

April 2020

How are PIC members doing during the pandemic?

By Sue Horner

PIC members are no strangers to working from home. But like many of our clients, some of us are now juggling work with childcare, dealing with reduced or added work, or handling extra isolation in a world of physical distancing. Here's how some of us are doing.



Janet Comeau moved out of Toronto (to Picton, east of the city) six years ago and has been working virtually at ALTkey Solutions ever since. She says social distancing is easy if you live rurally. Plus, she's now about 75% retired. "If you're close to retirement age, this is a good time to find hobbies to keep you occupied and adapt to being home (with your spouse) 24/7," she says. "Practise being retired." Her own hobbies include genealogy and needlework.

For anyone, she adds, it's also a good time to ramp up your digital skills, "understanding how various apps and software can be applied to your work routine (Teams, Zoom, Slack, WeTransfer, etc.)." Janet's been sharing her own talents in this area, showing people how to video conference and collaborate online. To stay connected with people, she has occasional online "coffee chats" with another remote worker she knows.



Chad Heard of Heard Communications usually works from home. "The difference now is there are more people around than just me and my dog, Lychee, an 11-year-old Chesapeake Bay Retriever," he says. "With two young kids, a daughter, 4, and son, 7, it's definitely noisier."

Chad started his consulting business less than a year ago and was just getting some traction when the virus hit. As a result, his workload is a little lighter than he'd like.

"I've spent the past year working on projects that emerged from a close circle of connections," he says. So, he's staying active on LinkedIn, keeping visible on social media and staying connected with people through phone and email. He's also working on a content marketing program and dipping a toe in search engine support. And he's staying focused and balanced with exercise.

The silver lining for Chad is more time with his family. "We're adapting by doing activities together, then individually so we parents can get some work done," he says. "I've also tried to write down the unique moments that occur during the day. For example, at dinner my daughter announced: 'When I grow up, I'm going to be a Tooth Fairy and a Fire Hydrant!'"

Meline Beach of MLB Communications is home with her husband, two children (10 and 14) and father-in-law. "With school, sports and seniors' day programs cancelled, we're adjusting to being around each other more than usual," Mel says.

After a busy March break of cancelled plans and no routines, she's made an effort to create a sense of "normal" for the kids. Each gets a weekly schedule that includes school subjects and extracurricular activities, like culinary arts, games and computer coding. Everyone has a dedicated area to work with headphones as needed. Of course, there's also free time for the kids to spend as they wish, including on their electronic devices.



"Our kids seem to like routine and appreciate knowing what to expect and what's expected of them," says Mel. The schedule includes two planned outdoor breaks each day, serving as a distraction from time on social media and giving the parents time to focus on their work. While one of Mel's clients paused her work due to their heavier production schedule as an essential service in the food industry, another client has increased communication needs in response to COVID-19.

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"I'm hoping this time together will support a new level of responsibility (the kids have taken initiative to bake, cook and prepare lunch for the family) and strengthen our connection while still having fun!"



Cathy Ledden, RGD of [Ledden DesigniT](#) and her business and life partner, Bill McLean, have operated from work/live digs for many years. Recognizing that we're all in for a marathon, she says they're focused on: "Trying to keep healthy, mentally, physically and spiritually. I've set up a regular Zoom coffee meeting with a group of friends to stay connected and help reduce the anxiety."

Workwise, she and Bill are busy with a large Ontario government project ("Knock on wood"), which will finish in May. They also managed to get on the government's Vendor of Record for Creative Services again for four more years. "Hopefully, this will help keep us and our virtual team busy," Cathy says. "And much of Bill's work is computer/software development that has not been affected by this crisis."

Some days, Cathy does find it harder to stay focused. "Both of us have moms at their end of life, and it can be daunting

juggling that with work and figuring out how to market during this climate. But I think of 'Roseanne Roseannadonna' [Gilda Radner on Saturday Night Live], saying, 'It's always something.' Humour helps the medicine go down."

Nancy Miller, director of consultancy [Red Thread](#), already works from a solo home office but is finding her workload fuller than usual.

"Since I work in higher ed and education technology communications and marketing, I'm compiling and crafting resources to share with the wider community and mapping out a schedule for their publication," she says. "I also work in mindfulness coaching, so I'll be sharing tips on how to avoid feeling overwhelmed and increase your mindfulness throughout the day."



Nancy is also keeping in touch with clients and looking beyond current projects ("challenging because so much feels uncertain") and developing a new marketing strategy that takes into

account the new global reality. "If you work in PR, there will likely be a growing demand for companies to maintain their brand reputation over the long term and communicate honestly and compassionately with employees in the short term," she says.

