platform

# THE NEW WORLD OF TECH COMMUNICATIONS

What leading media and analysts want in the "new normal"

# INTRODUCTION

On February 12 2020, the GSMA announced the cancellation of Mobile World Congress 2020 following weeks of speculation about the viability of the event amidst the Covid-19 crisis, and some high profile withdrawals from firms such as Amazon, Ericsson, LG and Sony.

IBC recently joined a list of cancelled and postponed events that already included the NAB Show, SXSW, E3, Google I/O and The Farnborough International Airshow. **Everything has changed.**

Trade shows and conferences are the drumbeat of the technology industry's communications calendar, driving news, product development cycles and customer engagement. As the major events that were once galvanizing forces for whole industries disappeared, the accepted wisdom on market and audience priorities has been turned on its head. Carefully laid plans for every aspect of communications have had to be rapidly re-assessed.

As the world tentatively looks to the future, there's a natural re-alignment of priorities and an emphasis on working out what the "new normal" might be. In that spirit, we asked leading technology journalists and analysts for their views on how technology companies have been communicating during the Covid-19 pandemic and what they want more/less of in future. The results reveal important insights that will help technology communicators plan their next steps.

**The research identifies:**

- How well technology companies have dealt with communications during the pandemic
- Trends in the volume and perceived quality of news
- If leading influencers are getting the content they want
- How virtual events can better serve the needs of media and analysts

We would like to thank all the journalists and analysts who took the time to contribute their views, via an online survey and also in a series of conversations. We're pleased to share their insights with you in this report.

There's no doubt that there's a need for technology companies to continue to evolve their communications. However, the focus should be on what works rather than rushing to try to recreate what went before.

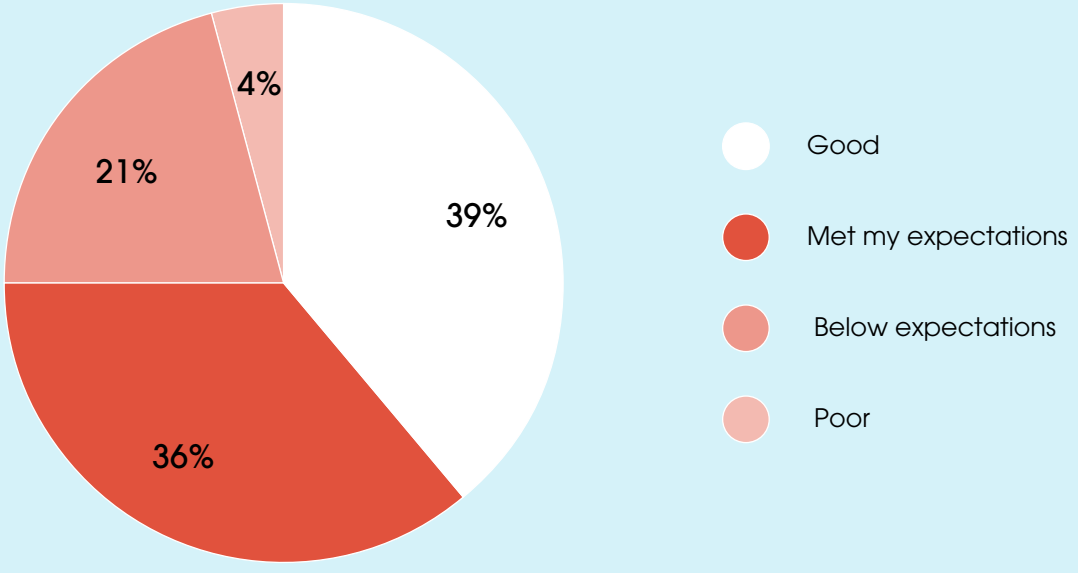
**Gay Bell**
Chief Executive

**David Lawrence**
Managing Director

Audience research included the views of 29 leading international technology journalists and analysts. The research was conducted via an online survey and a series of conversations in April and May 2020.

