How has your short-term and long-term work changed?

In-person events have always been an important part of being able to connect with an audience and help them experience products. This has been an immediate short-term hit for us. It has triggered a lot of shifts in our approach for generating leads and building brand awareness.

Short term, my new projects have slowed down, and in-person [projects] have almost entirely ground to a halt until we’re through this situation. In turn, we’re seeing a lot of people go to remote [work], even locally.

Now that we don’t have trade shows to help generate leads, we’ve had to put our creative thinking caps on. We’ve come up with some great outside-the-box ideas on how to reach those folks. For example, we’re looking at some highly targeted unique direct mail.

My organization had to cancel our annual conference, which is our biggest event of the year. We were heading into crunch time for all our marketing executions—and then everything came to a sudden stop. This has turned into an opportunity to address the current situation as well as to strategize for when things get back to normal.

My current priorities have all shifted to communications. But in between, I’ve been able to work on some of my normal day-to-day activities and short-term priorities. Some longer-term projects have shifted as events have been postponed or canceled.

We’ve actually been busier short term with helping all of our clients respond to new restrictions and communicate their amended hours and services during the new normal. So far, our long-term projects seem to be on track, but we do have some retainers that are indicating they may have to scale back until the economy recovers more.

How has your short-term and long-term work changed?

My work is largely virtual, so that hasn’t changed much in the short term. In the long term, I believe I’ll be better connected technically and personally as a result of this disruption.

My work has actually increased. Responses to the crisis in the nonprofit and healthcare space especially seem to have created the need for pivots and rehashing of existing plans. I’ve brought strategic ideas to the table for a few clients having nothing to do with marketing, and it created some meaningful perspective shifts that benefited us both.

In the short term, the in-person workshops for my clients were canceled. Much of my projects now need to be delivered via digital formats.

We are working to keep our long-term projects on track while handling a dramatic increase in short-term projects as we help our clients with COVID-19-related communications and challenges.

We’re doing our best to ensure that our new short-term actions still fall in line with our longer-term plan, but we’re really operating with a short-term view at the moment. Getting our business and our clients through the crisis as successfully as possible is our only focus.
What are the communications tactics your audience is responding to best at this time?

A personal approach focused on, “How can we help?” We are trying to focus on hearing the challenges our audience is facing and coming along beside them to help in any way possible.

Emails. When we are genuine and authentic, we’ve seen great results.

Offers of help, support, reassurance and personal connection are ruling the day. The focus and tone of our communications are generally framed in the experience we’re all moving through together, with the more promotional messaging toned down or paused. There is a real openness to using this time as an opportunity to connect or reconnect and collaborate.

We’ve focused our communication on current clients during the crisis. Proactive emails with personalized ideas and strategy recommendations have been appreciated and have generated new opportunities with current clients.

Unless you can draw a clear line of sight from your products or services to how it can actually support your existing customers in their new reality, stop promoting. “We’re here for you” messages seem effective, but only if it’s authentic. Otherwise, hold the promotions and lead-gen stuff.

I haven’t seen a dramatic change in any of our core tactics, but we have seen a much heavier shift to social media and boosting posts due to clients needing to get a message out quickly to their audience base.

We’re still waiting to see exactly what’s working consistently, but we know two things are true: One-to-one personalized communications are most effective and—regardless of the communication channel—there’s a lot more noise and everyone seems to be saying the same thing. The only thing getting through is content that’s truly unique and valuable.

We’re seeing good response on social media, as well as through direct visits to our website. We do a lot of outreach and direct communication though our communities, but we’ve been mindful not to overwhelm people through marketing emails.
What are some of the best examples of workplace leadership you’ve seen during these uncertain times?

Focusing first on employees and making sure they are navigating this time well and using clear and honest communication as a way to help teams feel stable. It’s important to look to your team and allow them to step up and jump into new ideas that weren’t pursued in the past.

