

Tips for Engaging Audiences Online



COVID-19 has changed the 2020 landscape and is forcing us to re-think how we communicate. With more events and in-person activities cancelled, below are some ideas for how to conduct partner engagement and outreach virtually.

SHARE TIMELY RESOURCES FOR DEALING WITH COVID-19 AND MAKE EVENTS AND INFORMATION RELEVANT TO MOMENT

Demonstrate leadership in your community by sharing information about public health, government services and economic benefits that can support individuals, businesses and communities to deal with COVID-19. Include links to these resources on your social media pages and website. Highlight steps your state/agency is taking to support vulnerable populations, health professionals and businesses, including operational and policy changes to assist individuals in keeping health coverage and accessing care.



TRANSITION AND ADAPT TRADITIONAL IN-PERSON EVENTS AN ONLINE AUDIENCE

Social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn Live all allow your organization to broadcast to larger, public audiences. According to eMarketer, both Instagram and Facebook have seen a 100% increase in use by organizations and brands since the COVID-19 outbreak. LinkedIn has recently opened its events platforms to all company pages due to COVID-19. And Google Hangouts, Zoom, WebEx or other multi-user platforms are best used to connect and meet with large groups of people for more interactive conversations.

Plan ahead for your virtual events:

- + Shifting from an in-person event to a virtual event requires an extra emphasis on keeping content condensed and relevant. Have a focus for your discussion with a specific topic or goal you want to achieve with your event.
- + Determine the best platform for your event based on your goals, expected number attendees, desired interaction and available tools.
- + For longer events, consider engaging with interactive features such as videos, photos and polls. Break content up over several days, sticking to no more than a few hours each day.
- + To the extent possible, be sure that all participants have strong Wi-Fi bandwidth, and have updated their browsers or required apps/software before joining the conversation. For Google Hangouts, every browser works, although Chrome is preferred.
- + Test your conversation before your meeting, ideally a day in advance to resolve any technical issues. For improved audio, consider using a wireless microphone that plugs into your phone or camera.
- + Consider whether to film your content horizontally or vertically—horizontal video can be easier for users to view on a laptop or Connected TV, while vertical is more conducive to viewing from a smartphone. Therefore, horizontal is best for more formal live streams or events such as panel discussions or press conferences, and vertical is best for sharing casual news and updates with your audience.
- + Make sure to promote your virtual event 5-7 days in advance using your email marketing lists, social media channels and any paid or promoted efforts.
- + If incorporating breakout sessions, keep them to 20-45 minutes to accommodate busy schedules.
- + Timing matters. National events should be scheduled to accommodate East and West Coast audiences, usually between 12-2 p.m. ET or 7-9 p.m. ET. Regional or local events should be scheduled for 9-10 a.m., 12-2 p.m., or typical “after-work” hours, if needed.
- + Consider housing archived presentations, slide decks and supplemental content online for attendees to access after the event.

A NOTE ON CHANNELS

Prioritize content to be shared on Facebook and Instagram for reaching consumers, and Twitter and LinkedIn for reaching issue experts and policymakers.



FACEBOOK (CONSUMERS): Facebook is a great place to engage consumers by sharing live streams, links, photos, and videos with calls to action for your followers.



INSTAGRAM (CONSUMERS): Keep consumers up to date through Instagram by sharing images in your feed or on Instagram Stories. On Stories, you can utilize interactive features, such as polling to ask your audience questions. IGTV also allows you to share longer format videos – ideally 2-3 minutes maximum.



TWITTER (POLICYMAKERS, JOURNALISTS AND ISSUE EXPERTS):

Maintaining an active and engaging Twitter profile by regularly sharing succinct, bite-sized facts and information in as few words as possible will make your page relevant to Twitter users. A consistent posting cadence with pictures, charts or links will help you get more visibility on your posts.