# 1 HOW WELL HAVE TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES ADAPTED THEIR COMMUNICATIONS?

Communicators have been quick to create virtual events and briefings as well as adapting content to suit the new realities that employees, partners and customers face. Three quarters of media and analysts (75%) rated the way that technology companies have adapted their communications during this period as either "good" or "met my expectations." However, there was clear room for improvement with the remaining quarter rating communications from technology companies as either "below expectations" or "poor."



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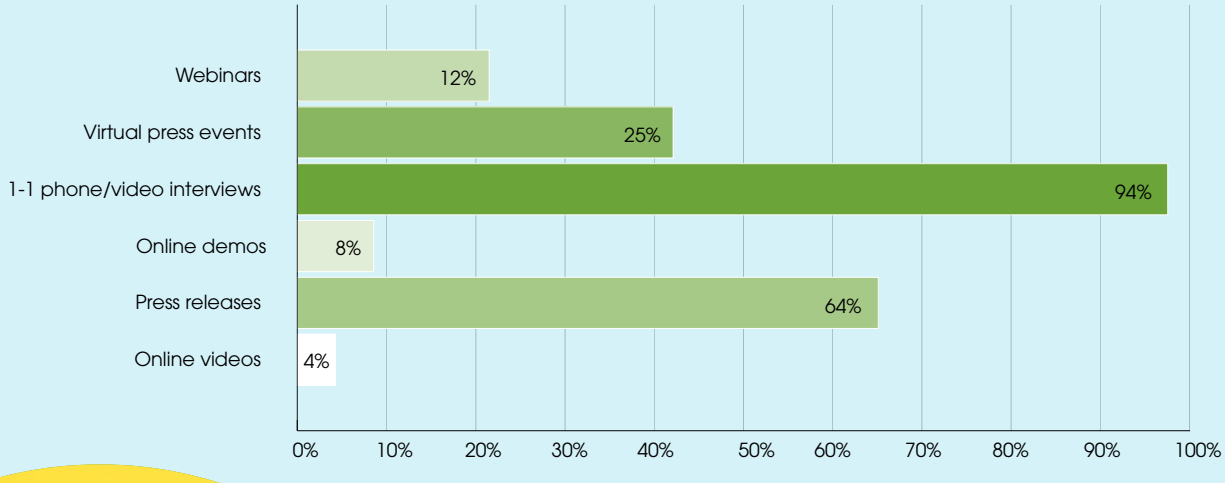
# THE RIGHT CONTENT TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

It's a truism to say that media and analysts always want information that is designed for their specific needs. It's no surprise that 1-to-1 briefings (either by phone or video) were ranked as the no.1 or no.2 most useful input by 94% of respondents. The traditional press release was seen as the next most useful input.

Amid cuts to their own teams, media and analysts now have even less time than before to sift through an abundance of detail. While it may be tempting to want to push all your content in front of key influencers, you can actively damage relationships by doing so. As a case in point, online demos and online videos were the least likely to be picked as top inputs. Online demos were ranked as being least useful by over half of respondents (54%).

**What type of communications have been most useful to you as a source of input? (graph shows the percentage of people ranking each option as their first or second choice)**



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# WHAT HAPPENED TO TECHNOLOGY NEWS?

In a time of crisis there can be an understandable tendency to hold news back. This is reflected by the fact that three fifths (59%) of media and analysts have received less news than the same time last year. While announcements need to be appropriate and made with the right tone, this shouldn't mean news should be cancelled. In fact, ever increasingly as time goes on, media and analysts are looking to spotlight news that shows markets are continuing.

While technology companies are likely to have been prioritizing their announcements, this hasn't resulted in an increase in quality. Almost half of survey respondents (48%) said that the quality of news decreased compared to the same period last year. Only 4% said quality had increased.

When asked what technology companies can do to improve their communications the clear top answers were all round more strategic media relations - sharing announcements further in advance was top (selected by 48%) - and providing greater spokesperson availability was second (selected by 31%).

