

Reputation Management: The Three Degrees of Preparation

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The times are changing. Lockdown restrictions are starting to ease, allowing the economy to begin climbing back to its feet. Non-essential businesses are opening again – some after nearly six weeks of their doors being closed. New normals are being established everywhere we look – new normals that we expect will still be in place for some time yet.

During April, I outlined in *The Drum* the three steps that brands had to get right to protect their brand reputation during COVID-19. The scene is developing all the time and, with it, so do the necessary communication and reputation management trends and steps that are going to be required for any business wishing to ‘get it right’ post COVID-19.

I’m even coining this **the three degrees of preparation** (yes, I find ourselves singing these words in the same ilk of *The Script*’s 2012 hit title), but, nevertheless, through our research and from what I have seen unfold in China, I am predicting that there are three stages to be aware of when it comes to getting your reputation management spot on in the forthcoming weeks and months.

These are:

1. Preparation – returning to a new normal
2. The Response – the need to pivot, innovate and adapt
3. The Rebound – reviving your campaigns

We have taken an in-depth look at all three points in greater detail...



• Preparation: Preparing for your new normal

The lockdown is being lifted, sure. You feel safe to return to your business and get it back up and running again, but the first thing any business owner is going to need to accept is that anything is still far from normal.

Do not try and just return to normal

COVID-19 is still prevalent and a high risk. People, including your colleagues and customers, are still cautious and nervous and you need to adapt to match it.

The companies that have thrived are the ones that have readily accepted that fact. Here are some of the actions they've taken to do so:

- Completed rigorous colleague and customer risk

assessments

- Considered and implemented social distancing measures, in line with Government advice
- Last, but definitely not least, communicated the above two points effectively through their digital assets

Health, well-being and hygiene NEEDS to be your top priority in your communications

One of Hallam's clients, Daltons Wadkin, applied the first two points impeccably, putting together risk assessments for each role within their business and made operational changes around the offices to ensure social distancing rules were met.

These new rules and changes were communicated beforehand too and each colleague knew what they were walking back into. Beyond that, colleagues that could still operate from home were told to do so.

Remember, your colleagues are your biggest and most important asset and they are more than likely going to be nervous and anxious about returning to the office under the circumstances. By making and then communicating those changes, or even liaising with them over their own thoughts, it will go a long way to making them feel safe.

Be proactive with your communications – create security & clarity for your employees

As a company, think about how you can communicate this internally. **FAQ sheets are a quick, easy, and effective way** for your colleagues to get the answers they need and keeps them from feeling in the dark and worrying about the unknown.

Harvard Business Review documented how China's largest kitchenware manufacturer, *Supor*, instituted very specific

operational guidelines and procedures for its employees and instituted health checks for them and their families from the early stages of the outbreak and procured preventative equipment. It was well prepared for a timely resumption of work.

Back here in the UK, Costa is another business that has implemented effective practices that garnered positive reactions, not only by their colleagues, but customers as well. Those businesses with soul and that put health and wellbeing on a pedestal above everything else will thrive within their community.



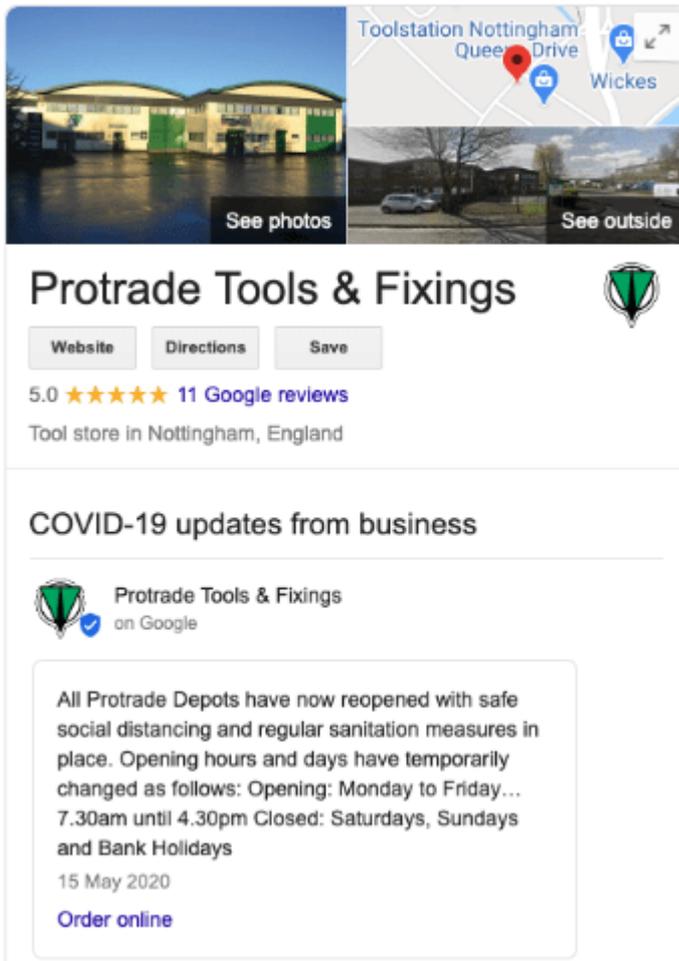
Costa Coffee  @CostaCoffee · May 26

Our new Drive-Thru shelves have been getting lots of love! Who's seen them in action?  



