Messaging in a time of crisis

By [Nicole Capper](#)   20 Mar 2020

In the communications world, we have all dealt with crises. We have assisted clients with messaging around accidents, incidents, mistakes and solutions. We have huddled with them in the midst of "war rooms" and navigated our way through some exceptional circumstances.

© Amy Hirschi via [Unsplash](#).

But this is an unprecedented time. In the last 72 hours, I have written internal emailers, external emailers, SMS's, website banners, website advice and guidance and social media posts – all about Covid-19. I have consulted with my partners in the International Public Relations Network from around the world on global best practice. I have spoken to agency owners in the USA, the UK, Spain, Italy, China and France and their reality is one we may shortly face.

Communications in a time of crisis
Sandra Gordon 18 Mar 2020

There are some golden threads that have come through these conversations that are worth sharing.

Companies that are panicking and cutting their communication budgets

Whilst the downturn in the global economy is a very harsh reality, those companies that cut budgets in countries that are starting to move into crisis or are moving out of crisis are starting to struggle. Their customers are still online. Their brand is still online and their silence is noted. It is understood that the economic reality of continuing business in lockdown situations is a challenging one – but it is equally true that the world is going to continue. We will emerge from this (in whatever form that may be), and it's more than likely that behaviour during this crisis will be noted for its proactive, positive, valuable and helpful nature, rather than its total silence.

#Covid-19: Communicating trust in uncertain times
Neeran Naidoo, Hewers 2 Apr 2020
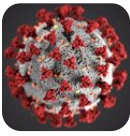
It is really important that we, as communication practitioners, help our clients manage this crisis and not disappear. This may mean that we have to find the time to go above and beyond our scope for a bit, but the situation certainly calls for it.

Language and the importance of it

Unicef has been brilliant at putting together guidelines around language. As the world sits online, content that is shared now travels far and wide at an exponential speed.

Here are some of Unicef's Do's and Don'ts:

- DO - talk about the new coronavirus disease (Covid-19)
- Don't - attach locations or ethnicity to the disease, this is not a "Wuhan Virus", "Chinese Virus" or "Asian Virus".
- DO - talk about "people who have Covid-19", "people who are being treated for Covid-19", "people who are recovering from Covid-19" or "people who died after contracting Covid- 19"
- Don't - refer to people with the disease as "C-19 covidases" or "victims"
- DO - talk about "people who may have Covid-19" or "people who are presumptive for Covid-19"
- Don't - talk about "Covid-19 suspects" or "suspected cases".
- DO - talk about people "acquiring" or "contracting" Covid-19
- Don't talk about people "transmitting Covid-19" "infecting others" or "spreading the virus" as it implies intentional transmission and assigns blame.
- DO - speak accurately about the risk from Covid-19, based on scientific data and latest official health advice.
- Don't - repeat or share unconfirmed rumours, and avoid using hyperbolic language designed to generate fear like "plague", "apocalypse" etc.
- DO - talk positively and emphasise the effectiveness of prevention and treatment measures. For most people this is a disease they can overcome. There are simple steps we can all take to keep ourselves, our loved ones and the most vulnerable safe.
- Don't - emphasise or dwell on the negative, or messages of threat. We need to work together to help keep those who are most vulnerable safe.
- DO - emphasise the effectiveness of adopting protective measures to prevent acquiring the new coronavirus, as well as early screening, testing and treatment.

Using these guidelines has been exceptionally useful for the work we are doing with non-profit organisations, assisting them to roll out careful communications to their clinics. We have found that this automatically provides a framework for positive and proactive communication.

We, along with agencies around the world, are moving into this practical mindset. We are privileged enough to have access to some of the most expert people on the globe. As a communications specialist; our role right now is to get their guidance, expertise and valuable content out there to a panicking public. At the same time, it is our responsibility to ensure that this content speaks to their expert opinions, is clear, not a duplication of what is already out there, is entirely appropriate and not opportunistic.

We need to be up to date

I am always on news streams, and some days I would prefer not to be; but it is imperative that we are up to date on Government decisions, global information and are consistently fact seeking. There is an enormous amount of information out there and filtering through it is a priority. The verification of facts, which has always been important, is even more so now as fake news proliferates and actively influences behaviour.

Remain calm

This may seem like a very banal way to end this off, but it is the golden thread across the globe. Remaining calm allows for clear strategic thinking in a new normal. Whilst this is a crisis, it is also a time for companies, brands, individuals, associations and more to be very clear on who they are, what they stand for and where they wish to go when the air clears.

ABOUT NICOLE CAPPER

Nicole Capper is the owner of MANGO-OMC, an integrated communications agency based in Cape Town. Energised by the ability to apply her honed strategic skills to very diverse client needs, she likes nothing better than generating and implementing converged communication campaigns. Coming from a branding and marketing background she relishes shifting from high-level strategic thinking to the detail and back again. Follow @ncapper on Twitter
▪ Messaging in a time of crisis - 20 Mar 2020
▪ Get ready for content marketing, SEO in 2013 - 3 Dec 2012

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com