

THE NEXT WAVE: HOW COVID-19 IS FORCING A RETHINK ON HOW BEST TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR CUSTOMERS.

We talk to a digital engagement expert who says that businesses are already coming to the realisation that they need to completely rethink their engagement strategies in light of social distancing and the other impacts of COVID-19.

From his remote alpine location, Mark Sinclair has been keeping tabs on the business world reacting to COVID-19. "Even the most rigid of multi-national businesses have changed the way they operate overnight," he says. "The uptake of platforms like Zoom and Google Meet has been phenomenal. People have 'discovered' collaborative apps like Slack, Asana and Wipster, and they're discovering how useful consumer apps like WhatsApp can be in a business context."

To him, it's second nature. "We've been using most of these platforms since each of them launched." With a team of 18 people scattered around the globe, remote working is not the "new normal" for the yBC team. It's the normal.

But Mark is most interested not in how people will change how they meet, but how they'll communicate with the audiences which matter to them most. "This will change, beyond recognition."

"Face to face will continue to be very important, but there will be limits on this. Events will be approved less frequently, and are likely to be even smaller. Travel will be restricted for some time to come - and it's likely that business travel will shift from being a 'given' to being an exception to the rule. All of this thrusts the need for much more engaging, more relevant communication right to the fore.



yBC's CEO Mark Sinclair addressing Asset Management firm heads of marketing in Singapore, pre Coronavirus.

"Former US Vice President Joe Biden has jumped straight in, recording his podcast from his home in Wilmington, Delaware. But not every business will have a presidential budget of millions, or an experienced production team on standby to provide the much needed expertise."

"For a busy manager with a day job, suddenly leaping into the world of digital content creation and programming - whilst at the same time rebuilding your parts of the business to survive the impacts of COVID - are a big ask," he says. "In fact, very few could successfully achieve both."

Mark lays out a very clear case for the use of multiple digital formats to reach and impress people. He talks about video, infographics and audio - now all regarded by the industry as more 'mainstream' than they were when he first started working with them in 2005. He describes such things as 'digital whitepapers' and 'serialised business content', along with 'responsive tech' and advanced analytics.

"Businesses of all sizes will have to reinvent their communications. Email newsletters and five page pdfs will no longer be good enough. They just won't get the cut through, and people will become intolerant of receiving them."

"The answer lies in a combination of very cleverly planned, relevant, regular content shared with key audiences. The concept of relevance and entertainment will be hugely important. Think Netflix for business. Think Bloomberg premium."

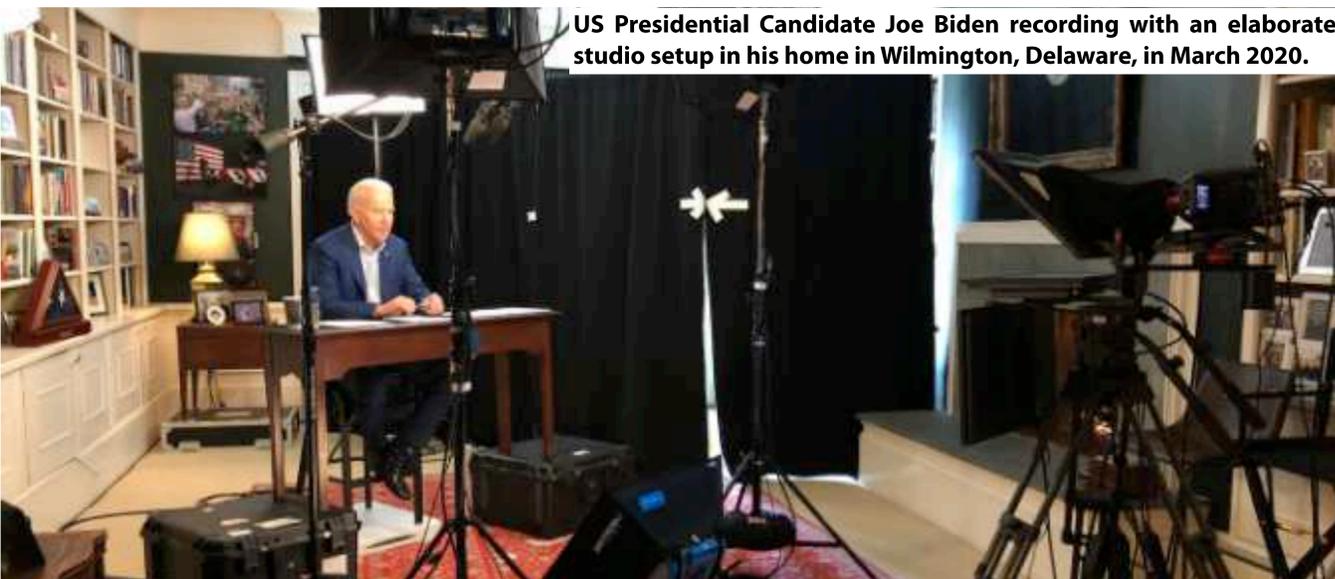
Mark says that the businesses which get this right will have their clients and contacts engaged, and in many cases even "waiting for the next episodes to arrive". And all of this comes down to the core concepts at the heart of their new communications strategy, and having a way to create your programming swiftly, to highest standards, at reasonable cost.

"This is made all the more difficult by the limitations COVID-19 has placed on the way people can interact with their colleagues and work on projects. It rules out many aspects of production which were the norm until a few weeks ago."

"In the second half of 2019, we developed answers to many of these questions," he said. "After working on a fully scalable training platform for financial services giant AXA, we looked into new modes of capturing high quality content remotely. We also developed a flexible publishing platform which enables us to pull all of this together, fast."

Mark predicts that services like yBC's Sabio will fundamentally change the business communications landscape. "The key is in being able to deliver high quality content fast, appealing to everything people like about Zoom, Netflix and the numerous messaging platforms. This will be absolutely key to keeping audiences engaged and enthused about your business," he says. "But you'll also need to make sure that your content is exciting, relevant and binge-worthy."

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US Presidential Candidate Joe Biden recording with an elaborate studio setup in his home in Wilmington, Delaware, in March 2020.