

# Responding with Clarity and Purpose to the Events of 2020

**Mike Swinford**

Chief Executive Officer  
Numotion



---

## **This has been a year unlike any other in most of our lifetimes.**

**The global healthcare pandemic has tragically resulted in many lives lost and much suffering. It has created significant economic disruption for businesses and individuals. The social unrest across the country, while positively raising awareness, has also contributed to an unsettling environment creating even more uncertainty, stress and new obstacles across all aspects of life. Natural disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires continue to add to the mix.**

For business leaders, the individual and cumulative effect of these events present many challenges as we determine how best to continue to serve our customers, engage our employees, facilitate necessary change, and position our businesses for the future.

It would be understandable to get caught up in all the negatives. To focus only on the short term. To be reactionary rather than purposeful and strategic. In a challenging year like 2020, how we respond can make all the difference in the world. When faced with multiple crises and great uncertainty, it is actually an opportunity to accelerate change at an individual, company and industry level.

There are ways to use a crisis as fuel to accelerate business growth and innovation. Challenging times can help us get laser focused on what is important and what is not. When focused on mission and purpose, and armed with the right perspectives, one can quickly eliminate meetings, initiatives, and projects that are not mission critical. The long term effects of this can and should build muscle memory and operational fortitude in order to keep this level of focus even when the crisis goes away. That can create lasting and impactful positive change.

The same holds true at an individual level. Facing into crises is a perfect time for personal reflection and much like on the business side, a time to create clarity of purpose as well. While we may feel the need to just get through each day, there is no better time to take stock in why we are doing what we do and how we spend our time, energy and capital – both professionally and personally. No matter the industry, finding purpose is important. For those of us fortunate enough to be in the business of helping provide mobility and independence, that is not a challenging task. What we do inherently has meaning and purpose. But the test during trying times is to make sure that we use it as a guide for the clarity and purposeful decision making that is so badly needed when surrounded by chaos and negativity. One will rarely go wrong when basing all energy and effort on fulfilling the mission and purpose that brought so many of us into this space in the first place.

Many individuals and companies have risen to meet the circumstances brought on by 2020. I certainly don't have all the answers and Numotion as a company does not either. But I wanted to share a small glimpse into how we are responding and transforming through the events of 2020 with clarity and purpose and how we are growing stronger as a team and, in my opinion, as an industry.

# 1

## Response

### Being “Truly Essential” to our Customers

Essential business was not a prominent phrase until the COVID-19 pandemic struck. Being officially classified as essential, fortunately, allowed key businesses to continue to function and serve customers when much of the world went into quarantine and lockdown. But for all of us who serve customers with mobility-related disabilities, being essential is far more than just being able to continue to conduct business. We are in fact essential in an incredibly meaningful way. Our customers rely on us for mobility, health, and as an aide to their personal independence. Many of our customers fall into other high-risk health categories and needed us to be even more attentive to their specific needs and unique circumstances during the pandemic. **Being “truly essential” to our customers, and faced with significant new challenges, our industry and our people had to quickly respond in innovative ways and with a higher level of intensity and purpose.**

Instantly, the manner in which we interact with customers needed to change. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) became an even more critical part of our daily routines. As healthcare workers shifted their focus and triaged their priorities, seating clinic closures or significantly reduced capacity necessitated new approaches to working with our therapist partners. We all had to quickly innovate different ways to serve customers despite the obstacles that a series of ongoing crises brought forth. While this is true for many businesses, all of us in our industry have become acutely aware of how even more essential we are to our customers’ health, mobility and independence during a pandemic.

Our new environment requires all of us to rethink our efforts and focus on the products and services we provide and how quickly and effectively we can provide them. And this type of disruption and change does not come easy. The use of new technologies, protocols and processes brings resistance from some, trepidation from others, and is at a minimum disruptive to the norm. Given all of the different people involved; from suppliers, to providers, to clinicians, to the customers themselves, it requires working tirelessly across one’s sphere of influence to drive widespread adoption of necessary change. Within any type of crisis, the response is critical. Given our customers’ dependency on us, the stakes are even higher, so stepping up and facing into the challenge is the only option.



