

## Coping With A Pandemic: ECOstrats' Elizabeth Ortega

(April 2, 2020, 6:10 PM EDT)

As self-isolation and social distancing become the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic, Law360 is sharing reactions from people around the business and legal community.

Today's perspective comes from Elizabeth Ortega, principal of Miami-based legal industry consulting firm ECO Strategic Communications.

### What challenges has the pandemic created in your specific area of work?

As a communications strategist, I have collaborated with lawyers and law firms for over two decades — it's the beast I know and love. And in that time, I've learned that a crisis precipitates clarity and the gift to deliver next-level counsel.

When the pandemic began to ramp up, I knew I had to speak to all of our clients. The conversations helped me gauge and assess their concerns and sources of uncertainty. I was able to formulate a timely approach to the issues they were facing in their firms as they dealt with their own business and continued to service their clients' needs.

The first recommendation to all lawyers was to set and keep a schedule. We also let them know that all hands are on deck and available by phone or video chat to lend structure and continuity and to help all firm members navigate the unexpected.

As we dialed into each firm's situational analysis to provide useful, helpful and timely communications counsel, it was challenging to convince clients to change gears. When in hell, keep walking. Their need to thrive under uncertain circumstances opened the door for sobering dialogue and for the creation of proactive steps to help them engage and connect with their clients on a deeper level.

### How are you and your family adapting at home?

The first steps we took, just like any communications professional will tell you, were to create and follow a plan. At our house, we had our 9-year-old son write his schedule so he would own it. This small, but significant step, has helped us manage the ever-changing landscape of uncertainty. We are on our third week and going strong.



Elizabeth Ortega

In that schedule, we worked in a set amount of time for creativity. The creative time has generated lots of laughs that has lightened the mood. We also realized we have a genius on our hands, since our son built a tin man costume out of aluminum foil! Yet, that realization quickly revealed that we need to restock our foil. Luckily, though, he didn't choose toilet paper — now worth a bar of gold — as his art medium.

We also have daily play time. Our basketball hoop was popular before social distancing, but nowadays it's a necessary space to expel pent-up energy. Sometimes, I watch my family play from our window, and in those moments, I forget this is really happening.

**What is the most creative or productive response to the crisis you've witnessed so far?**

My productivity level has hit an all-time high. I started my agency in 2008, in the middle of the financial crisis, while many law firms were reducing marketing personnel. I often look back with gratitude and keen awareness of how fortuitous it was that I was there at the right time. The in-house reductions presented an opportunity for me to competitively adjust and learn clients' businesses inside and out during tough times. The ability to provide flexible, relevant and credible advice in any circumstance is a sound investment in the client/provider professional relationship. Marching through adversity binds us together.

Now, as we look to carry on during the unknown, we're employing flexibility as we virtually connect with clients, colleagues and friends to offer them support and stability as they, too, navigate through this.

Virtual meetings, while not fully embraced by many, have proven valuable to maintain connectivity and continuity of work. During one of these meetings, academics and international litigation service providers of the International Academy of Financial Crime Litigators discussed how social distancing has impacted justice continuity worldwide. Through our virtual connection and discussion, our fellowship was propelled to research the far-reaching effects of COVID-19 on existing and future litigation. We now aim to spotlight those consequences to help others prepare and address the challenges of the times.

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