has crashed across our communities. In the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, an angry, determined, and reenergized racial and social justice movement in America has further upended the global business environment. And, in the process, the firm walls many CEOs once drew between running a business and taking a stand on social issues have crumbled. Across all industries, leaders have been forced to look more holistically than ever at the needs of business and society. But, as the public lens shifts from crisis response to navigating the long-term strategies for social and economic recovery, CEOs are feeling the weight of new responsibility: to use their privilege, influence, access and voices to help create a new normal.

Our research shows that the pandemic has drastically reshaped stakeholder expectations of our societal institutions. Recovery isn't about returning to habits, practices and prejudices we knew in the world before. Instead, it's about uniting internal and external stakeholders — employees, partners, regulators, customers, consumers and investors — in a new vision of success. And, in an environment where public sector leadership continues to be fractured, more and more consumers are looking to CEOs to lead the way. A June 2020 survey of 11,000 opinion leaders and consumers by Morning Consult found that **71%** believe CEOs should use their power and influence to demand action from government entities who have the power to enact systemic change. Similarly, **70%** of those surveyed believe CEOs should make a statement about their personal commitment.

In the post-pandemic period, visible and engaged leadership voices are critical to creating a sense of normalcy, order and grounding that helps society find the path forward to a reimagined and more equitable future. But, CEOs must strike a careful balance between pushing toward the change and opportunities that lie ahead, while still ensuring the confidence and safety of employees, customers and communities while the pandemic still looms.

Striking that balance may present special challenges for tech CEOs. Not all that long ago, the sector was playing defense in the response to techlash. Now tech is getting a reputational boost as providers have ridden to the rescue during the pandemic ... from supporting healthcare providers and first responders to giving us the tools to work, educate our children and buy virtually everything we need from home.

Yet, many tech companies may well find themselves in the crosshairs of 2020's social and economic aftermath. Without awareness and mindful action, another round of techlash may await growing goliaths who experience record sales, but do little to address the struggles of our black and brown communities, which have suffered disproportionately from COVID-19. Techlash may also await those companies that don't take steps to help the thousands of small, local businesses that have shut their doors in the wake of the pandemic, many of them never to reopen.

As tech leaders necessarily raise their voices throughout recovery, it's critical to listen and learn first before they speak. And when the moment comes to tell their stories, they must prioritize substance over style in shaping their narratives.

### **Share what grounds you.**

In times of uncertainty, leaders are positioned to ground their organizations for success by balancing the comfort that some things can endure with the recognition that other structures can be transformed — for the better — because of the way our society has continued to change.

### **Acknowledge the concerns of customers and employees — and stand with them.**

Safety is still a top priority where the virus is concerned, but addressing issues of racial and social inequality has also taken on a new urgency. Prioritize your stakeholders' needs as people first before speaking to their role in upholding the bottom line. Model the positive behaviors you're asking of employees and customers. If masks are required, or working from home is encouraged, lean into opportunities where you can participate and champion change through leadership behavior. And foster the kind of honest dialogue that leads to greater social justice by personally and visibly initiating uncomfortable but vital conversations with your employees and communities.

### **Provide evidence that change is tangible and impactful.**

Even in an era of individual uncertainty, rapidly shifting business developments and quick news cycles, some themes remain central:

- **Innovation:** Business and social restrictions have given rise to new challenges and compelled change. How has this change led to new product and service innovations? How can these innovations contribute to the broader economic and social recovery?
- **Workplace culture:** What workplace cultural tenets have spurred new practices, better ways of problem-solving and collaboration and support for workers? How will you capitalize on the moment and the headlines speaking to injustice and equity to create conversation and lasting change?
- **Living legacy:** What corporate changes are emblematic of who you are and your track record of doing good? What structural changes have you made to improve crisis management? Where have you broken down sacred silos to do what needed to be done, not just for your company, but for its stakeholders?
- **Greater good:** These twin crises of 2020 have brought businesses, governments and NGOs together for meaningful dialogue and a new start down the road to long-term solutions. In this environment, what are you doing to form alliances with unlikely collaborators to pursue the greater good? How are you balancing community needs with core business needs? How are you contributing to economic and social recovery? ■