In the meantime, she advises finding time to "do things that bring you joy, stay safe, and avoid falling into despair." She's enjoying cooking nutritious meals, potting plants on the balcony, connecting with friends/colleagues virtually, getting out with her Bernedoodle, Bentley – and maniacally cleaning and disinfecting.

Whether you're swamped with work or your clients are missing in action, you're feeling anxious or philosophic, remember to connect with other PIC members. We're all in this together, and this too shall pass.

Related reading:

[How to keep your kids occupied while working at home](#)

[How to keep writing and making money during this crisis](#)

[A list of resources for Canadian artists and freelancers](#)



Sue Horner is a writer, principal of [Get It Write](#) and Co-Director of Communications for PIC. Business is slow so she's keeping up her visibility on social media, writing on her own blog/newsletter and working on PIC communications.

Are you part of our resource?

We're reminding IABC/Toronto members they can turn to PIC members for help during the pandemic with this ad, which we're running in the bi-weekly chapter e-Lert and posting online. Since we're directing people to the [PIC member list](#), make sure your name is on it. (Thanks to **Cathy Ledden**, RGD for the ad.)

Send your updates to PIC's director of membership, [Kathy Lim](#). Normally we're allowed quarterly updates and would compile changes by April 28 for publication in May, but we're requesting more frequent updates during the pandemic. For new profiles, send your name, company name, city, email address, telephone number, website and LinkedIn URLs and a brief (about 40 words) description of your business. Existing members, does your listing include your LinkedIn profile?

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Mindfulness 101

By Nancy Miller

As the coronavirus circulates, anxiety spreads. While the economy stagnates, many of us feel paralyzed. Marooned in our quarters, our isolation breeds other contagions – cabin fever, stress, loneliness. We're dutifully following one order: Stay home.

It's a curious command to abide by in a culture that tends to promote productivity. A month ago, Toronto's streets were bustling. Now they're barren. Apart from the wildlife making the most of its reclaimed habitat, an eerie sense of sterility haunts everywhere but supermarkets. We're all at the mercy of something so tiny that put under a microscope, it escapes from view.

You might have figured out, as I recently did, that no matter how much you Clorox the counters or stock up on Charmin Ultra Soft, you've lost control. Your iPhone is no longer giving you the answers. Power it on, and you'll hear only terrible news spread by people just as lost as you. Plus, the screen is covered in germs! Who'd have thought that a nucleic acid molecule in a protein coat could silently and insidiously outwit us all?

"How could things possibly turn out this way?" asks Alexander McCall Smith in his poem, "In a Time of Distance":

"When we were so competent, so pleased / With the elaborate systems

we'd created — / Networks and satellites, intelligent machines / Pills for every eventuality — except this one?"

You may have heard the riddle: "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning, riddles like these are called *koans*. A friend shared one last week that feels relevant: "Not knowing is the most intimate." In the *Tao Te Ching*, translated by Stephen Mitchell, Lao Tzu expresses it this way: "Not knowing is true knowledge." Socrates had his own take: "I know that I know nothing."

Daily, our leaders field endless questions from journalists wanting to know the impacts of the coronavirus. "How much longer will Canadian retailers and restaurateurs be out of work?" "When will we have a vaccine?" "How many will get sick?" There are no definitive answers.

You probably have a few of your own questions: "Are you expecting me to cut my own hair?" "Where has all the all-purpose flour gone?" "How long does the coronavirus survive on grapefruit?"

Or you may be stirred by existential doubt that keeps you up at night. Either way, a little koan never hurt anyone.

The next time you're feeling anxious about when you'll next see a Raptors game, tell yourself: "Not knowing is the most intimate." Use it when you're

unpacking groceries and feel paralyzed by fear that the coronavirus might be living on your box of Shredded Wheat. Try it out when you're wondering if anything will ever return to normal.

And while there is no solution to a koan, just as there is no cure for the coronavirus, there is always an opportunity to ease into ambiguity. In doing so, you're opening up to more than one way of seeing the spread of the coronavirus and its upheaval of all our agendas. Resting in moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness, remembering that everything is interrelated, interconnected, is the heart of the practice of mindfulness.

If the coronavirus teaches us nothing else, it's that we are all heartbreakingly interdependent.

"And so we turn again to face one another," Smith continues his poem, *"And discover those things / We had almost forgotten / But that, mercifully, are still there."*



Nancy Miller is a communications professional and mindfulness coach. She specializes in giving a human face to technology, creating campaigns for innovations in education, consulting with learning companies and coaching groups and individuals through challenges. She's the director of the communication consulting firm, [Red Thread](#).