# Being “Truly Essential” to our Customers

## Illustrations at Numotion



In taking on this heavy responsibility we did several things at Numotion, as did many others, to ensure we could meet our customers' needs as their essential product and service provider. The first, and most obvious response, was once the COVID-19 pandemic started to hit the US, we immediately ensured all of the necessary [safety measures](#) were put in place. This included ensuring our customer-facing employees were equipped with required PPE and that our policies and procedures for customer interaction in our branches, in clinics, and in customers' homes were quickly adjusted to the rapidly changing environment.

This additional focus on safety also drove us to quickly develop an approach for [telehealth](#). While this capability has been prevalent in healthcare for some time, it was not at all present in CRT. We quickly created an ability to conduct virtual evaluations, home assessments and home delivery of equipment in a HIPAA compliant manner using Microsoft Teams, and through Sept 2020 we have conducted over 7000 telehealth sessions. Using telehealth technology, we were able to reduce physical interactions and conduct necessary activity in the safest possible environment for the customer, our therapist partners, and our ATPs and RTSs. We implemented our [Peer2Peer](#) capabilities into our virtual video collaboration as well. This program allows a Numotion ATP to take advantage of the collective knowledge of the other 500+ ATPs at Numotion to help them with new or challenging situations that one of their peers has more experience in addressing. Leveraging the size and scale of our experts ensures the customer receives the best outcome in real-time.

Our work with remote technology expanded on our already three-years old [remote service](#) platform where we are able to troubleshoot and even resolve a repair issue over video chat, greatly reducing the time required to get equipment back to functional. We will do over 100,000 remote service events in 2020 and having this infrastructure, technical capability and human expertise has also allowed us to expand availability to our customers for service after business hours and on the weekends. Once again, this is the level of service our customers expect and deserve from an essential organization.

## Where Numotion Can Still Improve

While all of the responses and programs mentioned go a long way to better assisting our customers, we know that in some instances we still fall short and we need to get better. For example, we will expand to 24x7 service and repair coverage and we are driving process changes to get to 100% live answer rate on calls into our branches. We are making great strides to drive down the amount of time it takes from evaluation to delivery of mobility equipment, but we are far from satisfied with our results to date. We will also become even more digital in how we interact with customers and therapists. This will bring additional speed and simplicity to our interactions. We have teams of people working on these areas of improvement and we are committed to continuously challenging the status quo in this industry.

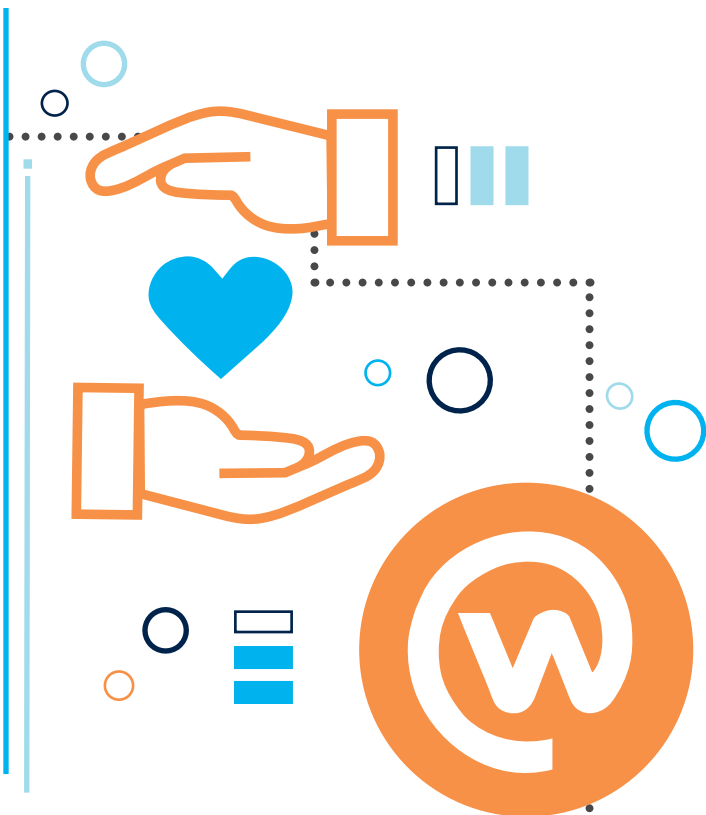
## Industry Benefits from a Similar Response

