

# The inside scoop on COVID-19 crisis communications: FAQs with Steff Berger

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Steff Berger, who recently appeared on IBTM Connect in her webinar about MICE Crisis Communications, sat down with all your questions following her session and answered them. Here we explore all of the questions about the present and future situations with COVID-19.

If you'd like to find out more about crisis communications and creating a strategy, read Steff's interview or check out her second FAQ blog focused on crisis management plans.

## The Present

**What sales approach would you take in these unprecedented times while still lots of companies are putting out the fire and struggling to survive?**

As a crisis manager, I would first of all analyze the risks, evaluate possible reactions to sales, and from there determine which sales approaches to avoid.

Also, it's important to develop a sales strategy ahead of time so that we're able to respond and act quickly if the situation changes again and events are allowed to take place. Now we have the time to do exactly that, to prepare for the time after COVID-19.

As a conference and event manager, I'd like to add: If there are any new developments or ideas we can share right now, then why not share them? We all have the same goal: to get back to normal as soon as possible and successfully pick up where we left off before COVID-19.

**What happens if you organise an event and attendees get infected by the virus and it emerges in the media and your name is associated with this infection?**

First of all, it's important to take a close look at what's involved in executing the event in order to assess the possible POST-COVID-19 risks. In this case, I would recommend you perform an exact simulation of the event and ask yourself which measures you need to adopt in order to prevent participants from getting infected.

When coming up with a plan, you should coordinate with local health authorities. Also, share the plan on the event website, as well as on all social media channels for participants, exhibitors, and other stakeholders, emphasizing the individual responsibility of everyone involved. Once you've finalized it, make sure to have a lawyer review the entire plan.

Finally, prepare for this scenario ahead of time by including it in your communications strategy. If someone happens to mention you in the media in connection with the infection of a participant(s), you can demonstrate that you've done everything possible to protect employees, participants, and exhibitors. In these scenarios, the story is almost always about who is to blame, or who made a mistake...With your communications tools in place, you can show that you've taken preventative measures to prepare for this emergency.

**What is the European PCO practise regarding rescheduling if an event is cancelled or postponed?**

My company consults and works directly with associations. Therefore I can't speak to how PCO's are set up and how they need to prepare for event cancellations and postponements. It also depends on the provisions in the contract they or their clients have with an insurance company.

At the moment, event venues in various countries are being transformed into hospitals and other emergency facilities. For the time being, we have to continue to monitor the situation in order to see when normal operations restart and

The Future

## **How will we literally 'meet' at events in the future – behind screens? 1.5m apart? In pods?**

These are decisions and regulations that are up to governments and governmental organizations. And each country will decide on the virus development on its own regulation.

I believe there will be a transition time, in which we'll need to establish specific measures to protect participants, staff, exhibitors, and other stakeholders. It also depends on the development of COVID-19. And how quickly a vaccine can be developed and made available.

In past decades and centuries, the world found ways to deal with other pandemics. Based on that experience, we can hope to master the COVID-19 pandemic and get back to a 'more normal life' in the near future!

## **Would you say that the future of the MICE industry depends on how airlines resume flight? If yes, how can you plan events in the future?**

The future of the MICE industry will depend on a variety of decisions from different government authorities. It doesn't only depend on how the airlines set up their flight schedules going forward. It will also depend on the development of COVID-19 in each region.

There are a lot of open questions: When will our participants, clients, and exhibitors from other countries be able to travel again? When will the borders be opened? How many participants will be allowed to attend the event? This depends on the form in which events are able, and allowed, to take place.

## **Is it possible to share strategic insights and practical thoughts that have influenced some of the organizations during this pandemic?**

To be honest, I'm not sure about the best strategic insights and practical ideas, since every organization is different and has a different level of readiness in terms of crisis management.

*Before COVID-19, 67% of the organisations that attended the webinar did not have a crisis management plan in place. If you want to create a crisis management strategy, I would recommend that you start with communication that's truthful, concise, appropriate, transparent, and fact-based.*

## **Virtual Events**

### **What is going to change in the MICE sector? I mean, can face-to-face meetings**

### **be replaced with video calls or something like that?**

I believe there will be a time after COVID 19, as there was also a time after the Spanish flu and other pandemics. As things currently stand, I don't feel that virtual meetings can replace face-to-face meetings. But, for now, digital platforms are a good tool to compensate for the lack of face-to-face meeting time.

It's the same thing with webinars. It's so difficult to speak with your screen and not be able to see people's faces, take in their reactions, or get a feel for the audience. But we need to accept that digital platforms are the best knowledge-sharing solution during COVID-19.

Let's hope for the best and prepare for the worst!

### **Do you have any ideas for events that serve a networking purpose and not a solely informative one?**

Personally I feel that virtual meetings are no substitute for face-to-face meetings, especially networking meetings. We can't just "copy and paste" from the real world to the virtual world.

I agree that virtual meetings help keep us connected right now and are a good way to share knowledge; I hope virtual experts find a good solution for networking events.

### **Do you think that Virtual Events are a good solution to go on with our business after COVID-19?**

I'd like to answer this question from the perspective of a conference and event manager since I don't have all facts and figures to fully answer it here.

I believe that there will be significant developments in the virtual events industry, and we should definitely use our new knowledge and resources in planning future events. For example, why not create hybrid events that combine virtual and face-to-face meetings?

Events bring people together from all over the world. And I hope this will be the case again after the pandemic when we can continue to meet face-to-face.

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If you'd like to watch the whole of Steff's webinar, you can find it [here](#) on-demand on IBTM Connect.

Also, we have published another blog from Steff on the practical approaches you can take to creating a crisis communications strategy. You can read it [here](#).