



FOUR KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNICATING IN A CRISIS

Winston Churchill famously said, “A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its boots on.” While there’s some doubt as to who coined the well-known saying, there’s no doubt as to its fundamental truth. Considered, coordinated communications are never more important than in times of disruption and crisis.

Today, with the spread of coronavirus, the world faces the biggest public health crisis for a generation. COVID-19 has already caused death and disruption on an unprecedented scale. With widespread restrictions on movement and measures to shield the most vulnerable, life as we know it is suspended indefinitely.

Misinformation, conspiracy theories and falsehoods are rife, particularly on social media. This has led to what the World Health Organisation describes as a ‘**coronavirus infodemic**’ that compromises outbreak response; generates fear and panic due to unverified rumours or exaggerated claims; and promotes xenophobic and racist forms of scapegoating.

During this time of fear and uncertainty new research¹ shows staff trust their employers more than government officials or journalists. This places a heavy responsibility on business leaders to rise above the noise to provide clear, relevant information to their workforce and those they work closely with. When people are looking for calm, confident leadership, businesses must provide reassurance and demonstrate they have robust business continuity measures in place to guarantee their survival.

FOUR GOLDEN RULES



Rule One
BE PREPARED



Rule Two
BE QUICK



Rule Three
BE CONSISTENT



Rule Four
BE ACCURATE

¹ Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report on COVID-19 2020 <https://www.edelman.com/research/edelman-trust-covid-19-demonstrates-essential-role-of-private-sector>



FOUR STEPS TO CREDIBLE CRISIS COMMUNICATION

Crisis communications need to be perfectly pitched to avoid hubris. Getting it right involves working through a four-step process:

“Meeting the crisis challenge is not only about saying the right things and saying them quickly; it is overwhelmingly about preparing an organisation to react well when the unexpected happens.”

UK Government Communications Service, Modern Media Operation

1. PREPARATION

The most effective work is usually completed before the crisis strikes when you still have time available. If that time is not available, make the best use of what you have. Treat the Internal Comms team as your top priority. What are you trying to communicate, and to who? Which channels will you be using; calls, email, social media or websites? Identify your spokespeople – ideally senior executives with gravitas, suitable experience and who are seen to be in a position where they can positively influence the outcome. Perhaps most importantly, are you listening to what clients, suppliers, staff and other stakeholders are saying, and are you addressing their concerns?

Things to think about:

- Crisis Communications workshop.

2. CO-ORDINATION

Acting quickly and decisively in times of crisis is critical. This requires leadership from the top and functional coordination, with department heads setting aside self-interest for the greater good. You won't know how your executives will operate in a time of crisis unless they have been put through their paces.

Things to think about:

- Crisis management exercises using a broad range of scenarios to give you the confidence that you're as well prepared as you can be.

3. INTEGRATION

Communications teams need to be embedded at the heart of your business and represented at senior leadership level. They need to understand the potential impact on different stakeholders – staff; clients; end customers; suppliers; regulators and investors. They also need to know who to ask to get the answers, a trusted network based on honest engagement and easy access will help when you need to communicate urgently.

Things to think about:

- Pandemic Resilience workshop, on-site or remotely delivered support to leadership and Comms teams during a crisis.

4. IMAGINATION

Be imaginative when considering the threats to your organisation. Taking COVID-19 as a topical example, leadership teams should consider the worst and most likely cases, the effect on the business and determine appropriate mitigating actions. Be imaginative and unconventional in your processes. In times of crisis, flexible, agile and resilient mixed-competency teams can prove more effective than traditional functional silos.

Things to think about:

- Reviewing existing Business Continuity planning to cover loss of people as a consequence of the virus, loss of site, loss of access, loss of key services, loss of information and loss of technology.

The timeliness and quality of your crisis communications, both internal and external, are critical. If you'd like guidance through the process, contact us:

GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS
680 EAST SWEDES FORD ROAD
WAYNE, PA 19087
1 (484) 582-2000
www.sungardas.com

EME HEAD OFFICE
UNIT B HEATHROW CORPORATE PARK
HOUNSLOW, MIDDLESEX TW4 6ER
+44 (0) 800 143 413
www.sungardas.co.uk

Trademark information

Sungard Availability Services is a trademark of SunGard Data Systems Inc. or its affiliate used under license. The Sungard Availability Services logo by itself is a trademark of Sungard Availability Services Capital, Inc. or its affiliate. All other trade names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective holders.

© 2020 Sungard Availability Services, all rights reserved.

