

KNOWING ME, KNOWING YOU...

Insights into how
PR pros can help
trade media
during lockdown

Introduction

There's no doubt that the lockdown precipitated by the Coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on the way we all work. We are affected in many ways, from changes in efficiency and productivity, to the tools we need to do our jobs, and the ways that we communicate with each other.

We want to be the best agency we can be, so felt it was important to understand the impact of COVID-19 on technology journalists and how best to work with outlets in the current climate; is anything broken that needs urgent fixing? What content do journalists need most at the moment? How can PR professionals and clients best interact with them? And most importantly, how well is the oft-quoted "symbiotic" relationship between PR professionals and media working? In short, how can we help?

In a snapshot survey in early June 2020, we spoke to trade journalists across four industry sectors – telecoms, fintech, enterprise tech and mediatech. This report reveals how the media landscape has changed under lockdown and provides recommendations as to how PRs and brands can work best with journalists for mutual benefit.

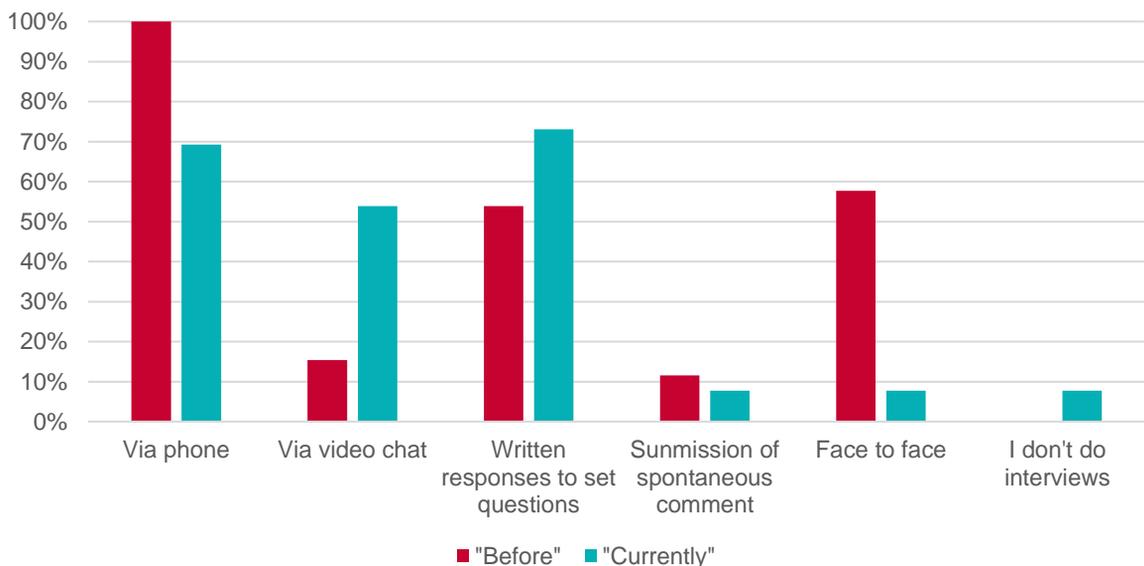
Key observations & recommendations:

- 1. *The drive to online:*** Unsurprisingly, lockdown has driven more online activity, from using it as a source of information, to a platform for engagement. More interviews are conducted via video chat, and webinars and group briefings are proving popular. Media are seeing their readerships increase. PR professionals should carefully plan how they use and execute online content and engagement strategies.
- 2. *COVID-19 isn't everything:*** Despite it being the sole reason for the lockdown, and its effects on everything from technology use to human behaviour, it's not necessarily the be-all and end-all of media's topical coverage. As ever, make sure stories and pitches are relevant to each journalist's personal needs.
- 3. *Be as supportive as possible:*** We're all locked down to some extent, and while isolation is "normal" to some, to others it is not, and adjustments are being made to new adopt tools and engagement practices to "cope". Readership is up, but revenues – and thus futures – are uncertain. But the symbiotic relationship between media and PR means our future fortunes are entwined. PR professionals should ensure they and their clients stay well connected and engaged with journalist contacts, adapting to the specific needs of each, perhaps now also considering commercial partnerships that may have been absent previously.

“What were and are now your preferred methods for 1:1 spokesperson ‘interviews’?”

- Key insight: PR people need to be ready to provide well-written responses to media questions, rather than pushing for traditional interviews.

Unsurprisingly, respondents increasingly prefer video as a channel for spokesperson interviews, with more than half identifying it as an important method for gaining spokesperson input. Face to face has, understandably, fallen away considerably. Phone calls dominated pre lockdown and are still popular.