As the industry continues to pursue similar responses, this will only benefit our collective customers who very much deserve these additional efforts. Be it during the continued healthcare crisis, or in communities experiencing social unrest or climate related challenges, our customers need continued innovation and a focus on quickly and diligently meeting their needs in new ways. The progress the industry is making with telehealth is not a short-term benefit. COVID-19 opened the door for change, but the technology will continue to benefit underserved rural markets and create efficiencies well beyond the pandemic time period. In my first whitepaper, [Transforming the State of CRT from Within](#), I wrote about the need for thinking differently and driving collaboration in the industry. We can learn from one another. In particular, with the technology solutions and process improvements that we make mainstream. There are many companies doing great things out there in local and regional markets to better serve customers. We have seen this first hand as we have acquired companies like Monroe Wheelchair, Carr Rehab, Medsource Mobility and others that have each brought us new ideas and ways of doing business. Harnessing these perspectives and learning from one another, especially at this time while the need is particularly heightened, will make us all stronger and better able to meet the critical needs of our customers.

# 2

## Response

### Relentlessly Pursuing a Caring Culture and Unlocking Employee Engagement



We are all aware of the compounding effects of unlocking the power of engaged employees. As noted in the 2017 Gallup whitepaper [State of the American Workplace](#), “simply put, engaged employees produce better business outcomes than other employees – across industry, company size and nationality, and in good economic times and bad.” The benefits are swift in the moment and tend to have long-standing positive impact as well. Creating an environment where employees feed off the positive energy of their colleagues is not easy, but when done well, the results are amazing. It is proven that when employees feel valued and cared for their engagement increases. According to the Qualtrics [2020 Global Resilience Report](#), employees feeling that their leaders make decisions with employee well-being in mind is the #1 driver of employee engagement. I have long been a proponent of “making it personal.” At its core, this means demonstrating that we, as leaders, are committed to understanding the needs of each individual employee, to truly listening to them and to always supporting them both personally and professionally.

**Our job as leaders is to unlock the inherent passion and commitment of our employees through servant actions tied to the well-being of our employees, customers and communities.**

By encouraging and empowering leaders across an organization to lead in this manner, it leads to a caring culture. Creating a caring culture is not easy. It requires a passion to always do what is right and to address employee needs, regardless of effort and cost. It requires tangible demonstrations of compassion and creating platforms and opportunities for employees to help one another when they need it most. It requires having a sense of when policies need to change. This relentless pursuit of a caring culture helps drive unification among employees. This is critical in times of crisis but will be fleeting without also providing complete transparency. When there is uncertainty all around, and when there are conflicting messages in the news media and from political leaders, it is disruptive and taxing on the minds of employees. It is not helpful to also have that in the workplace. Communication and transparency are always important, but never more so than during confusing and challenging times. Amidst all the turmoil and confusion, being very clear on what the organization is doing and why, as well as what the implications are at the individual employee level, is paramount and demonstrates to all employees that the organization truly cares about them.

# Relentlessly Pursuing a Caring Culture and Unlocking Employee Engagement

## Illustrations at Numotion



Creating a caring culture has long been our approach at Numotion, but as the events of 2020 have unfolded we have done some very specific things to continue to drive this. As I already described in our response to engaging with our customers, once the severity of COVID-19 became clear in March 2020, we immediately began procuring all the necessary PPE required for our employees to be safe while continuing to serve customers. This was not easy as demand was extraordinarily high compared to supply, but we worked with a global network to secure PPE and if our employees did not have what they needed, we put in policies and procedures to ensure customer interactions were rescheduled. Additionally, we executed a plan in a 48-hour window to shift every employee who could work-from-home to do so, totaling nearly 2000. This also created a safer environment for those whose roles required them to still go to the office. And once we had secured enough PPE inventory to ensure our front line employees had enough supply, we shipped care packages of masks and hand sanitizer to any employee who needed these items for personal use. Months later, as hurricanes and fires wreaked havoc across the country, we shipped kits of generators, extension cords and gas cans to employees without power and put several employees and their families up in hotel rooms. All at no cost to them, because this is simply the right thing to do for people you care about who are in need. We also recognized the ongoing mental stress our employees were under so we provided additional latitude for employees, where possible, who were juggling other responsibilities (daycare, homeschooling, etc.) and also gave every employee two extra paid days off to be taken at any time in 2020.

