

Part 2: Earned media in a coronavirus world

Normal life as we know it ground to a standstill this week. For media too it was another week of adapting to a new normal: not just how to cover the rapidly developing coronavirus situation but how to help their readers, listeners and viewers cope with the new limitations on their lives and livelihoods.

Journalists are also having to rapidly adapt to a new way of working. Social distancing requires newsrooms to operate with skeleton staff and writers previously exclusively office-based are now working from home. Staff shortages due to sickness or self-isolation also mean journalists are being drafted in to cover new beats, with tech specialists moving over to health or sports writers covering news.

It's a rapidly changing landscape so here's our weekly snapshot to help you navigate earned media in a coronavirus world.

NATIONALS

Nationals continued to devote unprecedented space to the crisis: there's still an average of 14 pages in the print editions. Beyond news of infection rates and Government updates, the pandemic also dominates the features and lifestyle sections. Content that would previously have been considered too mundane to cover is now afforded generous column inches, especially practical domestic hacks to help readers through isolation. This week, the Express ran a feature on which vegetables to freeze, while the Daily Star advised readers on how often they should wash bed sheets to kill germs.

National online are increasingly looking to provide some light relief during isolation. They're trawling social for entertaining UGC content (e.g. the WhatsApp emoji film quiz designed to combat isolation boredom and BBC's round up of the best and the worst celebrity isolation videos) and journalists at Reach PLC's video desk are requesting more softer PR content to populate their feeds.

The business pages in nationals are, unsurprisingly, still heavily focused on the impact of the coronavirus on businesses. Key topics include support for small businesses, large retailers struggling with rent payments, employment rates and spending data.

Now that the initial shock of the new measures has abated slightly, and the Government has announced packages of support for businesses and workers affected, and there is space opening up for limited PR where directly relevant. For example, Dyson and Airbus are now starting to make ventilators to help patients suffering from coronavirus. On the other hand, journalists have also been keen to name and shame businesses that aren't behaving sensitively – whether that's by insisting on staying open against government guidance, or refusing to pay staff or ordering non-essential workers to come into work.

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COMMUTER TITLES

London's lockdown presents huge distribution challenges for commuter titles. Following last week's announcement from City AM, that it is halting print production, *Stylist* and *Time Out* have followed suit and moved to digital only. The *Evening Standard* has also been quick to adapt by introducing a door-to-door delivery service in zones two and three.

LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle publications still have a significant focus on Covid-19. A number of articles include lifehacks on cooking with limited ingredients and how to keep yourself entertained around the home, such as *Cosmo's* roundup of adult jigsaw puzzles and *Red's* 10 ways to enjoy self-isolation. There's also a focus on products that now offer home delivery; *Red Online* and *Closer Online* both featured round-ups of items that can brighten up staying at home, including 11 fancy perfumes to cheer you up and five pieces of home gym equipment that are still in stock.

A number of publications are covering entertainment round-ups: must-see films and boxsets, must-read books or must-listen podcasts. Dating also remains a key topic with *Stylist* reassuring readers that it's ok if they are bickering with their partner during isolation, and *Cosmo* questioning whether you can still visit your partner in lockdown. However, there is clearly an appetite for non coronavirus-related content, as *Stylist* this week published a piece entitled '5 ways to talk about anything other than the pandemic crisis.'

TRADES

The lockdown announcement from the Prime Minister on Monday evening sparked a new wave of Covid-19 specific coverage in the trades, as even more industries strived to adjust to a shift towards working from home for the foreseeable future.

Technology trades are, perhaps inevitably, filing content that aims to help those that are adapting to a new remote working schedule. Similarly, business advice pieces related to the pandemic are still being well received across all sectors.

However, we're already starting to see inbound requests from journalists looking for alternative ground to cover and planned forward features calendars are going ahead as scheduled.

BROADCAST

Unsurprisingly Covid-19 has continued to dominate programming this week. So much so that Channel 4 launched a new quarantine show with Jamie Oliver called 'Keep Cooking and Carry On.' *Good Morning Britain* has merged with *Lorraine* to offer an extended show focusing solely on the news. Guest bookings continue via video link with interviews ranging from Health Secretary, Matt Hancock to Peter Andre who is self-isolating. But it's not all doom and gloom, BBC Breakfast interviewed elderly Insta-sensations Geoffrey and Pauline Walker on Monday about the ways in which they have been helping people get through isolation with their warm and uplifting content.

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With schools now closed, helping parents educate and entertain their children has been a popular topic of conversation. Joe Wicks' PE classes have been immensely popular with the public and broadcaster's alike.

OUT-TAKES

The brands garnering earned media attention continue to follow the trends we outlined in last week's overview:

1. Companies acting for the greater good of society:

- Perfume giant [LVMH](#) make hand sanitiser for French hospitals
- Chefs from the [Ottolenghi](#) restaurants in London, the River Cottage, Jamie Oliver chains and The Dorchester have signed up to a scheme to cook free school meals during the coronavirus outbreak for children of key workers:

2. Organisations applying their expertise to help win the fight against Covid-19 – we've spotted some great examples in the data and technology space this week:

- [King's College London](#) launched the [Covid-19 Symptom Tracker](#) to understand how many people are infected after the Government stopped testing in the community in the first week of March
- Geo-tracking firm [Ubilabs](#), working with the Hanover Medical School, has developed a prototype coronavirus mapping app, in line with proposals by epidemiologists that people could donate tracking data that they've already collected about their movements through platforms such as Google Maps

3. Brands offering insights into the impact of coronavirus:

- The route planning app [Citymapper](#) has been tracking the shutdown of cities across the UK, revealing on March 23, when the full lockdown was announced, that only 25 per cent of its normal volume of trips were planned

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And brands should note that with teams stretched and brands having limited access to resources, media and consumers are willing to accept content that isn't as polished as usual – as long as it strikes the right tone. Readers are simply looking for a combination of respite from the news and genuinely helpful advice to help see them through the pandemic.

- Consumer brands have resorted to 'info-tainment' across their social channels to engage their audiences and media are lapping it up – covering everything from story-telling with author Nicola J Rowley, to how to perfect the martini from London's Lyaness cocktail bar
- Meanwhile, the trades are branching out into podcasts and webinars. As the construction industry has been under the microscope, Building magazine ran a webinar alongside Fenwick Elliott Solicitors, advising companies on their legal position. Media are going to become more willing than ever before to partner with brands in the coming weeks, as they look to help their readers navigate this new landscape