## FIVE TECH-ENABLED TRENDS IN YOUR MEDIA PROGRAMS IN 2020 AND BEYOND

Ryan Brack, Senior Vice President, New York

If there's one thing media mavens can agree on, it's that the first half of 2020 feels like a contradiction. Faced with an ongoing global pandemic, news media is ever more central to daily life, while simultaneously facing a crisis of trust and funding. Tech was already disrupting media. COVID-19 accelerated that change. Digital subscriptions are up significantly in 2020, but so are layoffs. In Australia, 157 newsrooms have closed since January, increasing the pressure to explore digital-only directions. This, despite a **54%** month-over-month audience increase closing out Q1. The Boston Globe announced several rounds of layoffs despite growing to 200,000 digital-only subscribers in just 11 months — their first 100,000 took seven years. Across the pond, members of the U.K. trade organization, Association of Online Publishers, report that digital subscriptions are up **24%** year over year, the highest in a year-and-a-half, though revenues were down by **6.2%**.

Mainstream media have gone from breaking news to amplifying it. Stories are kick-started in local, national and online discussions. Newsrooms must do more with less. So, what are the implications for the communications industry? Taken together, these trends require a distribution of energy, spend, and eyeballs into more agile and tech-enabled platforms, which will need to be top of mind for companies as they build and execute their recovery and resurgence plans in 2020 and beyond.

### Micro-data sources from media

The 'long-tail' is certainly not a new phenomenon. But with newer technology capabilities, publishers are now able to home in on micro-targeted information in order to sell traffic data by individual article URL. The information includes how many people are actually reading an article, on what platform, in what part of the country and for how long. This allows us to understand true interests. The ability to know what people want to read and how they want to read it allows us to create more precise targeting of storylines. We expect this trend of access to actual reach data for earned media to continue. As a result, expect to see more precision around earned news media programs that previously relied on total potential impressions for measurement — especially critical during unforeseen periods.

### Social journalism, the side hustle

For years, social media platforms have been the primary gateway to information for younger generations, and influencers have been a key messenger. Until recently, the influencer category was dominated by micro to mega celebrities. No more. Journalists and freelancers, who have found themselves with more time to experiment with different channels, are rapidly expanding the category.

New news platforms hungry for new audiences are emerging. TikTok is becoming a major platform for freelancers to create content. Fortnite is a new platform to watch concerts from the likes of Travis Scott. Twitch is emerging as a newsfeed for breaking news. The advantage for communications and PR professionals is understanding how traditional media and users consume content, which is radically changing during quarantine. Success relies on understanding how to provide social journalists with engaging content, unique to their platform of choice, and in a quick and compelling way. As platforms see traction in media attention, it's important to focus on both mature and emerging platforms for clients. TikTok may have more buzz in this moment, but may not overtake other services when it comes to consuming information and shaping opinions, for now, if ever.

## Digital gateways

In addition to social platforms, search and aggregators are also operating as news gateways. Here, information travels across local media, national media, social journalists and social platforms. Algorithms and biorhythms work alongside each other, in outlets and on digital platforms, to make decisions that impact where, when and how information appears. In this world of mass personalization, learning how to convey and adapt stories for all the digital gateways versus static content is now a basic requirement.

## Podcast, redux

If podcast 1.0 focused on long form, podcast 2.0 is as much about the act of creation as it is about the listening experience; in some cases, the community of ‘co-creators’ is larger than the active podcast audience. Podcast 2.0 is also marked by wild variations in length. Driven by the need to match short attention spans, microcasts are emerging to complement the traditional long-form podcast. Like other forms of media and talk radio, podcast 2.0 is on a path to becoming the central pillar of multichannel strategies. Large players see the writing on the wall, too. The New York Times recently acquired a startup that creates audio from written journalism. We’ve been helping clients build podcasts — whether ‘earned’ or ‘owned’ — into their multichannel communications strategies for several years, and we expect this to accelerate in the future.

## Executive email newsletters are the new industry analysts

In order to maximize subscription revenue, individual journalists and news organizations are creating subscription-only newsletters with high value analysis, targeted to senior executives. Like the op-ed columns of old, tailored newsletters are particularly influential and are being produced by individual journalists and publishers, alike. Generating high open and read rates, their analysis shapes how readers view the reported ‘hard news.’ As with podcasts, we expect to see the most successful newsletter writers building multichannel media companies with online communities and digital/hybrid events layered atop as additional revenue streams. Newsletters have become a heavyweight player in the media market — demanding deep subject matter expertise from contributors and readers alike.