Beyond health and safety, we did our absolute best to communicate with complete transparency from day 1. We implemented an employee communication and engagement tool called [Workplace by Facebook](#). This platform has been tremendous in allowing us to keep communications flowing and to keep people as unified as possible when so many are working virtually. Through this tool, I and other leaders have sent regular video messages to all employees keeping them informed of business performance and communicating necessary business adjustments in real-time. Workplace Groups have provided a way for like-minded

sub-communities within Numotion to connect and help each other professionally and personally. Our ATPs, Service Technicians and other teams can easily share best practices and collaborate with one another. The platform also lends itself to having some fun, which is critical in times like these. We have run contests to see what people are binge-watching or what their favorite song is. There are Groups for sharing best practices when it comes to virtual schooling, encouraging health and wellness, sharing pictures of pets, and many others. This has gone a long way to relieving some stress while keeping people connected and engaged with one another and our business dynamics.

## Where Numotion Can Still Improve

While we have just recently graduated our first class of a program we call Leadership Futures, in which we are developing and growing the leaders of today and tomorrow, and we have delivered numerous training sessions to our branch operations managers as well as our commercial teams to be more effective in their jobs, we know we still have work to do with leadership development and hiring. We need to develop more leaders who embody the caring culture on a day in and day out basis. We are also continuously working to create opportunities for networking across functions to allow our leaders to learn from one another how to build an environment of energized and engaged employees. Additionally, in the realities of the current environment, we are continuing to find new ways for more effective virtual training and onboarding.

## Industry Benefits from a Similar Response

The ecosystem of companies serving people with mobility-related disabilities is comprised of so many individuals with compassion and commitment. As we collectively raise the bar across all organizations to demonstrate that caring and compassionate attitude back to them, we will all benefit from a more energized and engaged workforce that is even more focused on serving the customer and delivering advancements and innovation to the industry. Fueled by this energy and compassionate culture, we can leverage our common interests and collaborate more often, to have an impact in areas like driving state and federal policy changes and collecting necessary data on outcomes to advance our collective mission.

