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MEASUREMENT

The Dual Pandemics Lead to a Breakout Year for the Volume of Communication Measurement

Here's a topic you won't have a chance to discuss around the table during your cancelled Thanksgiving dinner: the state of communication measurement. It would have been a discussion worth holding.

As PR marks [Communication Measurement Month](#) in November, measurement seems to be continuing its upswing of recent years. Ironically, the global pandemic, is partially responsible.

As Katie Paine, the self-proclaimed Queen of Measurement, says, "Everything [communicators do] is being measured more now and measured better."

That's because the economic downturn has left businesses with little room for error. "Since everyone is being more resource-conscious, you have to get things right fast. And you have to measure," says Johna Burke, global MD at **AMEC**, the communication measurement organization.



Johna Burke
Global Managing
Director
AMEC



Katie Paine
Founder
Paine Publishing

Equally vexed, the C-suite is demanding more data from communicators to understand what messaging is working. Communication measurement, she says, used to be a nice-to-have. It's a must-have "in this crisis," she adds.

2020, Burke believes, may show a steeper incline in measurement "than we otherwise would have projected." In part, this is a quantity issue. There's more com-

munication to measure as brands are communicating far more than they did previously with employees.

Like Burke, Paine reasons that economic uncertainty is a main driver in communication measurement's rise this year. "We're in a permanent state of anxiety," Paine says, and when there's uncertainty "people want certainty and data. They want answers. Measurement provides those answers."

As Paine said early in the pandemic, 'Data is your PPE.'

There's another cost factor. "Measurement of PR and communication is so cheap compared to measuring other things," Paine says. Since communication measurement is not a huge drain on budgets, "I don't see anybody cutting it."

Paine describes the communicator's lament at this time. "I don't know if what I'm doing is working or not. And I can't afford to make a mistake because I'll get fired, lose my job or mess things up. So, I need more data." As a result, communicators are doing "way more surveys and asking their stakeholders more...they're doing much more measurement because it's an uncertain time." In addition, boardrooms, she says, are seeking more data. "They want to know if things are working and if not, how can we make them work?"

She cites the example of **Georgia-Pacific**, whose paper products were in great demand early in the pandemic. Its external message, Paine says, was not to panic. The company could track message pickup, message amplification and how its message were playing on social. "It wasn't a question of making more sales. Instead, the concern was people being able to find toilet paper, posting pictures of themselves finding it and feeling happy about it," she says.

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Social Media War Rooms Need to Focus on Listening and Advance Prep

Having an extensive social media strategy is a key part of crisis readiness. In addition, it can help a company take advantage of a breaking situation that falls short of crisis.

A healthy social media plan starts with listening—keyword research, daily roving of consumer sentiment and a constant audit of your organization’s stance on current events.

Next comes preparation for any type of scenario and a process for going forward with a variety of responses—especially if you have a product launch or an event approaching.

This is where it can be helpful to have a social media war room in place, a team dedicated to responding to an event in real-time. At a minimum, having social media experts and content creators on hand can make a difference.

Remember the Super Bowl blackout in 2013, and **Oreo’s perfectly-timed tweet**? People are still talking about it.



Leo Morejon
Business Debate
Show Host
ProveItMatters.com

“While the stadium was covered in darkness and confusion, we saw an opportunity to make cultural commentary and to jump into the national conversation with relevance and speed,” says Leo Morejon, social media professional and Business Debate Show host at **ProveItMatters.com**. Morejon was lead social

media community manager for Oreo at the agency that represented the brand.

And, though it was hardly a PR crisis, former Vice President Joe Biden’s campaign had fly swatters for sale **within minutes** of an insect landing on Vice President Mike Pence’s hair during the VP debate last month.

A timely response is not always a coincidence. For most social media professionals, plans for a potential situation are created months in advance. We talked to several pros about social media war room best practices.

SITUATION: ELECTION

Adrienne Shih, audience engagement editor for politics at **The Los Angeles Times**, has been preparing for Election Day for weeks. Shih even **wrote an article** telling readers how the newsroom will be covering this year’s election.