We are able to track and follow these media and platform trends because we place a premium on merging our proprietary and data-driven strategies with our deep communications expertise and industry relationships. But it’s not just about seeing around corners for our clients. The tech-enabled shifts in the media require the ability to see around small mountains, and the ability to distinguish between linear and exponential will be a defining factor for success in the media landscape of the future. ■





## TOP TIPS FOR LAUNCHING A PRODUCT IN A PANDEMIC

Paula Conhain, Senior Vice President and Partner,  
Corporate Reputation, San Francisco

Launching a product in a pandemic. As PR counselors, it sounds exactly like the kind of thing we'd vehemently advise clients NOT to do. But what happens when their business cannot afford to cancel? When they operate in a highly competitive category where relevance and shelf space — both online and physical — are in jeopardy if they do not introduce the next big thing?

The COVID-19 crisis hit at a time when many consumer tech companies were about to hold their spring launches, inclusive of flashy events, carefully crafted plans for reviews, influencer engagement and marketing campaigns. Those who successfully navigated the impact did so by quickly pivoting and prioritizing tone and humanity, despite the bottom line being the reason to carry forward. Winning product launch PR strategies were defined by the following tenets that are central to our work and should remain so no matter how our world evolves over the next several months — or years:

- **Find relevance:** No company can solve the global health crisis we are facing and any that claims to should expect to be met with swift backlash. But many have risen to the challenge of lending what they can offer to help people in specific, relevant ways, be it a focus on fitness, virtual collaboration or connectivity.
- **Be flexible:** In the most uncertain of times, expect the unexpected and be ready to pivot. For example, while some parts of the world are taking steps to reopen, be ready with virtual options for your next launch so you can execute no matter what.
- **Always listen:** Real, collaborative relationships are important to truly understand how the reporters that matter to your clients or company feel, so it can guide the evolution of your launch plan. And, going right to the source is often appreciated, so we can help reporters do their jobs easily and be respectful of what they are facing.
- **Most importantly, be creative.** While we struggle to stay engaged in our work while sheltering in place, so do our clients and reporters with whom we work. Virtual events have become immersive experiences in just a few short months and open up new chances to think globally. Find a unique, surprising (and safe!) way to deliver products for testing.

Product launches can be executed effectively if done thoughtfully and responsibly, if you have a legitimately relevant product, and if you prioritize making it easy for reporters. ■



## LESSONS FROM ASIA: VALUES KEY TO MANAGING RESURGENCE BALANCING ACT

Rachel Catanach, President and Senior Partner, Greater China, Hong Kong

The saying, Fortune favours the bold, has frequently been used in military contexts to inspire people in battle to take appropriate risk. The situation communicators find themselves in today with COVID-19 certainly has many parallels with war. Truth has been the first casualty. Consumers are having to scramble through a mish-mash of polemic and misinformation. And sorting through it is hard. Even the most savvy can be caught out by carefully packaged propaganda from “experts” that appeals to their sense of conspiracy or salves their feelings of uncertainty.

The challenge for communicators is that with this virus, nobody knows any better. We are all charting new territory. Communicators often need to be the first to craft a response or a policy with no parallel experience to draw on, nor any real certainty of how it will play out when implemented. This can be both terrifying and energising.

In Greater China, we have lived with the pandemic since early in the year, and it feels like we’ve reached a truce. Life isn’t what it was, and many of the structures of the past have changed irrevocably. But we need to move forward, understanding that the decisions we make now will set us up for the next chapter, whatever it brings. It’s no time for nostalgia. This will be the new normal for the foreseeable future.

### Here are five things that I have learned and observed over this period.

- 1. Listen intently:** The individuals, companies and organisations consumers are turning to are those that listen well to underlying sentiment and reflect that understanding in their message delivery. Sentiment is changing every day, so what is true one week isn’t necessarily true the next. Using data and insights to guide action has become even more important. Companies need to be regularly taking pulse checks and adapting their narrative to suit the times.
- 2. Donations don’t buy love:** The tech sector dominates global private donations and big players from both West and East have given billions of dollars in PPE, cash and kind. This largesse has been welcomed by netizens but hasn’t necessarily translated into reputational credit nor brand love. Consumers expect corporations to play their part but what they really want from leaders is empathy and clear direction, people who reassure through measured explanation in a timely way and who are in the trenches alongside them.