# 3

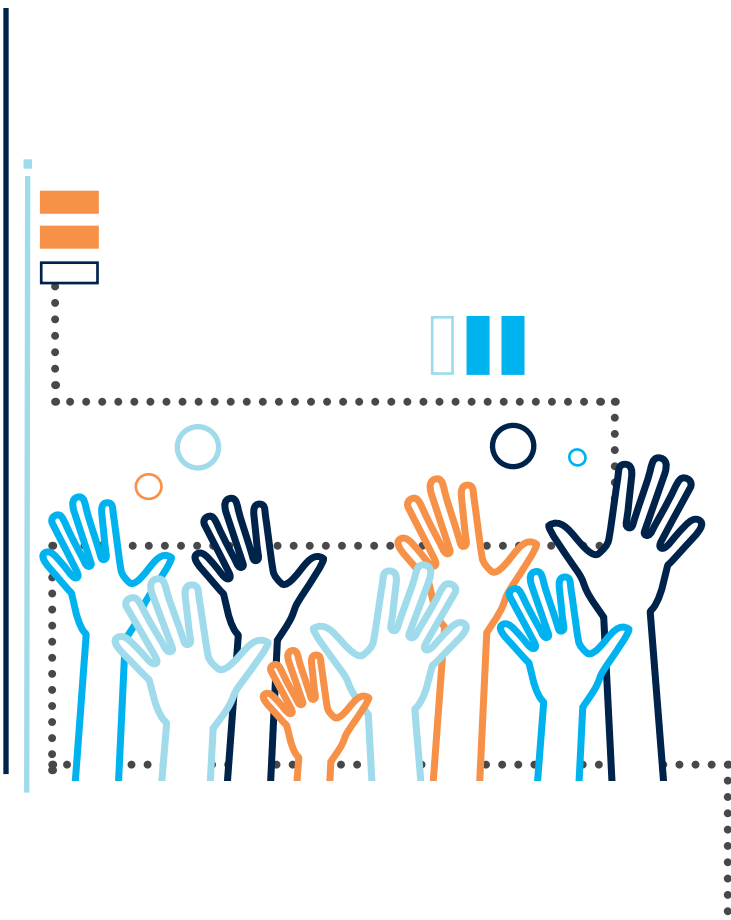
## Response

### Courageously and Openly Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

This topic could certainly have been part of response #2 since diversity and inclusion (D&I) is such a part of relentlessly pursuing a caring culture and employee engagement. However, it is important to single this out given the extreme importance of it when addressing responses to the key events of 2020. The social justice dialogue and presence in this country has not been this pronounced in decades, if ever, so it warrants candid and ongoing discussions.

Putting a focus on D&I in the workplace is not new. Most organizations have addressed it at some level. But things have escalated in 2020 and D&I have become more important areas for companies to address. It has escalated from a focus on diverse hiring and inclusion training, which are both very important, to include far more challenging areas where awareness, listening and behavioral change are necessary. There is extreme sensitivity and no shortage of underlying issues to consider when contemplating an appropriate response from a business perspective. Doing so requires acute levels of openness and communication on very tough topics like systemic racism, bias, the role of law enforcement, protests, and rioting to name a few.

**It is critical to be courageous, and not afraid to have these tough discussions openly. Creating an environment where all employees are encouraged to listen to understand while also showing respect for their colleagues' different perspectives on various issues goes a long way to yielding a culture of true diversity and inclusion.** Creating this type of environment can help shift the conversation from "choosing sides" to an appreciation that there are multiple sides to many issues and one does not necessarily need to be wholly on one side or the other, but can be supportive of what some may consider conflicting points of view. Additionally, the approach we take as leaders to facilitating this dialogue benefits from being a purposeful and focused effort, but also should be a natural act and not one that feels forced and disingenuous. Done right, the discussions may be challenging and raw but are a necessary part of reaching a true environment and culture of diversity and inclusion where everyone feels respected and valued.





# Courageously and Openly Embracing Diversity and Inclusion

## Illustrations at Numotion



While we have always had a [focus on D&I](#) at Numotion, our response to the events of 2020 resulted in several new actions and approaches. When the George Floyd killing occurred we committed to raise the dialogue, increase awareness and facilitate change within Numotion. We did not take this responsibility lightly. We quickly mobilized several panel discussions. The first was on racism during which several African-American employees shared their personal experiences and encounters with racism. The second panel had several employees who were former law enforcement professionals sharing their thoughts on the daily challenges of working in law enforcement. The third was about bias and in particular unconscious bias, as well as the impact of micro-aggressions. We posted these panel discussions on the aforementioned Workplace where not only could all employees view them, but they could also comment on them just like on Facebook. The results were amazing. There was incredible support and affirmation for all the panelists, but also continued dialogue and sharing of personal experiences and introspection on how the panel discussion personally hit home with employees. We definitely took a step forward in our commitment to raise the dialogue and increase awareness, but this is just a start.

As far as the third part of the commitment, to facilitate change, we have taken several key steps in that direction. In 2018 we established the Numotion Women's Network as an [employee resource group](#) (ERG). This ERG has developed into an excellent way for women across Numotion to network, learn from each other, and support one another. There are several male members as well who use it as an opportunity to better understand issues that women face at Numotion and in the workplace in general. Just recently we set up our second ERG at Numotion, the Black and Brown Network. Similarly, this network will provide a forum for all members to engage in continued dialogue, support, professional development and education of the broader Numotion workforce. There definitely will be more ERGs in our future!

Additionally, we have recently started a D&I Council that includes a wide spectrum of champions representing all levels of the business as well as diverse groups across Numotion. Our Numotion Foundation has created a [scholarship through United Negro College Fund](#) for

African-American students with a mobility-related disability. We have an employee consumer council made up of employees who are wheelchair users, which gives them a strong voice in how Numotion acts as an employer and how we interact with our customers. We have become a Corporate Partner of [Disability:In](#), which is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide. These are just some of the powerful examples of what we are doing at Numotion.