One of my clients just opened up a Slack channel for all his team members and contractors. It made my day to have some new folks to talk with, and I’ve followed suit and done the same on my Slack for my team members that don’t normally talk, trying to spur some conversations to keep people connected.

We’ve had a tough month here in Nashville. First, we were hit by the tornado [March 3] and next by COVID-19. We have daily leadership calls addressing both situations and are candid about what is going on, what is expected and what needs to be done.

Focusing first on employees and making sure they are navigating this time well and using clear and honest communication as a way to help teams feel stable. It’s important to look to your team and allow them to step up and jump into new ideas that weren’t pursued in the past.

As the workplace becomes increasingly dispersed, don’t forget to check in on everyone’s well-being.

When you remove the physical watercooler from your relationships, it’s easy to forget this.

One of our business partners has holdings in several companies, and he immediately reacted by setting up a daily call where he pulls together all the business leaders. We have also instituted a daily call to promote collaboration and to have some time to be a team while remote.

Our agency president personally delivered care packages to the porches of all of our employees who are working remotely to show gratitude for all of their efforts.

Our whole team stepped up to transform our business in a week.

Flexing hours for families who have young children in the household. Giving grace to online meetings when someone has to step away to answer questions for children or take care of their elderly family members. Or when the kids pop up into the meetings.

Placing a stake in the ground immediately to establish that all employees be able to work from home has been a winner. For those businesses operating in industries that have been ordered to close: Leaders who have set up a way for people to financially give to help support those who lost their jobs are also winners in my view.

Many, if not most, employers have been steadfast and thoughtful in their support of employees and customers. There has been impressive openness to making technology and other solutions accessible, if not free, enabling people to stay connected and productive while doing their part to change the game.

We had a project manager step up and organize a virtual happy hour for an intern’s last day. That provided a great send-off for her and some much-needed socializing for our team.

Leadership [at my organization] has done a great job of taking a pragmatic approach, while acting swiftly when the time was right.

We had a tough month here in Nashville. First, we were hit by the tornado [March 3] and next by COVID-19. We have daily leadership calls addressing both situations and are candid about what is going on, what is expected and what needs to be done.
Which of your marketing skills have become your greatest strengths to help you navigate this environment?

Listening. It has always been important to me to listen to my audience and not react. I’ve always been a relationship-driven marketer focused on finding ways to help and support first and I’m leaning on that focus right now.

Keeping calm under pressure, for sure. This is when we need to buckle down, be clear with our communication and get creative on how we are going to get through this.

An understanding of live streaming has been way more helpful than I ever thought it would be.

Networking skills. The connections and relationships I’ve built and maintain with other marketers allow quick ramp-up of new technical capabilities, access to resources and collaborative solutions and support. The strength of the community makes the uncertainty not just bearable, but also navigable and even hopeful.

Adaptability and strategic thinking are key right now. We have to react to an unprecedented pace of change, and we have to make the best decisions possible in an environment with high stakes and great uncertainty. It’s like real-time optimization of a digital campaign times a million.

It’s all about communication. The ability to craft clear, factual and relatable messaging has allowed us to move fast and provide timely communications.

Keeping calm under pressure, for sure. This is when we need to buckle down, be clear with our communication and get creative on how we are going to get through this.

Embracing change, improvisation skills and valuing what diversity, equity and inclusion can mean for new ways of thinking.

We always work hard to connect sales and marketing. Sales processes and lead generation have had to change a lot with social distancing, so we’ve actively pursued ways to help our clients overcome these challenges with an increased digital presence and ways to hold sales presentations virtually.

Adaptability. Things are moving so fast right now that we have to be ready to change direction and connect with our audience on a moment’s notice. The ability to get things done quickly is key right now.

Since I specifically focus on DEI [diversity, equity and inclusion] through culture and brand, my skillset has been instrumental in supporting clients in how to create new cultural norms digitally with inclusivity in mind, and how their brand can authentically show up during this pandemic. MN