3. **Adapt and pivot:** Brands operating in China have been remarkably quick to adapt to the new circumstances and demographic trends. When offline events became impossible, tech companies quickly introduced livestreaming commerce into their platform offerings, allowing brands from alcohol to shampoo to engage with consumers in new online ways and earn revenue at the same time. What has become clear is that brands that have not digitalized their offerings need to accelerate their plans if they are to survive.
  
4. **Don't be complacent:** Consumers were relatively forgiving of organisations in the first stage of the pandemic on the basis that this event is not their fault. In the next stage, however, brands should expect that consumers will be watching them more critically. Every action from the resumption of "new-normal" marketing to the layoff of employees will be assessed through new filters. Getting the right balance between health and safety and commercial initiative will be an ongoing imperative.
  
5. **Review and reaffirm your values:** FleishmanHillard research has revealed that consumers want organisations to reshape their culture, purpose and values, potentially to reflect new social contracts with stakeholders that have yet to be codified. Tech companies should look at their values through a long lens and use them to frame the discussions on the trade-offs between privacy and freedom that may need to be made as governments consider technology solutions as part of their overall pandemic mitigation strategy. Values can be a guiding light for these conversations at a time when there is such a lot of uncertainty and unknowns. ■





## DESPITE TALK OF THE END OF TECHLASH, THE DEBATE IS FAR FROM OVER

Sam Fabens, Senior Vice President, VOX Global, Washington, D.C.

Over the past few years, big tech found itself in the crosshairs of consumer and policymaker ire. Data privacy and monetization, censorship, spread of mis-(or dis-) information or market concentration, have all been at the center of significant discussions about the “threat” posed by big tech and what actions policymakers can take.

2020 opened with the debate continuing among policymakers, with the U.S. elections likely to send the conversation into hyperdrive. Then, the emergence of COVID-19, the killing of George Floyd, and a national conversation about racism in America abruptly paused business as usual.

For the big tech companies, COVID-19 was an opportunity to demonstrate how data, AI and supercomputing power could be used for good. Technology enabled all to stay in touch with loved ones, connected to colleagues and classes, and ensured that necessities continued to make it to the front door.

Those same companies also saw their reputations among consumers improve. While the rapid transition to a conversation about policing and racism makes it nearly impossible to know if that reputation boost among consumers was short or long term, it’s clear that the techlash and policy debate is far from over.

This point may seem counterintuitive — reputation boosts often lessen the need for policy debates. After all, policymaker sentiment is driven by voter sentiment. However, it’s important to remember that tech industry backlash was always different. It wasn’t started by a consumer-driven grassroots campaign. It began with calls for change from influencers, advocates and those who understood the technology. The 2016 election may have sent techlash into the consumer psyche, but that was a catalyst for the movement, not the inception.

The clearest evidence of that was American policymaking in May. Even while the economy was in a steep dive and recovery funding was still being debated, Democrats and Republicans both introduced legislation aimed at controlling and restricting how contact tracing data is collected, shared and retained — regardless of who is doing the collecting, sharing or aggregating. At the same time, the Department of Justice and state attorneys continue to pursue antitrust cases against tech companies.

Since then, a dialogue about race has resulted in questions for tech companies, from consumers and influencers alike, about internal diversity, business practices and partners and commitments to stopping racism — questions that have rarely generated satisfying answers for the underserved communities in the past. The issues are real and are not going away.

At least for the foreseeable future, the politics of tech policy have changed. It’s no longer just about whether companies are liked. It’s about practices and behaviors, whether it’s a company’s data practices or their hiring practices. As we analyze the policy landscape for the remainder of 2020 and into the beginning of the next administration we must be prepared to engage in a more issue/behavior-based conversation that (like all policymaking) will be influenced, but not defined, by the reputations of a few companies. ■



31% of consumers think that tech companies are regulated too little - 2019 FleishmanHillard research



## WHY YOU NEED TO PREPARE YOUR TECH COMMUNICATIONS TEAM NOW FOR THE POST-COVID-19 MEDIA LANDSCAPE

### *Building a media team crow's nest*

Seth Bloom, Senior Vice President and Senior Partner, Boston

To steal a line from every airline pilot I've ever flown with: "Air traffic control has told us to expect some light to moderate chop ahead."

As we peek around the corner to a world that is slowly picking itself up from the COVID-19 pandemic, in-house and agency communications teams in the tech space will need to quickly adjust to a media landscape that has been significantly altered. And I'd argue that those of us who communicate on behalf of tech companies need to move even faster than our peers since the tech press is usually ahead of the curve in how they report and share news.