## Where Numotion Can Still Improve

For all that we have done, there is still much more work to do. We are continuing to find ways of driving a more diverse culture, with a focus on hiring and promoting diverse talent at all levels of the organization. We will continue to listen, learn and respond to the various concerns and needs of the employees across Numotion. Ultimately this will give us a different perspective on how to grow the company, retain talent and better serve our customers. We also are committed to working with our business partners in further embracing their own diversity and inclusion efforts as well as supporting ours.

## Industry Benefits from a Similar Response

Collectively, we cannot go wrong by simply doing what is right. The more focus that can be given to diversity and inclusion across our industry can only help us advance. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to have worked with countless diverse individuals and multiple ERGs. This has made me a better leader, mentor, husband, father and human being. When we all acknowledge the benefits of diverse perspectives, and we listen and learn, we are better people creating better companies and our communities become stronger. A 2019 [Gartner study](#) supports the notion that more diverse companies who are reflective of their customer base, are able to better serve their customers with high-performing teams, resulting in exceeding financial target expectations. While financial and performance benefits are great, so are the benefits of driving opportunities for historically disadvantaged populations. As an industry, we can benefit from hiring and promoting more people with disabilities into key roles in our organizations and ensuring racial, ethnic, sexual orientation and other diversity categories are well represented in key roles within our organizations. We will become stronger by advancing the dialogue on racial inequalities and facing directly into challenging discussions that serve to open the minds of others.



# 4

## Response

### Adapting and Accelerating Through a Crisis to Profoundly Transform and Grow

It is important to the long-term health of any business to always be adapting and driving growth. Most won't survive without doing so. **While there is a temptation in a crisis to slow down in order to address the events of the moment, there is opportunity in doing the opposite.** Viewed through the right lens and at the right time, a crisis can bring focus and clarity to an organization's growth strategy. Investing in what is core to its mission and is of strategic importance in the long-term, should serve as a guidepost to transforming the company and everyone in it.

Transformation and growth during a crisis is a balancing act. Initial focus is on making the right decisions to protect short-term financial health when the crisis disrupts an industry as was the case with the global pandemic when the world changed in a matter of weeks. Periods of volatility, whatever the cause, are certainly times to keep the business as healthy as possible. Some organizations and leaders may need to stay in this mode for an extended period of time as their industry dictates it. Airlines and hospitality in the current environment are good examples. But there comes a time in nearly every crisis when accelerating through can lead to a defining moment. When to push on that accelerator is not an easy decision to make, but once made, it is important to have clarity and conviction in the strategic investments throughout the crisis at hand. Constant change of course generally only leads to confusion, misalignment, and poor results. Additionally, waiting until "post-crisis" to drive innovation and change can be alarming when others have leapt forward. Profound transformation of a company and an industry, like ours, can occur when the lens is open to innovation and new ideas.

This can come in several forms. Technology innovation is a great example such as driving telehealth in our industry or finding new tools that drive better communication and deliver faster processes. Other ways profound transformation can occur is via new partnerships, new markets and entering adjacent businesses. This applies to any industry, but for us, this means expanding our scope to addressing the full spectrum of our customers' needs and ensuring that historically underserved markets get the resources and attention that they desperately need.



# Adapting and Accelerating Through a Crisis to Profoundly Transform and Grow

## Illustrations at Numotion



We have a growth mindset at Numotion. It is at the foundation of how we came to be. That said, we have taken the opportunity in 2020 to look at how we can excel during the crisis and accelerate our growth moving forward. Like many others, we have taken the necessary steps to protect our business in the near term, but in parallel, we are boldly looking forward by expanding partnerships in other areas within the ecosystem that help our customers further meet their various mobility, independence, and health related needs. We have expanded our portfolio of solutions through partnerships with like-minded organizations that are passionate about serving people. Great examples of this include our partners at Vantage Mobility International for [wheelchair accessible vehicles](#), and Harmar for [home accessibility products](#). We also continue to invest in increasing our coverage to serve more customers across the US. We have recently expanded in [Madison WI](#), [Casper WY](#) and [Sioux Falls SD](#). These come on the heels of strategic acquisitions of long-standing industry veterans such as [Monroe Wheelchair](#), which not only came with a strong legacy in CRT, but also in [speech solutions](#). We have plans for continued expansion into over a dozen new geographies in the next 6-12 months, and extending beyond our current portfolio of solutions is also a large part of our strategic plan. We continue to seek out partners who share our dedication to the mission and purpose of finding better ways to serve customers, and the communities in which we operate, through transformative thinking.