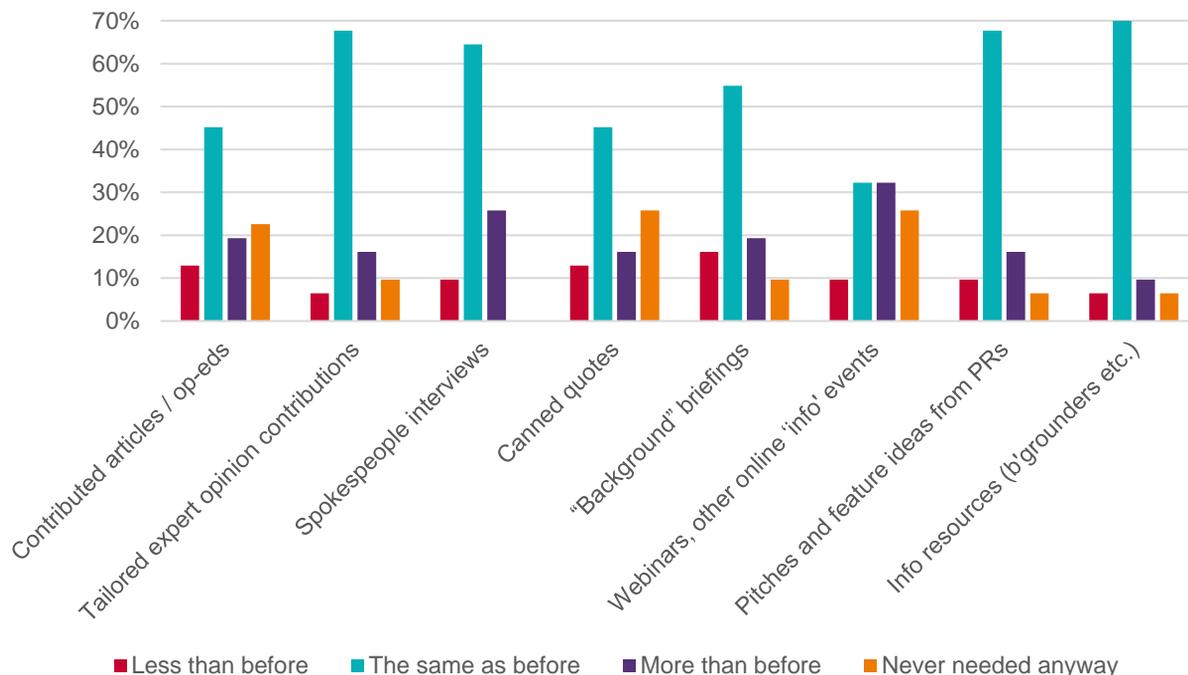


Accepting all those perhaps-predictable responses, the most interesting rise is the 73% of respondents who now need written responses to pre-defined questions. This requires PR people to be able to muster detailed information and convey it in written material in an impactful way, where previously charismatic and knowledgeable spokespeople may have been relied on. As always, timeliness will also be critical.

“Thinking about your input needs for content you’re working on, what do you need more, less or the same input for, compared to before lockdown?”

- Key insight: Stay connected. Ensure you are making experts and online content available in a timely fashion.

There isn’t a great deal of variation in the input that media need now, compared to pre lockdown – a bit more of this, a bit less of that, as we can see overleaf.

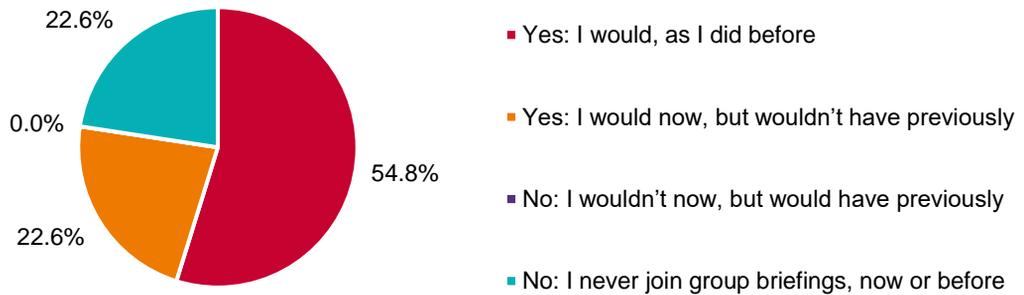


That said, the content that seems to be more keenly required is “Webinars, and other online information events”, where 32% of respondents now see this is valuable input. This perhaps speaks to current working practices, where the opportunity to attend press conferences and events is diminished, forcing media to look online instead. The second biggest rise is the demand for spokespeople interviews, where 26% of respondents say they need this more now than before.

