

# Coronavirus Communications: How Businesses Should Respond

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The development of the Wuhan Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak is dominating business media coverage and has begun to impact business operations for corporations across a variety of industries. [Inquiries from investors or media](#) may increase as they seek to understand the degree of impact to your business, while employers with operations in affected areas will likely be inundated with requests for information and assistance from employees, partners and suppliers. How your business handles coronavirus communications can have a significant impact on the public's perception of your company.

In a rapidly developing situation, it is important for company leaders to be nimble and prepared to communicate transparently and effectively around issues related to the health and safety of their employees and any potential impacts to their business.

The Chinese government has taken some dramatic measures in an effort to contain the spread of the virus, which could negatively impact certain business operations and results. The ultimate impact of the outbreak will depend on how quickly it is contained, stemming the daily rise in number (and location) of affected persons.

### How Should Companies Handle Coronavirus Communications?

In order to create an effective coronavirus [communications plan](#), companies should first assess the coronavirus' potential impact to their business, which will vary depending by industry, location of operations and other factors. Particularly affected industries include, but are not limited to, travel and hospitality (including airlines, hotel operators, cruise lines and travel sites), dining and entertainment (restaurants, movie theaters, and meal delivery), companies with Wuhan or China-based operations. Impact on global commodity pricing, such as oil, could ripple across multiple industries, based on concerns over decreased demand from the world's second largest oil consumer. Companies in additional industries may be impacted depending upon the location of their operations, location of their supply chains and partners, and frequency of employee travel.

Companies should conduct internal diligence that analyzes all aspect of their business and operations to determine potential implications from this event. It should be recognized that even the *potential* for impact will be of concern to certain audiences and plans need to be developed for those instances as well as ones where the company believes the impact is substantive.

Once company leaders determine the degree of the business and employees' exposure to the Coronavirus, they must consider and develop transparent communications for all stakeholders, and prepare to modify messaging as the situation evolves. It is important to note that in crisis situations such as this, individual reaction could be irrational, grounded in emotion and fear. It is important to provide facts, but companies also need to be empathetic and recognize the genuine concerns, while also taking steps to proactively communicate in some cases to preempt questions that it can reasonably assume are on the minds of its stakeholders:

- Employees: Clearly articulate what steps the company is taking to protect employees' health and secure the business, communicating to what degree daily operations may be impacted.
- Customers: Provide information and assurance on the steps that your business is taking to ensure quality and operations control; if your operations are impacted, consider what steps you will take to reassure and woo customers upon reopening.
- Investors: While it may be difficult to fully identify the financial impact on your business, provide as much detail on the impact and outlook as possible, even if in ranges.
- Partners/Vendors/Suppliers: Seek to understand what your partners, vendors and suppliers are doing to protect themselves and further operations, and ensure they are fully informed about your company's protective measures.

In any rapidly evolving crisis where there is significant uncertainty and the facts can change quickly, it is important to assure stakeholders that the company is taking formal steps to monitor the situation and is committed to promptly providing updates as necessary.

While in these situations, companies must first focus upon the initial impact of the issue; company leaders and their advisor teams must also consider coronavirus communications on a go-forward basis, once there is a resolution that will allow the business to recover and return to normal operations.

As the situation continues to develop, companies should follow trusted news sources on a continual basis as well as learn more from the [Center for Disease Control Coronavirus site](#), which has also provided a [detailed FAQ](#) as a helpful resource.