## Where Numotion Can Still Improve

There is much opportunity out there and as we continue to manage through a challenging myriad of crises, we need to go bigger, be bolder and execute faster. We need to see the results of our early actions, learn from them, and adapt accordingly. We will continue to look forward, think strategically, drive further innovation and sharpen our focus.

## Industry Benefits from a Similar Response

We encourage both our partners and our competitors across the industry to adapt and accelerate through these crises and look for ways to transform and grow. The more activity and positive, innovative change we see across the industry, the better it will be for all of us. Many of the innovations we've brought to the market have been replicated by other equipment suppliers and we see that as a good thing. If we all focus on improving collaboration to improve health outcomes and customer experience it will only benefit our customers which is why a majority of us work in this industry to begin with.

---

## Conclusion

There is no blueprint for what we should be doing in 2020. Any one crisis would on its own be a significant challenge, but the accumulation of events is indeed unprecedented. As I said at the onset, it is all about how we respond and lead through the crises! I have articulated 4 such responses for consideration and reflection and included some specifics of what Numotion has done in each area. I will be the first to admit that we certainly don't have all the answers. **Many have likely tried things that have worked well for their organization. I would love to hear from you about them in the spirit of openness and collaboration. Please reach out at [2020response@numotion.com](mailto:2020response@numotion.com) to share your comments and ideas.**



2020

---

## About Numotion

Numotion is committed to improving the lives of people with disabilities by enabling them to actively participate in everyday life. We are the nation's leading and largest provider of products and services that promote mobility, health and personal independence. Our focus on Complex Rehab Technology (CRT), urological supplies, home accessibility, accessible vehicles and speech solutions help meet the unique medical and functional needs of individuals with significant disabilities and medical conditions and provide them with greater independence.

These disabilities and conditions typically result from a congenital disorder, a progressive or degenerative Neuromuscular disease, or from injury, trauma or other conditions that cause them to require mobility equipment and lifestyle solutions. Typical diagnoses include Cerebral Palsy (CP); Multiple sclerosis (MS); Muscular Dystrophy (MD), which includes ALS; Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI); Spinal Cord Injury (SCI); and Spina Bifida.

Based in Brentwood, Tenn., Numotion has 150 locations across the country, and serves more than 260,000 people annually. Our team of nearly 3,000 professionals are recognized as the best in the industry and are committed to providing individualized, medically appropriate and cost-effective lifestyle solutions for our customers.

## About the Author

### Mike Swinford CEO, Numotion

As Numotion's CEO, not only is Mike responsible for the strategic direction and growth of the company, but he's extremely passionate about the company's customers, employees and its mission – improving the lives of people with disabilities by enabling them to actively participate in everyday life.

Mike has been outspoken in working alongside industry leaders, influencers and policymakers, as well as various industry groups and associations to improve healthcare access and inclusion for people with disabilities. He has a passion to influence the betterment of society and uses his role to be an advocate for positive change.

Mike has spent his entire career in the healthcare industry. Prior to joining Numotion in 2014, Mike spent 22 years at the General Electric Company (GE) in the healthcare services sector - his last role as President and CEO of GE Healthcare Services, a \$5 billion global business unit of GE Healthcare.

Mike is very active with several advocacy initiatives and associations including the ALS Association and the Muscular Dystrophy Association. In 2018 Mike created the Numotion Foundation and serves as its current President. The Numotion Foundation provides grants to other 501(c)3 organizations in the United States with common missions to Numotion.

In addition to his advocacy work, Mike serves as a Trustee for the Committee for Economic Development and was recently named Board Member for CareATC, a technology driven population healthcare provider.