“Would you be willing to join group briefing sessions hosted online, where you might previously have attended in person? Which of the following best reflects your view?”

- **Key insight: Don't be afraid to host online briefings with dynamic sessions**

Interestingly, nearly a quarter of respondents would now consider joining an online group briefing, having previously eschewed them. This speaks to the demands that lockdown has placed on media to source information. But “necessity is the mother of invention”, and it will be interesting to see if this willingness lasts beyond the lockdown period for these converts.



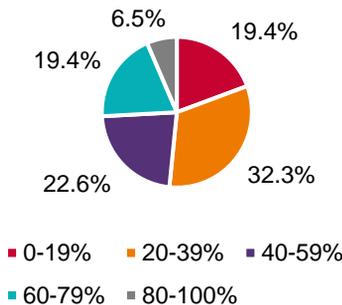
Of course, some will never join, and responses suggest this was ever thus – but nobody said they'd no longer attend where they might have previously.

“Approximately how much of your current coverage relates to COVID-19?” and “How will this change in three months’ time?”

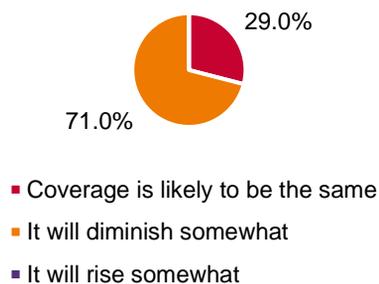
- **Key insight: Don't assume all media are interested in COVID stories – some are, some aren't.**

Surprisingly, there is little uniformity to COVID coverage – some are covering its development in depth, others with barely a mention. Looking in detail provides a little more insight, suggesting that mediatech journalists are covering COVID more than those in other sectors, perhaps due to the impact that streaming media has had in this period. It would be reasonable to expect the same from Telecoms too as a major enabling technology, but journalists there seem to be covering it much less. As an overall observation, there appears to be little appetite to cover COVID, with just over half of respondents dedicating less than 40% of their coverage to it.

How much coverage is on COVID?



How will it change?

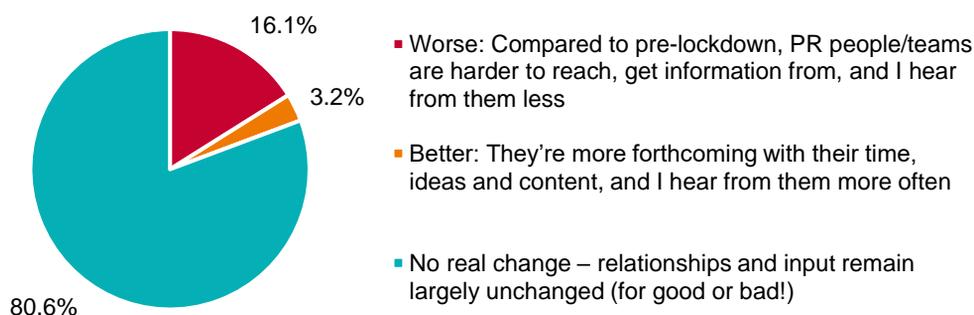


Overall, media are expecting to cover COVID less in the coming months. The reasons for this aren't explored but this is probably to be expected; it may include factors like coverage fatigue and the general easing of the pandemic's effect, meaning it becomes less relevant over time.

“Thinking about the PR support you receive, either from PR agencies or in-house staff, how would you judge your experience?”

- **Key insight: Make more of an effort to be in touch, offer help, and enhance media relationships. They will pay off in the long run.**

While there is a small pocket of journalists that think their relationships with PR professionals have worsened, most journalists don't seem to perceive much has changed. However, we might also interpret data as showing that PR professionals haven't really stepped up to the plate during this time of crisis either.