Financial help for surviving the pandemic

How's business? For some of us, it's tanked. With little money coming in, we have a keen interest in the emergency measures announced by the federal government.

There's money there. How do we get it?

Find details of the [government response plan here](#). The Broadbent Institute also [has a guide](#) to help you figure out which new or existing benefits from the federal government might apply to you. And Canadian financial planning and coaching firm New School of Finance has an excellent article on [How to survive a financial emergency](#). (Thanks to Mary Ellen Hynd for sharing it.)

While the government figures out the specifics, make sure you have a [My Account with CRA](#), as all benefits will likely flow through that account.

In the meantime, tax deadlines have been extended: file by June 1 and defer payment interest- and penalty-free by September 1. Of course, file as soon as possible if you're getting a refund. If you pay HST/GST quarterly, the deadline for the first quarter has been extended to June 30.

See you on social media

Build and strengthen your connections with other PIC members, advance your communications business, discuss business issues and network with PIC on social media: on Twitter at [@pictoronto](#); LinkedIn, [IABC Toronto Professional Independent Communicators](#); and Facebook, [Professional Independent Communicators \(PIC\), part of IABC/Toronto](#). Recent posts include tips for freelancers during the pandemic and other times business slows down; how to prevent the coronavirus from killing your freelance income; and much more.

THE INDEPENDENT VIEW

We can control how we react

By Nkiru Asika

It feels like a decade has passed since I last sat down to write this column. For the March issue of *The Buzz*, I shared valuable tips on networking your way to success at live events. A few days later, we entered this strange new world of social distancing, self-isolation and quarantine. Cue Alanis Morrisette.

In the last few weeks, we've been thrown off balance by the uncertainty, unpredictability and downright unpleasantness of it all. Sometimes it feels like COVID-19 is kicking our collective butts, and there is no clear end in sight.

I found that my productivity plummeted and I spent several days questioning whether, at a time like this, I should be focused on something as "non-essential" as marketing.

But the truth is that what we do matters. As communications and marketing experts, we can lift up companies who have been brought to their knees by this pandemic. We can support businesses struggling to pivot, help them revise their messaging or find more clients. We can show companies how to engage more confidently with their employees and their customers in this time of crisis.

So, while it is tempting to freeze, this is the time to go to market – with sensitivity

but with boldness. We can't control how this pandemic pans out, but we can control how we react and what impact we allow it to have on our own businesses.

Here are a few things we can all do to keep moving ahead:

1. **Look after your mental and emotional health.** Don't watch too much news (I got into real trouble here initially). Make time to exercise, explore new creative outlets and hang out virtually with as many people as you can.
2. **Take good care of current clients.** Feel their pulse to see if anyone is talking about pausing work or cancelling contracts. Try to be proactive to stem any losses.
3. **Use social media wisely.** Spend less time on COVID memes and videos and more time identifying and reaching out to ideal prospects, especially on LinkedIn.
4. **Get in touch with past clients.** Check in on how they are doing in this difficult time and remind them that you are ready and able to work.
5. **Contact businesses that are laying off full-time employees to see if they could use some freelance help.**
6. **Follow up with all leads.** This is the time to dust off those business cards you dumped in a drawer and resurrect lost email conversations.

7. **Create content.** Showcase your expertise with new blog posts, eBooks, video series or other useful content.

8. **Research recession-proof sectors.** What industries are going to remain strong or even grow during this economic downturn (e.g. online learning; remote working; health)?

If this list feels overwhelming, just pick one thing and start with that. The important thing is to move out of a state of inertia and gain some momentum.

I don't know when we will be able to gather again in person, but it will be a rollicking good time. Until then, stay healthy, stay home and stay focused.

As always, if you have any ideas for professional development topics, possible speakers (including yourself) or any questions, concerns or ideas about PIC, please don't hesitate to reach me at toronto-sig@iabc.toronto.

Onwards and upwards.

Nkiru Asika

Chair, PIC;
VP, Special Interest Groups,
IABC Toronto



[Professional Independent Communicators](#) (PIC) is a special interest group of [IABC/Toronto](#). PIC's mission is to support independent IABC/Toronto communicators through professional development, networking and marketing. [IABC](#) connects communicators from around the world with the insights, resources and people they need to drive their careers and the profession forward.

THE BUZZ *The Buzz* informs members about upcoming events, shares professional development tips from past meetings and keeps us connected. Editor this issue: [Sue Horner](#) | Graphic design: [Deana De Ciccio](#).

Want to recap a meeting or do other writing for *The Buzz*? Contact [Sue Horner](#) or [Nancy Miller](#).

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