Keep your communications clear and concise

If you're planning on re-opening, outline how and when and what is being done to proactively make your facility as safe as possible. If you made changes to your opening times on Google My Business, or your website and social media assets prior to lockdown, make sure they are changed to avoid unnecessary confusion.



• The Response: Be prepared to adapt

As part of your new normal, your customers have new priorities that you need to be aware of. **Here are just a few things that your customers are going to be thinking about:**

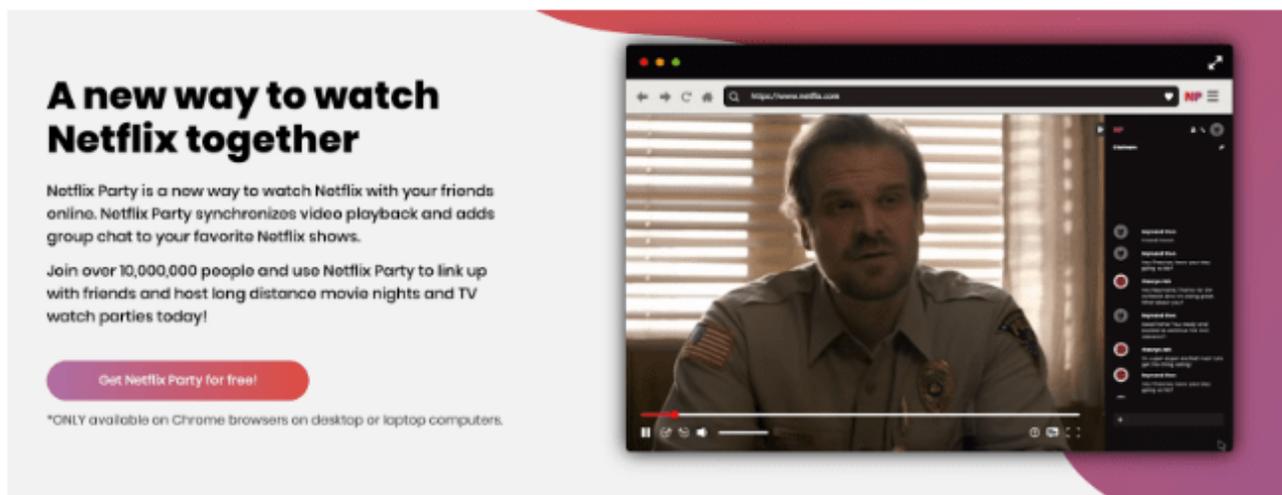
- Home working lifestyle (despite the softening lockdown, a lot of people will be remaining at home for long time to come yet)
- Returning to work lifestyle
- Home entertainment and the ability to be social
- Healthcare, hygiene and wellness (in particular around mental health, with data showing us that four out of

five adults are worried about the impact COVID-19 is having on their life)

- A cut in luxury and non-essential spending
- The UK's key workers

Ask yourself this question. If you're not already, how can your business support a customer range that falls under one of these categories? Can any of your response campaigns be tailored around this?

Netflix introduced Party, allowing people to binge watch movies and boxsets together virtually, multiple businesses, including Dyson, New Balance and Jaguar Land Rover have pivoted their business models to support the NHS, while several institutions across the UK launched mental health initiatives to support colleagues, customers and their community during Mental Health Awareness Week towards the end of May.



A new way to watch Netflix together

Netflix Party is a new way to watch Netflix with your friends online. Netflix Party synchronizes video playback and adds group chat to your favorite Netflix shows.

Join over 10,000,000 people and use Netflix Party to link up with friends and host long distance movie nights and TV watch parties today!

Get Netflix Party for free!

*ONLY available on Chrome browsers on desktop or laptop computers.

The image shows a promotional graphic for Netflix Party. On the left, there is a white box with black text and a red button. On the right, there is a screenshot of a Netflix video player showing a man in a uniform, with a sidebar on the right displaying a list of party members and their avatars.

And now, maybe, it's your business' time. **This is your opportunity to be creative with your brand and cut through the clutter and noise to leave a positive lasting impression.**

Think about how you can communicate these changes to your customers, too. Recent research showed that email open rates have increased 25% in comparison to pre-COVID-19. Along with social media, this is currently looking like the most effective way to communicate business changes.