But adjust how? First and foremost, you need to put a team member or agency partner in a figurative Communications Crow's Nest: ensuring that your team is looking far into the distance, assessing what's ahead and proposing course changes as appropriate. This role will also send a message to the entire team: everyone will need to be on their toes in our new normal. Communications staffers who are forward thinking and willing to take risks will have a leg up as we climb out of COVID-19.

Here are some specific predictions on where communications is heading post-pandemic and how your staffing decisions could be impacted:

#### **Media Prediction: Buckle up**

The pace of tech news coverage had already become dizzying before COVID-19, but we think it'll actually increase after the pandemic. There will be more coverage, but it'll be shallower as reporters cover more areas than they used to.

**So tech comms teams should include:** Staffers who can keep up with the fast pace and who, while moving a mile a minute can still explain complex technology in plain language to reporters with less subject matter expertise. Team members will also need to be like Swiss Army knives — smart about all aspects of a company's business, so if a busy reporter declines one pitch they can quickly pivot to another relevant story idea.

#### **Media Prediction: Get comfortable passing the buck**

In order to survive, media outlets will need their paid products (sponsored virtual events, affiliate relationships, etc.) to thrive.

**So tech comms teams should include:** Staffers who are comfortable researching, securing and making the most out of paid opportunities. Communications teams will need to work closely with their marketing colleagues and get more comfortable with a new way of thinking that includes financial investment and ROI.



### **Media Prediction: Don't sleep on the "Blogs of Record"**

Top-tier, online, journalistic tech outlets (years ago, we dubbed them the Blogs of Record) are reporting strong readership lately. We think they will continue to grow in influence because of their scrappy, smart journalists and aggressive writing style that's just right for 2020's mood.

**So tech comms teams should include:** A member of the small breed of media specialists who truly understand how they like to work with brands (and how they don't).

### **Media Prediction: Have a little fun?**

Consumers need to be entertained in these tough times, and that's a trend that won't go away anytime soon. Comedians who take news and their technology seriously — John Oliver, Trevor Noah, Stephen Colbert — are super important now and could get more influential.

**So tech comms teams should include:** Staffers who can think very creatively about how tech companies' offerings are impacting real people in real ways. This wouldn't be a place to pitch corporate news, of course, but outlets like The Daily Show will be receptive to big stories about technology improving lives that can be brought to life by execs who can speak with humanity.

### **Media Prediction: Executive importance**

Tech executives who can provide a human face to their company will be incredibly important as generally cynical reporters return from covering a life-and-death pandemic.

**So tech comms teams should include:** Staffers who have the ability to build communications programs for executives and who can coach them to effectively talk about the human impact of their technology rather than the geeky inner workings. ■





## THE HEIGHTENED IMPORTANCE OF LOCALISATION DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Claudia Bate, Head of Technology, Director and Partner, London

I consider myself very lucky to have lived and worked in London, Paris, Rome and Singapore during my career. I have experienced different working cultures and approaches that have helped to shape my perspective and the counsel I now bring to my clients.

Having advised technology brands headquartered all over the world — in U.K., Germany, U.S., Singapore, China, Taiwan and Japan — I have always believed in the power of global brands that understand the importance of adapting their communications to align with the priorities of international stakeholders, from customers to partners and suppliers, employees and investors.

While every organisation will have its own priorities, it is clear there is no “one-size-fits-all” approach, and communications messages need to be adapted to work effectively in different markets. As we navigate the global COVID-19 pandemic, this mantra applies now more than ever.

We know that different countries are experiencing the pandemic in different ways — and while there is a shared experience that pervades the consumer consciousness on a global level, the significant variations in national responses, regulations and policies — combined with varying timelines — provide a diverse set of challenges to businesses and their customers around the world.

While it’s important for organisations to take a consistent approach, with the CEO leading from the front in terms of shaping a company’s response to the pandemic, it has never been more critical for brands to shape localised, nuanced messages that will resonate with international audiences. For example, as things begin to tentatively return to relative normality in some parts of Asia and conversations begin to shift to recovery, many European nations are still experiencing lockdown measures. The way a brand approaches its communications simply must reflect this.

In just a few short months, the pandemic has changed our perceptions to a degree typically seen only over years and decades. This shift is likely to last well beyond the initial shock to societies and economies as personal experiences shape the way we think and behave in years to come.

