

Disinfecting the News Cycle



Staying sane is tough when the world seems so crazy, and having your brain plugged directly into the news cycle doesn't help. I know

it's not healthy to keep refreshing my news feed. But the coronavirus has everyone scared, myself included.

So I keep scrolling. I keep checking my phone. I keep listening to the news. I can't help it. I need to know if my children will be safe at school, if my loved ones overseas are in danger, if I should cancel my family vacation or my upcoming business trip. The whole world is in a panic, and I need to know if I've stockpiled enough toilet paper and canned beans to make it through the apocalypse.

Okay, that last part is an exaggeration, but you get the point. It was bad enough when we were just dealing with impeachment and the presidential primaries. Add in a global pandemic and its associated travel bans, stock market volatility and disruption of daily life, and you have all the fuel you need to feed our smart-phone driven anxiety.

The experts at the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are telling us that we should avoid large gatherings. We should consider working from home and cancel all nonessential travel. As the disease ramped up here in the United States, people began—slowly—to take heed. SXSW was cancelled. Various trade shows, conferences and business events have been postponed. The NBA, NHL and Major League Soccer suspended their seasons.

Now that the disease is everywhere, the best thing we can do is help prevent or slow its spread. Wash your hands. Don't touch your face. Stay away from crowds as much as possible. Social distancing is how we limit the spread of the disease.

Maybe the social distancing principle should also be applied to our news feeds.

I'm not saying you should bury your head in the sand. Clearly this is a serious issue that requires everyone's attention. But a little bit of distance from the torrent of information might be a good thing. Maybe check your news feeds a couple of times per day instead of constantly.

The CDC is also recommending judicious disinfecting to help prevent the spread of the disease. And this, too, should be applied to our news feeds. Although cleaning your phone is probably a good idea, no amount of Purell or Clorox wipes will protect you from all the fake news, highly politicized commentary, deliberate misinformation and ignorance you have to wade through to get anything useful. No, some mental filtering is probably what you need in order to find whatever small kernels of truth are out there.

Taking these steps won't solve any problems. But they'll go a long way toward alleviating your anxiety and allowing you to focus on the things you can actually control. You can't solve the coronavirus crisis by yourself. But you can still meet your deadlines at work. You can still be a good parent, spouse, friend and co-worker. You can still serve your customers.

So stay focused on the things you can control, and keep your business running. Yes, you'll have to deal with disruptions, but don't let everything grind to a halt. The more you can keep things moving now, the better off you'll be. When the COVID-19 outbreak dies down, I have a feeling we're all going to have a lot of ground to make up.

Randy Stott

