

A low-angle, upward-looking photograph of several modern skyscrapers with glass facades. The buildings are partially obscured by a thick layer of white fog or smoke that fills the lower half of the frame, creating a sense of height and scale. The sky is a pale, overcast grey.

SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATIONS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



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This month marks the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Yet as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to wreak havoc around the world, many companies are asking whether it is appropriate to talk about their climate commitments. In this document, we reveal the key questions to ask when deciding if, when and how to communicate about sustainability at a time of global health crisis.

1. Do you have meaningful news to share?

Even in the midst of the pandemic, companies that have made significant sustainability announcements have received positive feedback from media and peers. So, if you have positive progress to report against previously stated climate goals, you should share it. However, avoid saying something simply because it is Earth Day. At a time when people are more sensitive than ever to being deceived or sold to, you risk seriously damaging your reputation with announcements that are perceived as spurious or not sufficiently action-led to warrant promotion.

2. Have you put people, health and safety first?

In the current crisis, it is critical that companies communicate how they are protecting the health, safety and job security of employees. You should therefore evaluate whether you have done and said enough to support the wellbeing of workers before publicly discussing your sustainability commitments. Organisations in the hospitality, health or travel industries, that are facing specific outbreaks of Covid-19 in their workforce, or are making redundancies and/or furloughs should refrain from proactively talking about sustainability at the moment.

3. How will your announcement be viewed in the context of the coronavirus?

At a time when millions of people are living under lockdown, social distancing is in full force and livelihoods are under threat, you must be thoughtful about the type of sustainability innovations you announce. For example, introducing reusable items to combat waste or encouraging shared transportation solutions may come across as out of touch with the current situation and leave you vulnerable to criticism.

4. What channels and tone are appropriate?

As well as deciding *what* you share, you should think about *how* and *where* you share it too. Consider using your executives' platforms channels, such as your chief Sustainability Officer's LinkedIn page, to announce sustainability news instead of a company page or social channel. Earned media consumption is also extremely high at the moment, so is there a way you can let your story play out there? Be wary of overstating though. In fact, if possible, you should ask a sustainability partner to review what you are planning to say so they can help determine if the tone and timing are appropriate in the current environment.

5. Are you prepared for sensitive questions and last-minute changes?

If you do plan to go out with a proactive sustainability announcement, ensure you – and especially any spokespeople – are prepared to answer questions about how the coronavirus crisis may impact your sustainability commitments in the short- and long-term. Make sure you constantly monitor the conversation around both Covid-19 and sustainability in the lead-up to your announcement too. You need to be ready to amend, delay or even cancel it should the situation change and make what you are going to say inappropriate.

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6. Have you thought about the long-term?

No matter how far off it may seem right now, this pandemic will come to an end. How will key audiences and stakeholders evaluate your progress on sustainability at that time? As Helen Clarkson, CEO of The Climate Group, recently said: “We cannot afford to cancel or delay the important conversations, commitments and negotiations that need to take place.” So, even if you decide not to talk about them publicly during the coronavirus crisis, it is important that any sustainability actions, commitments and communications plans stay on track within your organisation to ensure you can hit the ground running in the future.

Visit the [Edelman Coronavirus Hub](#) for more practical advice on how your organisation can communicate effectively during the coronavirus pandemic to boost resilience, protect employees and ensure business continuity.