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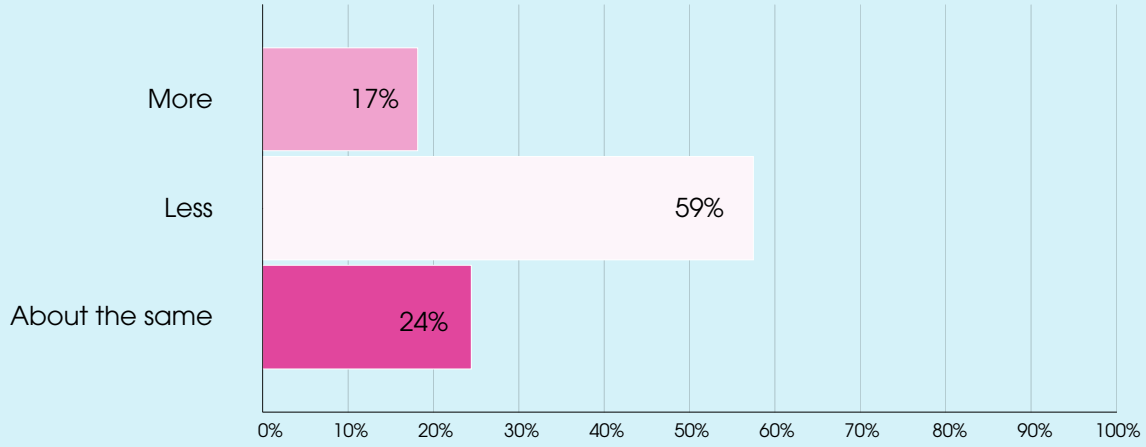
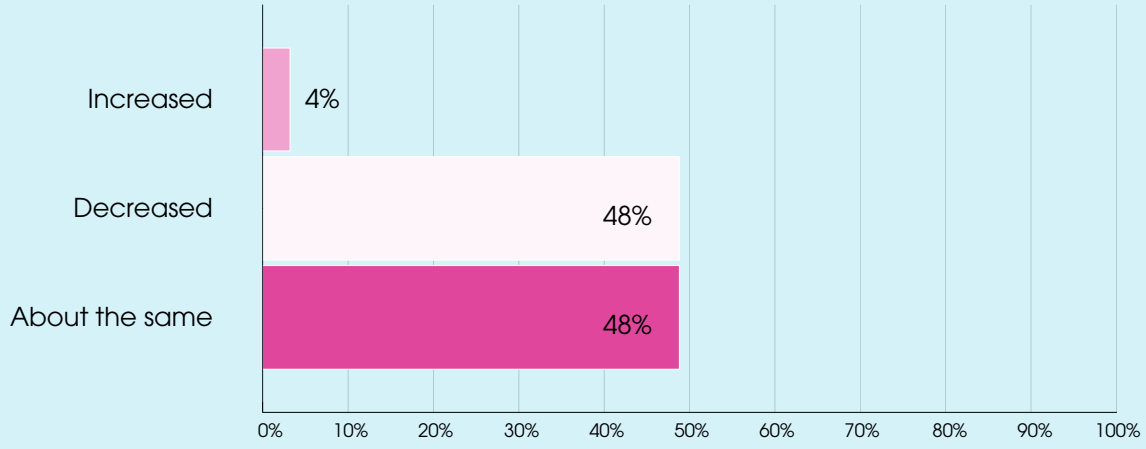
**Are you finding that you are receiving more or less news compared to this time last year?**




**Has the quality of news increased or decreased compared to this time last year?**



# 4 THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT INFLUENCERS WANT AND WHAT THEY ARE GETTING

Unsurprisingly Covid-19 related industry commentary was the top type of content received by the huge majority (79%) of leading technology media and analysts. However, it's clear that this content was not always perceived to be genuinely insightful and useful.