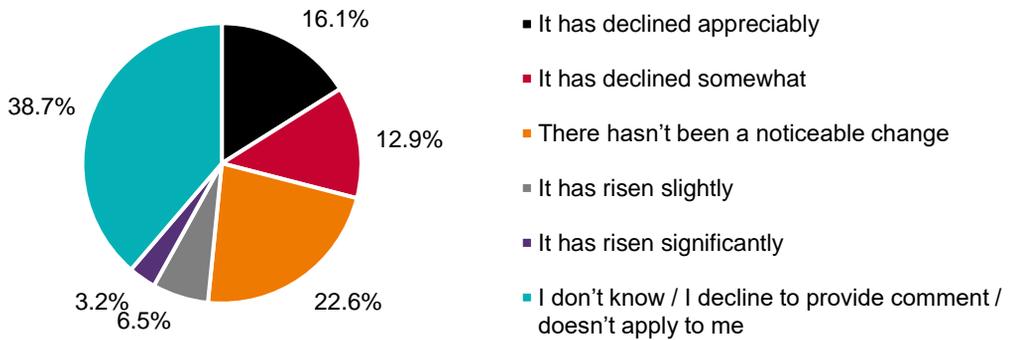


PR professionals need to make more of an effort to ensure they're indispensable in supporting media with all they need.

“As far as you are aware, how has revenue for your publication from advertising, sponsorship etc. changed since lockdown began?”

- **Key insight: The future of UK trade media is not certain. PR professionals should do what they can to help support them – their future is our future too.**

Among those that were able or chose to provide a response to this question, 29% report declining revenues for their publications, compared to just nearly 10% that have seen them rise. However, this doesn't tell the full story – a number of respondents were unable or chose not to provide a response to this question.

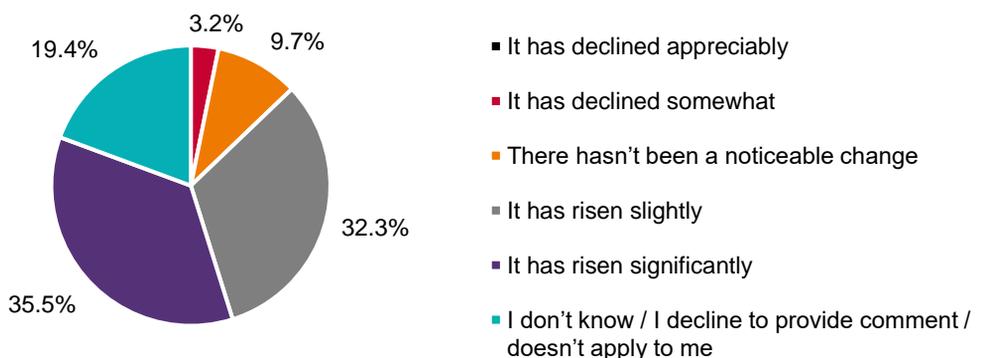


It's perhaps obvious though that there is no clear or consistent "direction of travel" for publishing revenues, and we should remain vigilant to the health of trade media in the UK.

"And as far as you are aware, how has readership for your publication(s) changed?"

- **Key insight: Media are currently "hot" sources of insight and industry discussion. Use them! Partner if it makes sense commercially.**

Responses to this question are revealing. Comfortingly – for both media and PR professionals, and the clients of each – readership and page views appear to be "up", either somewhat or substantially, according to nearly 70% of respondents. For media, increased readership adds weight to the promotion of revenue generating opportunities (e.g. sponsors, advertisers); for PR people, it assures clients that there's value in pushing for more media engagement as content will be more widely read.



We can only speculate on the reason for this phenomenon; it may be the artefact of lockdown, with more people desk-bound finding more time to read, or it may be that in the absence of face to face contact and discussion, online sources are sought and read more to find comparable information. Regardless of the reason, right now media platforms are clearly important for ongoing industry dialogue. Engagement is key but it can go beyond traditional editorial content; commercially underpinned partnerships around – for example – white papers, ebooks and other custom publishing, webinars are valuable for both parties. Clients can be encouraged by the increase of readership, and publishers ensure they're able to stay in business to provide them.

Snap summary

The coronavirus lockdown has driven some predictable behavioural changes, e.g. media's adoption of new means of gathering editorial input. But it has also driven greater reader engagement. This survey was conducted at a critical time for us all to understand where relationships stand, but in pursuit of maintaining that symbiotic relationship, it remains incumbent on PR professionals to continually assess how they're most helpfully supporting their media partners.

About CCgroup

CCgroup is an international B2B technology PR and marketing consultancy that trades on its deep, specialist knowledge of four key tech markets: Mobile & Telecoms, Enterprise Tech, Fintech and MediaTech. We help ambitious technology businesses get noticed by blending 30 years of experience in B2Btechnology markets with our unique 'Catalyst' audience insight programme that identifies how our clients' customers behave in the buying process. We leverage our insight to create acutely targeted and commercially-focused PR campaigns.

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