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Tips for Effectively Managing Your Website During COVID-19

Your website is the number one place to house information during a crisis situation. Consolidated and organized updates will help your community find and consume the all the news you have to share. Our current health crisis, COVID-19, is rapidly evolving on daily, and sometimes hourly basis. This leads to a lot of updates and some questions about how to concisely convey your message, who you can lean on for help, what to store on your website, and how to limit conflicting information. Use these six tips to help you effectively manage your crisis communication on your website.

1. Use a "dark site" to offer critical content and resources

Some website CMS providers will offer a "dark site" or crisis website that you can quickly establish for all your COVID-19 resources and materials. Dark sites are designed for incident response. They are intentionally "no frills" to ensure optimal performance with large traffic volumes and are quickly set-up so that you can turn your attention to other matters. Avoid adding unnecessary graphics, add-ons, or media, and keep content related to important information your community needs to know. Links to other pages should be used for these types of materials.

2. Keep your content simple

Focus your time on writing consistent and concise website copy that is easily digestible for your visitors during a crisis. Break up your information with titles, bullets, and short sentences for easy reading. Your stakeholders are looking for important updates which will be delivered with text. They are not necessarily coming to your crisis page to see videos, image galleries, or blogs, so keep those types of content at a minimum.

3. Limit conflicting alerts when directing traffic to critical information

If you send a notification to your stakeholders that directs them to a specific page on your website, consider temporarily disabling any active on-screen alerts. You don't want to unintentionally draw visitors away from the page or content you want them to see by having them click on the on-screen alert.

4. Leverage your relationship with your website vendor

Let your website vendor know which URL you plan on driving your traffic towards. They will be able to audit the page or crisis site to ensure the fastest load time and suggest modifications that can increase your visitor's time on page.

5. Communicate updates, news, and critical information from the district level

Having a consistent voice in a consistent location is key to successful crisis communication. Post all your updates from the district instead of individual schools. Managing individual updates across school sites isn't sustainable, especially during rapidly evolving crisis situations. Parents also don't want to jump from school site to school site to check for different updates pertaining to different children. Instead, condense all school-specific updates into an organized list to display on your district or crisis site.

6. Use your website as a communication tool, not a file repository

Your website is a great tool for sharing critical information and keeping parents and students up-to-date. While websites can be a great way to share some content, they aren't designed to house homework, instructional videos, quizzes, and other classroom content.

As a best practice, online learning is best done through an LMS, or learning management system, which is designed for teaching with quizzes, gamification, grades, discussion forms, and interactive learning features.

Using the right tool for the right job will help you deliver an engaging, effective, and equitable online experience to all users. In a pinch, you can use your classroom pages to share learning content using links. Teachers and other editors can create content directories on their classroom pages that link to content stored in other places like Google Drive, Dropbox, and more. Leave the heavy lifting for an LMS.