> **I don't view the current communications coming from suppliers as particularly serious (with some notable exceptions). We are seeing depression (not recession) level economic numbers come out in the media sector. Against that backdrop, suppliers appear to have made little to no change to intended event talking points developed in January and February** - Leading US based industry analyst

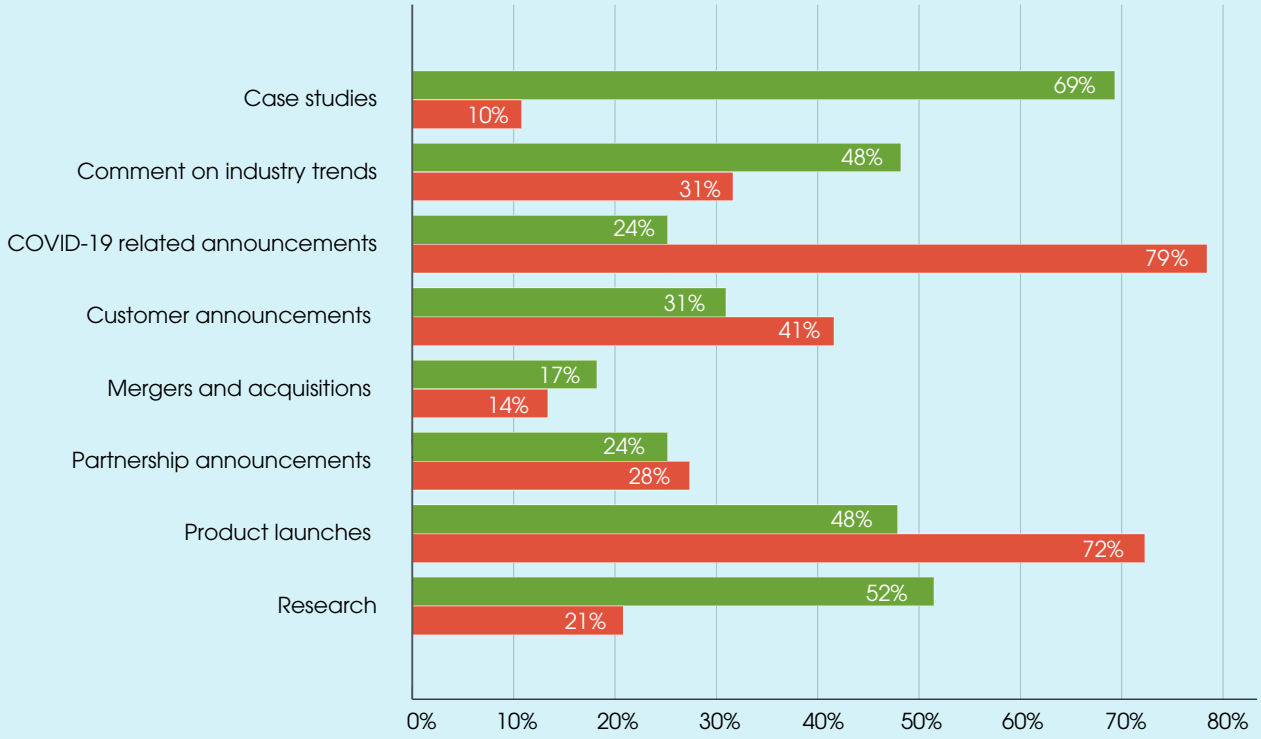
Less than a quarter (24%) said they wanted more Covid-19 related commentary. This reflects a feeling that plenty of material sent out by companies wasn't perceived to be helpful or newsworthy. Influencers need genuine insight that's useful for their audiences.

> **There has been way too much talking about Covid and not enough actual news** - Leading European freelance journalist

When asked what content they would like to receive more of, case studies came out top (selected by 69% of respondents), followed by research (52%), comment on industry trends (48%) and product launches (48%).