Our global research shows that **73%** say the pandemic has already changed the way they see the world, and **68%** report that it has changed the products and services they once thought were important. This will undoubtedly have a significant, and long-lasting, effect on business.

Furthermore, our recent survey highlights that while **85%** agree that major corporations have a role to play in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, only **30%** agreed they are currently performing to a high standard. However, the data varies significantly by region — with respondents in China holding an entirely different view to those in Europe at that point in time — as you might expect.

While we are united by a sense of uncertainty around the world, the way we think, feel and act in any given moment differs greatly by market. Global technology brands need to be agile enough to understand and address these differences more than ever before.

We cannot predict the future, but we know that navigating the recovery from this pandemic will require deep audience insights and an agility to flex messages and campaigns according to the situation as it unfolds. This will require careful handling, led by in-market communications experts. Now is the time for localisation, not globalisation. ■



## THE CASE FOR CREATIVITY IN REEMERGENCE

Jared Carneson, Senior Vice President and Senior Partner, San Francisco

While the verdict is out on which behavioral shift takes center stage in a post pandemic re-emergence, people cannot deny that COVID-19 has forced rapid digital transformation at scale. And most likely, there is no going back.

As we seek to adopt some of the behavior entrenched by the global pandemic, digitization has shifted from a line item lurking on the C-suite agenda, to a worldwide imperative necessary for economic and societal survival.

Our innate needs to gather, to love, to seek validation and to be entertained have not gone anywhere — they remain fixed and baked into the human experience. The difference now, however, is that these needs are just more difficult to service in the mire of a pandemic. But, with that said, make no mistake, the fictional Dr. Ian Malcolm from Jurassic Park captured this sentiment best when he said that, "If there is one thing the history of evolution has taught us, it's that life will not be contained. Life breaks free, it expands to new territories and crashes through barriers, painfully, maybe even dangerously ... life ... finds a way."

Those who have the courage to see the challenges in reemergence as opportunities are unlocking unprecedented productivity and creativity. Now is the time to go all in on ingenuity. As an agency, we have spent the past few months helping clients creatively unpack and translate physical products and service experiences into more appropriate virtual offerings. This virtual proxy is the status quo, but the next layer of conversation focuses on differentiation, driven through the smart use of platforms, services and emerging technology.

With this imperative in mind, we can expect to see the emergence of more creative technologists ushering in smarter ways to engage with the world.

We have been on the precipice of a convergence of next generation tech for some time. This convergence coalesces at the intersection of next-generation connectivity and computing, coupled with novel data science, resulting in an amalgamation of automation and virtual world augmentation.

These leaps forward through 5G, quantum computing, IOT and AI will fundamentally change industries across the board. The next few years of technological innovation promise several incredibly exciting advancements ranging from AI-driven drug discovery and robotic farming to the future of hyper-personalized education and less-invasive medical interventions — all at scale. Currently, skepticism induced by technological vilification and a lack of trust in both tech and political leaders has hindered the widespread embracement of innovation. But now, with the pandemic fueling a recontextualized need for technological innovation, we will witness a reawakened desire for the products, services and goods that were once only moon-shot prototypes for future digital life. In short, the pandemic has catalyzed the arrival of the future.

Headlines are ripe with predictions about the increased cycle of innovation as a direct result of the pandemic, boldly stating that we can expect five years' worth of innovation in 12 months. And for once, there is a solid grounding to what might have been previously filed under futurist narrative. Even at the most fundamental level, things like telemedicine, cloud-based collaboration and virtual conferencing have seen mass adoption through a layer of late adopters (all technologies that have historically taken years to realize). As a result, even in this narrow ambit, we now find a new benchmark from which to innovate.

In this environment, the reemergence creates a huge opportunity for a diversification of your communications mix — multidimensional needs demand a multidimensional communications team. And key to that need is the integration of creativity at the core of all communications activity. The barriers for messages to break through with true traction are denser than ever. In order for stories to resonate with audiences, they need to align with that audience's interests, the predominant news agenda, channel algorithms, hyper-personalization, sociopolitical issues and content fatigue — those with courage to bring creativity into the core are experiencing more success in navigating this particularly complex environment.

Individuals, teams and organizations positioned to usher in creativity as a key tool will be the ones able to shift perceptions and win hearts and minds.

This impetus is our ice age. A moment in time that we may very well look back on as a technological and creative leap forward for those brave enough to double down on unbridled, courageous creativity. ■





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