Ensure your brand remains positive in its communications

Business pivots are simply not achievable for all businesses. Regardless, there is still a responsibility to deliver positive messaging to its community. **There has been a lot of negative press since the start of this crisis and people are craving something good to talk about.**

In our last article on this, we spoke about how companies can come together to do their bit by supporting local initiatives and charities. Your brand has still got a big opportunity to make an impact – one that will be remembered for a long time.

.The Rebound: Reviving your campaigns

There is going to be a market rebound. Statistics show that China experienced a faster recovery rate than expected – just six weeks after the initial outbreak.

Harvard Business Review shows how congestion delays stood at 73% of 2019 levels, up from 62% at the worst part of the epidemic, which was a firm indicator that the movement of people and goods was resuming.

Given the slow ease of restrictions here in the UK, we can expect a similar market rebound. This very topic is something that has been covered by Hallam's new CEO, Julio Taylor, in a recent column in The Drum. This is what he had to say about this topic: *"My message to brands out there is that what you were in February will not be as effective towards the end of this year when a degree of normality returns. It's going to be a different world and it is going to be those brands that evolve with it – those that are smarter – that will be remarkable and stand out."*

As the number of new cases begins to decline and the recovered overtakes the current cases, it is time to consider how you

launch your brand recovery plan.

Ask yourself, is the market ready for this?

Remember, your consumers are in recovery mode just as your business is – consider it, cautious optimism – and **there is a fine balance between getting your strategies and campaigns right and wrong.**

These types of brand campaigns take time. They often take more insight (often into new consumer trends you perhaps had not delved into before) and creativity to get right and time is of the essence. Your consumer's sentiments are far different now to what they were prior to COVID-19. It comes back to what Julio said: "It's going to be a different world."

Don't let all that good work you did during lockdown go to waste with a bad campaign or tone death messaging, which could leave you planning for a long-term recovery.

Prepare for possible setbacks

COVID-19 has not just gone away, nor has a vaccine been delivered, or Track and Trace been implemented. In place, we're also local lockdowns being enforced. We're just finding new ways to live with it and with that, unfortunately, comes with the obvious threat of a second spike.

Be mindful of that when it comes to your brand new campaign ideas and brand recovery launches. **You've hit that pause button before and you may need to do it again.** Keep yourself and your colleagues fully in the loop with the Government's latest guidelines and act accordingly – always with the foresight to keep your colleagues and customers informed with transparent communications.

Bonus: Don't forget about the

influence of PR!

As PR & Outreach Specialist here at Hallam, it would be remiss of me not to make the most of this blog by speaking specifically about your PR activity. A lot of what I have spoken about relates to internal communications and messaging, but your external PR output shouldn't be neglected as part of that. Our PR team is working with multiple different brands and businesses to produce content that is still newsworthy and current. We're using newsjacking tools every day to source new opportunities and liaising with business figureheads to find out what's important to them and tailoring our content to fit.

Tip... not every journalist wants to cover COVID-19

We've been privileged to work on some great articles recently that have achieved coverage across, local, regional, national and trade publications – not only in the UK, but abroad too. This Includes:

- Westermans – 10 ways to think like a start-up to keep your business agile
- Harrison Castings – Smart sustainable manufacturing: the benefits of outsourcing
- Haddonstone – Outdoor rooms you'll want to escape to
- CAT Autokeys – This one city is best prepared to deal with electric car switchover
- Cleveland Containers – The Weeknd among most popular singers for barbecue tunes
- Performance Networks – Will virtual learning go viral after the pandemic passes

Final Thoughts

To conclude, things are changing and what is clear is that businesses and brands are needed to change with it. **Reputation**

is hard earned, but incredibly easy to lose and a company's communications strategy – both internal and external – is going to be key to protecting that standing you have built up.

A business' ability to be honest, proactive and adaptable and timely will make the biggest differences in the coming weeks and months. These three factors allow you to create clarity for your workforce, gain insight into possible new markets, pivot if necessary and, finally, act at a time when the market is ready.

We may be working in a new normal, but what hasn't changed is how our brand's voice and thoughts are still required and wanted. It just comes back to getting it right and we're on hand to help achieve that, whether it is assisting with a business' new campaign, or assisting with internal messaging and press statements.

In the meantime, stay safe and you are thinking about how you can improve your PR output and master your reputation management during COVID-19. We'd love to hear from you and discuss how we can help.

About the Author: Tom is Hallam's PR & Outreach Specialist and is an expert in brand reputation, campaign management, and crisis communications. With over seven years of PR experience behind him, he joined Hallam in Q1 of 2020 with a diverse background after holding comms roles in the football, leisure management, and retail industries. Tom graduated from the University of Huddersfield in 2014 with a First-Class BA (Hons) Degree in Sports Journalism. Find out more [by here](#).