**What sort of content do you want to receive more of from technology companies?**

**What sort of content are you receiving the most from technology companies at this time?**



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# VIRTUAL EVENTS ARE WELCOME BUT NEED TO BE IMPROVED

Asked what tech companies are doing well, three quarters of the media and analysts we surveyed (74%) said "creating digital alternatives to physical events." Indeed, almost the same proportion (71%) agreed that virtual events have tended to be more useful than (pre-Covid-19) physical events.

> Overall I think people are getting used to doing things remotely and people are realizing how much time and money they are saving. We still want to meet face-to-face but it will have to be a good reason
> - Leading technology industry analyst

It's clear that, when trade shows and conferences start happening in earnest again, they need to become much more digital. **Nine out of ten (90%) of media and analysts want more online access to briefings and presentations from physical events**. This does not mean that all physical events should be replaced in the long-term, it's more a case of augmenting them. This is reflected in the fact that over two thirds (69%) of survey respondents disagreed with the idea that if more presentations and briefings were available online they would go to less events. Around three quarters (72%) said they would cover more from events if the content was available online.

> Virtual events can be a very poor substitute for physically being present at a trade show. A trade show means the multi-media bombardment of news, information, trends, noise and people - it is the happy accidents of all these and the ability to 'read' a room, see someone actually present or talk, see how exhibits are presented, chat informally with a mix of people - that makes the newscycle tick - Leading freelance technology journalist

While virtual events have been generally well received there is room for improvement. This is reflected in the even split between responses that virtual events maximize use of time compared to physical events - 48% agreed and 41% disagreed.

A particular area of concern is the level of interactivity that virtual events offer. Three fifths of media and analysts (59%) reported that it can be hard to ask questions at virtual events and half (49%) said it can be difficult to get the input they need. There's a clear need to make sure that virtual events are well managed and are tailored to the needs of different media and analysts.

> Virtual is great, as long as it is informative, tightly run, and provides opportunity to interact. There should be opportunity to submit questions beforehand, and an expectation that questions will be answered, individually and to all attendees, afterward - Industry analyst

Scheduling can also be a significant issue. Where a major trade show is cancelled some companies have simply moved their briefings and events to take place online at the same time. This creates huge problems for journalists and analysts to prioritize and can mean companies damaging their engagement as a result. There's considerable scope for much more strategic planning of news delivery, avoiding competing with everyone else's news.

> **This week would have been NAB Show in Las Vegas and I'm listening in on three webinars and other virtual events this afternoon and it's just crazy on the online front at the moment. It literally feels like every company and their dog are doing something and I actually can't make all of them because sometimes two or three are taking place at the same time** - Editor at top international technology magazine

Another key consideration is that without events, there are much more limited opportunities for your key sales and leadership teams to interact with customers and partners. With technology sales commonly being made on a recurring, OPEX basis it can rapidly become damaging to lose contact with customers. Communications teams should be actively creating increased, ongoing opportunities for customer conversation by ensuring the right members of your team are visible to the industry through thought-leadership and targeted social engagement.

# COMMUNICATIONS IMPERATIVES

Our research revealed how leading technology media and analysts perceive recent communications from technology communications. Successful communicators will be planning for a very different landscape in future. Our recommendations are:

1. **Activate influencers both inside and outside your organization** to boost engagement and keep you in front of customers. This is especially vital when events aren't happening and will continue to make a difference in boosting sales engagement.

2. When trade shows, conferences and events emerge again, **make full use of digital communications to make the right content available** to a much broader audience.

3. When a crisis hits, **avoid going quiet**. It's not about stopping; it's about being appropriate. As the crisis eases, there will be even greater emphasis on showing that your company is moving forward.

4. Media & analysts are hungry for case studies, products and industry insight. **Quality content will make you stand out.**

5. Virtual events need to be more than just putting a presentation online. **Think about interaction during and after the event**. Also, plan for how you'll get the right audience to attend. If your virtual event is replacing activity at a big trade show, don't feel you have to have it at the same time. You can be more strategic to avoid competing with everyone else's news.

We'd love to hear your experiences and talk more about how we are building brands and driving sales in the new world of communications. Please drop us a line at

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