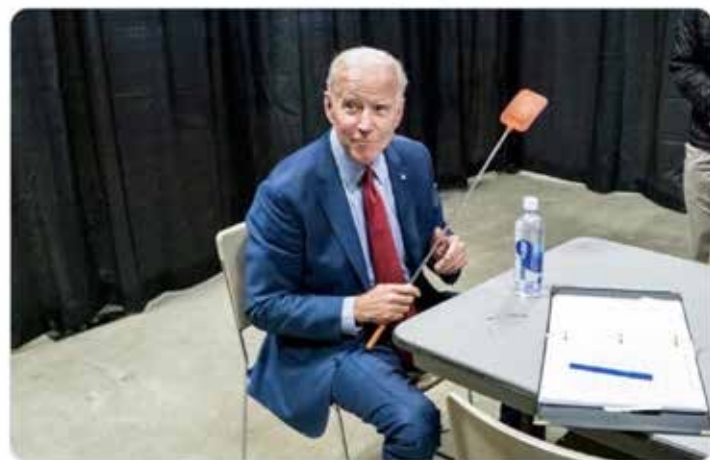
At a news organization, war room teams come with a lot of experience. In pre-COVID-19 times, Shih says, reporters and editors gathered in a physical room every time there was a major event to pro-



Adrienne Shih
Audience
Engagement
Editor for Politics
The Los Angeles Times



Pitch in \$5 to help this campaign fly. joe.link/3nvsFwL



10:33 PM · Oct 7, 2020 · TweetDeck

Joe Biden’s campaign and Oreo’s both had real-time responses to live events within minutes of their respective occurrences.



Power out? No problem.



cess real-time updates.

For the 2020 election, Shih and the team have done much of the legwork ahead of schedule, as well as planned for unforeseen events.

“Sometimes, even for huge tentpole events, you have the ability to plan certain elements,” Shih says. “In advance of Election Day, I compiled a giant spreadsheet of our past coverage, assigned specific tasks for the night of and made sure to train all of our teammates. A team leader should assign everyone a very specific, actionable task, so that all bases are covered.”

Shih emphasizes the importance of transparency, particularly within the news industry, during what could be a long election night—where results could take days or even weeks to confirm.

“It’s always best to be transparent with your audience, and to signal that you’re working on clarifying or confirming facts in a rapidly changing situation,” Shih says. “There’s nothing more dangerous than confirming speculation, unless you really do have a certain answer. Otherwise, you’re just adding to the noise of disinformation.”

SITUATION: FACULTY STRIKE

Kathryn Morton, communications director for the **Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties**, spent three days in a war room during a 2016 faculty strike. Her small state staff included herself and the government relations director. Morton did everything in her power to stop a social media flood for 14 campuses.

“When tweets and Facebook messages started gushing in the night before the strike, [we] split up responding to questions and comments,” Morton recalls.

The team started a file of frequently-used responses, so they weren’t typing from scratch each time, and it helped to keep messaging consistent, Morton adds.

“Many of those social-media responses derived from talking points and FAQs I’d been posting and updating in the months leading to the strike,” she says.

War room satellite offices included members of the 14

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Kathryn Morton
Communications Director
Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties

BEST PRACTICES FOR WAR ROOMS

Experienced pros share their tips for what makes a successful war room, whatever the situation.

▶ **Take notes.** As soon as possible, jot notes about what worked well and what didn’t. Save any FAQ documents you created, advises Kathryn Morton, communications director for the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties.

▶ **Remember the team.** While covering live events can be exhilarating, it is critical to remember they can also be excruciating for the team. As such, plan for regular staff breaks. Use the 80/20 rule, where 80 percent of posts are pre-scheduled, while 20 percent remains live and unplanned, suggests Matt Murphy, CEO of **Beanstalk Predictive**.



Matt Murphy
CEO
Beanstalk Predictive

▶ **Prepare physically and mentally.** War rooms can be nerve-wracking—even for the seasoned professional. Brands need to cast teams correctly. Team members need to prepare emotionally. “That includes being open to the possibility of anything happening; good, bad and/or the ugly,” says Leo Morejon, Social Media Professional and Business Debate Show Host at ProveltMatters.com.

▶ **Staff properly.** The only really good war rooms are those that utilize graphic designers who know the brand standards. Ensure they are in the room with the person managing the community. “Always have a person who gets to say ‘go/no go’ [who is] close to the community,” says Sarah Chapman, social media manager, **CareSource**. Having a full committee means it is going to be slow going and turn out mediocre work. “Take some big risks. If you make a couple people in the room uncomfortable, it’s probably the right idea,” she says.



Sarah Chapman
Social Media Manager
CareSource

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