



You know those overused words from March and April that none of us ever want to hear again: uncertain and unprecedented? Well we have good news and bad news. The good news: as we head into the final months of this year: they no longer apply. The bad news: that's because they will be woefully inadequate to describe what's to come! As schools open and flu season approaches, the headline dominating 2020 - the global pandemic, will once again run off the front page into the business section, opinion columns, and lifestyle section, displaced only by election coverage in what is anticipated to be ...anyone know a good word for beyond uncertain and unprecedented?

But there is more good news: there are a few things of which we can be certain in the coming months, and there *is* precedent for how communications professionals and brand managers approach the coming months – it's a mix of change management, crisis communications, and long-term planning.

To help you navigate the media landscape, we've created **Politics, A Pandemic and PR: A Communications Point of View for Late 2020**, a guide for navigating your brand through troubled times. From now through the end of the year, it is more important than ever that you manage your brand and connect to your core audiences with intention, integrity, and relevance. Here's how:

PLAN YOUR WORK ACCORDING TO THE ELECTION CALENDAR

The closer we get to election day on November 3, the more difficult it will be for brands to break through a relentless 24/7 news cycle, massive media spends, partisan rhetoric and constant breaking news.

The ability to reach your target audience efficiently or at all will become more and more challenging as the days go by. That means for you, **September is go-time**. September is the time to double down on your work – if you have something important to share, do it **now**. Use the early fall to ready product launches, prepare new services, finalize special offers, and prime your social channels for any communication initiatives on your marketing plan. In fact, consider October 31 the absolute cut-off for launches. By Halloween, you can expect a veritable ghost town when reaching out to media contacts with pitches that are not related to the breaking news cycle.

And related to the election calendar, we should expect that the election results will not be finalized by November 4, or even December 4. Remember, in 2000, the presidential race between George W. Bush and Al Gore was not officially decided until December 13.





REMAIN RELEVANT OR RETREAT

At Double Forte we have long preached the importance of relevance, simply defined by Merriam Webster as, “related to the matter at hand.” Relevance is what keeps you current. Relevance is what allows you to break through noise. Relevance is how you reach your audience. If you cannot find a natural and credible way to relate your message to the current news cycle, reconsider your communications strategy. In the midst of a critical election (as defined by both sides), an ongoing global pandemic now playing out amid a return to school for millions of children and young adults, and a sustained cry for social justice, you must stop and consider:

- Is now the right time to deliver my message?
- Am I advancing or disrupting the conversation?
- How will my message be perceived?

FOCUS ON FREELANCERS

While proactive pitching will be a challenge the closer we get to election day, all hope is not lost and communicators should continue to nurture relationships and plant seeds for coverage. There *will* be media looking for stories with long shelf lives. Freelancers, in particular, will be commissioned by media outlets to ready a cache of stories related to products, holiday, consumer lifestyle, etc. Savvy marketers will look beyond media mastheads for writers and producers who are interested in writing and creating content beyond the headlines – and they will cultivate those relationships. To assist our clients with longer term media planning, Double Forte has more than tripled our database of freelance media this year.



OWN WHAT YOU CAN OWN CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

In this intense media climate, marketers with a relevant message should augment their media outreach by using owned channels. From press releases, to newsletters, to social channels, webinars, and podcasts, your owned channels are critical right now. Why? Because on your own channels you can control the message, craft your story, boost your SEO and create an archived public record. **Do not go dark.** In the early months of the pandemic, people purged their email lists and realized which products and purchasing trends were superfluous. Your followers are with you today because they want to be. Embrace that base with targeted and relevant marketing via direct channels.

Hone your social skills. Your social media accounts require a higher level of finesse than perhaps your other owned properties do. That's because, if managed properly, they are a two-way channel. It will be critical in the coming months that you:

- **Post with intention.** What are your key messages from now through the end of the year? How do they translate across your different social channels? Map that out now.
- **Remember relevance.** Especially on social, you must tune in to the zeitgeist.
- **Be nimble.** Yes you need a plan. Yes you need to make sure your key messages are delivered with intent. However, you also need to act in the moment. That's how most social media platforms were designed, and that's what users expect. Be open. Be responsive. And so important: be ready to go dark if the news of the day calls for it.
- **Engage.** Messages matter, sure. But you know what really matters? Conversations. Have them. Engage. Ask questions. Respond. Listen. And then listen some more. And when you do, you will discover what you need to do for 2021.





WORK WITH INTENTION AND **AN EYE TOWARD 2021**

While you may decide in the final months of 2020 to pull back on aggressive outreach campaigns, do not take your foot off the gas pedal with regards to 2021 planning. Consider the media focus on the presidential election a gift and use the time wisely – to plan a strong start to 2021. None of us, including Nate Silver, can predict the outcome of the election or the date of a COVID-19 vaccine, so savvy brands will counter the uncertainty with strong owned media strategies for the new year. The winners among us will be the ones who can connect to core audiences with compelling, relevant content in the form of webinars, podcasts, newsletters and engaging social campaigns. Now is the time to invest in content creation.

To map out your fourth quarter and create a 2021 communications plan that will resonate regardless of the election results, CONTACT US:

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