



## ► THE WEEK WHEN

How lessons from this crisis will shape the way we communicate in a Post COVID-19 world.

# "SOCIETY WILL CHANGE PERMANENTLY."

This is the constant refrain of the pundits, anchors and world leaders imploring us to stay home. Social media influencers capture this moment with quippy memes about videoconferencing, social distancing and hand washing.



This is the week when everyone started working from home.  
Learning from home.  
When we banned graduations, weddings, parades, concerts.  
When we eschewed buses, trains, planes, and cruise ships.  
When we fled the cities.  
When we all realized it was every man for himself.

We're not saying the news is not dire. At this nascent point in the pandemic, it surrounds us in concentric circles. From afar (blessedly, for now), we're watching COVID-19 case counts across the country soar. Closer in, we hear the sounds of businesses closing their doors for indeterminate lengths of time.

And then there's our immediate situation: housebound, surrounded by too many distractions. Or too few. Wondering when it will be "ok" to see our parents and grandparents and friends again, with hugs. But we remain a bit skeptical about society changing permanently. It seems like a narrow view, especially if you've got some gray around your temples and have lived through the other crises this new millennium has wrought.

The truth is, many of us have been adapting to this now-enforced way of living and working for years. Online classes are not new. Zoom calls are not new. Hand washing? Not new. (Or so we hope.)

We don't think it's too early to predict what some of those lessons will be, because — out of desperation, eternal optimism, or just wanting to do something besides watch the kids eat all the pandemic food we've hoarded in our pantries — we want to think ahead, to what we'll wryly call the PC (Post COVID-19) World. Because this world will emerge. And anyone who communicates for a living needs to plan for what consumers and audiences want when we get there, and be ready to deliver.

And we can see, even now, how some behaviors and actions among government organizations, businesses and regular people are gelling into what will become the decisive solutions — and the defining lessons — of this crisis.



## WE'LL ALL SEEK OUT THE HUMAN TOUCH.

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If there's one thing we've learned, in our collective years on the planet and in our collective years studying human motivation, it's that we are social animals. Some of us more solitary than others; but most of us, at some point, crave companionship, closeness and touch. We like to gather around the table to toast a birthday or a new job or a new baby. We like to stand before a musician on a stage, or two teams battling on a field, or under a preacher's pulpit, where the shared experience sends a thrilling reverberation of solidarity through the audience. We love the in-theatre experience of watching a horror movie, slack-jawed in collective suspense with our fellow cinema-goers.

City people might bemoan the teeming throb of commuters streaming to work, but there's something irresistible about this lifestyle to the millions of people who experience it every day.

We like hugs, we like holding hands, we like all kinds of other stuff we won't get into here.

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### What happened after the Bubonic Plague, the English Sweat, the 1918 Pandemic?

People didn't practice social distancing forever. And they won't this time. Connection is hardwired in us. If you are a brand or organization whose model relies on people coming together, be ready for a surge in demand the minute we get the "all clear" from whomever is in charge of the press conference that day.

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## INNOVATION WILL MEAN RISING TO THE OCCASION.

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Creating new products to fulfill on undiscovered needs has been the guiding force of big tech from the launch of the first iPod, and ever since, we've been showered with a cascade of new technologies. Software and websites and apps that allow us to do everything from hire a handyman to get a ride across town. They make our lives easier and they've brought untold advances in medicine, commerce and education. But what we're seeing in the last couple of weeks is innovation in the truest and most old-fashioned sense: inventing things that fill a critical, immediate need.



Lately, and for obvious reasons, innovation has focused on medicine: We loved [the story](#) of the Italian engineers who usually make what they call "practical stuff" — earthquake sensors and silicone bandages — who designed a ventilator valve prototype when they heard that doctors from a hospital in hard-hit Northern Italy didn't have enough. They've now produced hundreds for local hospitals in the fight against [COVID-19](#). We've been reading about the way scientists from around the globe have identified specific proteins in the virus that react to existing drugs, and then shared that information with the world.



Businesses are heeding this call, too: the ones who have risen to the occasion are the ones that will claim victory after this. A couple examples off the top of our heads: the [School of Rock's](#) remote lesson offering - blindingly obvious but yet brilliant. Papa John's ["No Contact Delivery"](#) system, which outlines how pizza is safely delivered to consumers' doors. Hanes is making face masks. Even luxury goods brands like Dior and Givenchy are producing [free hand sanitizer](#) for French authorities.

If you are a brand or company that can quickly adapt your business to suit the current moment — whether for a critical medical need or a less-urgent but still important consumer need — you'll not only be in a good position now, but an even better position in the PC World.

## THE HEROES ARE HUMAN

Some of the greatest leaders from this crisis have emerged because of their simple, sincere, honest communications with their audiences. This group is perhaps over-represented by New Yorkers, whose cultural propensity to reassuringly, unflappably "tell it like it is" subconsciously soothes us into relying on them in times of crisis. But even business and government leaders who aren't from an outer borough win the day when they communicate to the public with sincerity, wit and straight talk. They inspire us and compel us to listen.

And we don't think it's going too far out on a limb to say that in situations like this, experience counts. We want to know that our leaders have been through similar situations and have come through the other side. We talked earlier about a little gray around the temples...well, we like to see it from public figures who are communicating to us about important things, too. It's comforting. As we emerge from this crisis, we will see increased trust in authority figures who have years of experience. We'll start to seek wisdom over whiz-bang.

Off-camera, we have a whole contingent of people who we can safely say we've always taken for granted who are very much the everyday heroes of this crisis. Delivery drivers, post office workers, supermarket cashiers, emergency room doctors. They are all showing us the nobility in being "ordinary," helping to us all hold it together right now — whether sounding the alarm about needed supplies or delivering

your groceries so you can maintain the "shelter in place" order. This might be our societal turning point where we go from idolizing famous people to seeing the nobility in the ordinary. Brands and organizations, take note.

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We're all feeling varying degrees of anxiety, exhaustion and maybe even mortal fear. These are not good times. But we do know this shroud will lift. And when it does, we people — we social animals — are going to emerge into the sun. We'll go to our favorite restaurant or theatre or nightclub, and we'll get on planes and take cruises and let our friends try bites of our pasta.

We will seek closeness with each other once again, and the connection of a laugh or a smile. At closer than six feet.

In many ways society will have changed, but in many ways it will be exactly the same.

LET'S ALL BE READY.



# WANT TO TALK?

This is a strange new world we're navigating. Whether you need advice on marketing in these uncertain times, or just want to chat, we are here to help. Shoot us an email. We'll set up a conversation via phone or Zoom — over coffee or wine — anytime. (Bedheads, screaming kids and barking dogs all welcome.)

In the meantime, take care of you and yours. We look forward to hearing from you.

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