

**The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on most industries is severe.** While some sectors have come to a sudden halt in many regions in the world, others are expanding and facing logistical and reputational issues. At the same time all sectors and companies, even the ones that are not directly impacted by the crisis, are (or should be) preparing for the economic and financial consequences of the protective measures and “lockdowns” governments across the globe have put in place.

Everyone is trying to get ready for the “new normal.” The way trade associations in the health space respond to the crisis and anticipate the novel reality will help define the success or failure of their members to come back stronger after the COVID-19 pandemic. Trade associations play a crucial role in providing coordination and facilitating services for their members in these challenging times. Expectations are high though. While firefighting is currently the modus operandi, strategic thinking is also urgently needed to prepare for the future. The loyalty of association members has been weakening already before the COVID-19 crisis, but in light of adapting to the “new normal,” members want to understand even more what they can expect from their associations and how they can bring value to their operations.

In this context, there are a number of areas which are crucial to consider for trade associations now and in the post-COVID-19 future:

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### Member Support: Demonstrate Added Value and Expertise

The coronavirus is pushing the health sector to adapt quickly to new developments. This creates uncertainty and enables shifting positions among individual companies depending on how they consider opportunities to position themselves and/or their products as solutions for COVID-19.

Trade associations’ normal functions are still important, but times of crisis demand swift action. Trade associations need to plan ahead now which is why they have to invest in and focus on providing expertise that members do not necessarily have (e.g., regarding regulatory change and norm setting), but also by managing the complexity of the stakeholder environment they are exposed to and quickly adapting to shifting positions.

#### APCO Worldwide can help identify the necessary steps necessary to make informed decisions about:

- Applying digital research and data science capabilities to scan the relevant conversations taking place, enabling associations to communicate faster and more proactively in response to key issues affecting them and their industry.
- Conducting member research to help understand their current states of mind, concerns, needs and wants to help deliver resonant services.
- Mapping external stakeholders.

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### Virtualization and Addressing Business Model Challenges

Traditional revenue streams, such as in-person events, trade shows and seminars are currently heavily challenged. The ongoing situation has the potential to transform the way stakeholders interact and engage around the world.

While in-person contact will remain important, lockdowns have made remote stakeholder meetings, virtual conferences and e-events a necessity. This forced collective experience has no doubt changed the perception of going digital—something that is expected to endure well beyond the lockdown and most likely to become the norm, not least for cost saving reasons. But, success requires a behavioral mind shift and rethinking the overall approach to stakeholder engagement and collaboration that creates meaningful connections and extends conversations.

As such, virtualization and the importance of digital platforms and communication channels should be a major part of addressing the business model of trade associations.

**APCO can help prepare and implement innovative approaches to digital advocacy and identifying new ways of engagement to help boost trade association's revenue streams by:**

- ✓ Collating and leveraging data-driven insights.
- ✓ Boosting of digital presence.
- ✓ Planning and implementing virtual events and meetings.
- ✓ Leveraging internal communications.
- ✓ Engaging with stakeholders/networking.

**Expectation Management: Tackle Reputation Challenges and Harness New Opportunities**

There are many opportunities in the health sector due to the COVID-19 crisis, but associations and their members should not overpromise. There is a real focus on the value the industry brings, but with that also comes responsibility.

Above all, what is needed in these times of uncertainty and misinformation are credible, reliable and consistent sources of information. This is a role that trade associations are naturally well-positioned to play.

**APCO can help prepare and equip trade associations to embrace the new normal by:**

- ✓ Evaluating reputation, forming a proactive strategy to get through the pandemic and, if necessary, determining how to recover and come back stronger.
- ✓ Mapping new partners and potential non-traditional members
- ✓ Exploring larger partnership opportunities.