LINKEDIN (ISSUE EXPERTS): LinkedIn is an influential channel to leverage expertise with like-minded professionals and industry influencers. The channel is expected to grow to over 160 million adult users in the U.S. this year and has quickly become a content network for professionals to share expert perspectives within their networks.



HOST TWITTER OR INSTAGRAM CHATS TO BRING AUDIENCES AND INFLUENCERS INTO THE SAME CONVERSATION

- + Schedule 20-30 min for a chat.
- + Promote your chat 3-5 business days in advance (weekends can be low usage times for both Twitter and Instagram).

– According to SproutSocial, weekdays are the best for engaging audiences on Twitter.



Best times: Wednesday and Friday between 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Worst day: Saturday

– In order to get the best engagement on Instagram, schedule your event during the week.



Best times: Wednesday at 11 a.m. and Friday from 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.
Worst day: Sunday

Use a hashtag that is relevant to your organization or topic and can be used for subsequent chats, such as #HealthCareChat.

- + Further customize the hashtag by adding in your organization's name. Only use one hashtag per chat unless making a reference to another conversation as an example.

Twitter

- + Twitter Chats are best for reaching stakeholders such as policymakers, issue experts and journalists. Your tweets will have longevity as they will live on your page after the chat concludes, but you'll need to promote the chat ahead of time to ensure engagement from your audience.
- + Ask for questions in advance with the hashtag and monitor the hashtag to gather questions. Be sure to credit the questioner when reposting the question by tagging their handle.
- + Start and end your chat with introductory tweets to bookend the conversation. Have guests introduce themselves, too. Post moderator and guest participants' photos to tweets to humanize the discussion.
- + Number your questions and responses for participants or audiences who join the conversation out of order, e.g. Q1/Question and Q1/Answer. Longer answers can use the format Q1 1/3, 2/3, 3/3 to thread tweets.

Instagram

- + Instagram Chats are best for reaching consumers. Although your story will only be available for 24 hours, you will be able to control the narrative of your chat by selecting responses to repost. You can also archive your chat using the story highlight feature.
- + Leverage Instagram Stories to conduct an "Ask Me Anything" chat. You will start your Instagram Story series with a prompt, and subsequent stories will highlight your audience's submitted reactions and responses at your discretion.
- + Make stories relevant to the COVID-19 crisis by using stay home, thank you or donation stickers to build solidarity and promote partner organizations helping people in need. If relevant to the subject of your story, incorporate GIFs that encourage physical distancing, washing your hands and supporting local businesses.
- + When you are referencing partner organizations, add a mentions sticker to your story tagging them. This will help promote them to your audience and make it easy for your partner to repost your story to their page, allowing their followers to see your content.



LEVERAGE EMAIL AND SMS TO REACH STAKEHOLDERS AND CONSUMERS DIRECTLY

- + Create a centralized online location (either an email list, text thread or Facebook/WhatsApp group) where you can distribute one piece of content a day (or one every few days). This content can include news articles, helpful resources or images/videos from families and stakeholders.



COLLECT AND PROMOTE TESTIMONIAL CONTENT

- + Collect selfie videos from individuals describing the value and impact of health coverage at this time (and/or videos on other topics to support your initiatives). You can request participation from individuals and families, community leaders and others who can speak to the personal and economic benefits of coverage. You can share these videos on your social media pages, email distributions and even in paid media.
 - Encourage selfies to be filmed vertically, and to avoid background noise.
 - The shorter, the better, to account for short attention spans on social media.
 - Adding a border/logo/end card can help make the videos look consistent and within your campaign's overall brand.
- + Encourage those who film videos to share them on their social media accounts, so that the messages can be amplified organically.
- + Engage strong messengers like health care providers, community leaders and consumers to increase your chance of views and impact.
- + Develop a webpage on your site that houses collected stories and push this page out via social channels. Provide downloadable graphics for partners to share on social with a branded hashtag.
- + Ask consumers to send a 15-second snippet video (one option is to use Facemail via the [House Party app](#)), on why residents need support now more than ever. These could be chunked out to create a series of posts.