

THE POWER OF OUR WORDS

Communication during crisis



Grant Thornton

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As we entered year 2020, we made plans, set out expectations and coloured our dreams. With the first quarter of the year now behind us, we can surely state - it has turned out to be nothing anyone would have pictured.

COVID-19, a declared pandemic, has sooner or later swirled through every country and every industry. They say the world has not experienced anything of such scale before. The impact of the pandemic is unprecedented: in one way or another, it has affected the life of every person.

How can anyone prepare for such a situation?

How can the business align communication and effectively respond in a crisis?

In this publication Grant Thornton Armenia has summarized key aspects that will help leaders and communication professionals design a smooth response in critical situations or test their existing communication plan. It should be noted that the below content may be subject to modification with consideration of sector-specific peculiarities.

The frontier role of communication

In the modern world, where reputation and image of a business are key to its success, communication has a critical role. The experiences that the business creates with its people and clients are conveyed with stories that shape brands.

Communication influences the way these experiences are perceived, it is not a complimentary packaging service, it is of strategic importance.

Most businesses have some sort of a communication strategy. Some, with developed systems and resources, have a clear, proactive communication plan. Few can boast for having a crisis management plan that embeds communication. And even they will tell you that they were not prepared for this.

How do you prepare for an unexpected?

When COVID-19 sent everyone home and isolated people from their teams, business from their clients, and all of a sudden made the whole world digital, communication stepped up to the frontline and became the only tool that keeps some of our conventional connections and relationships alive.

It is important to note that in times of significant turbulence, maintaining and nurturing these relationships is key to reassuring confidence and continuity.





The reign of uncertainty

This crisis has tested the ability of people and businesses to quickly adapt to the new conditions, their resilience in the face of many challenges. It has also become a serious proof for the communication strategy and its effectiveness. Mostly, because one of the key principles of building an effective communication campaign is to have a factual base, news or developments that need to be presented to the public.

With COVID-19 posing many questions to the world and shaking entire systems, a common theme is emerging from every country and industry – no one knows the answers to these questions. So how does one respond to this uncertainty? And the main challenge for all communication professionals – how do you build a communication strategy around this uncertainty?



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GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We have outlined several principles that may be helpful for designing a communication strategy during a crisis. These principles are largely true for any audience, whether internal or external and for any industry.

A woman with long brown hair and glasses is looking down at a tablet device on a desk. The background is a blurred office setting with warm lighting.

1

Be agile

During a crisis you do not have all the time on your hands to think and rethink. The situation is changing constantly and your response should be timely, otherwise, the time and effort will be in vain.

2

Be honest

Transparency is critical at times of uncertainty. Your audience is looking for answers. Honestly speak about the actions that you are taking in the face of the crisis, and, what is more important, those that you are unable to take, or commitments that you are unable to fulfil. Do not fear small disappointment, false promises will lead to a much deeper one. Besides, you may find that most people tend to display amazing sense of unity and understanding in such situations.

3

Be bold

Critical situations are a real test for leadership. The ability of leadership teams to face the challenges and work ways to respond or reduce impact, and communicate their position in a bold and reassuring tone to their internal and external stakeholders is very important.



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Be consistent

Crisis creates chaos and ambiguity. In that atmosphere, your audience will appreciate any systematic steps that will bring back sense of control and organized structure into their lives. Plan for regular reach, inform your stakeholders about the sequence and keep true to your plan.

5

Be relevant

Your content and the communication that you build around it, need to be harmonized with the situation. Set up a regular system for monitoring public information, updates on the crisis situation and news from your industry. This will help you estimate the relevance of your content and reschedule or reconsider its release, if needed.

6

Be pragmatic

Any communication piece will be better perceived by your audience, if it focuses on their issues. Especially in the times of a crisis, when issues are multiplied at an unbelievable pace, seek ways to help them navigate through complexity, provide actionable solutions where possible.

A smiling woman with glasses and a yellow shirt, sitting in front of a glass wall with sticky notes.

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Be creative

There is no better time for exploring new communication channels and experimenting with new methods. Be reminded that your communication strategy is there to support shape experiences of your people and clients. Look for ways to enrich these experiences. Embrace innovation and, for the time being in the current situation with the pandemic, replace your face-to-face communication with digital.

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Be positive

In volatile times, where all the information out there is worrisome, focus on good news, motivate your audience. Look for positive developments within your organization, among your people and clients. Yet, remember to keep balance and remain relevant. Streamline your positive content in harmony with the situation.



Be forward-looking

Plan for the future. Most people fear speaking about the future at a time of uncertainty such as this. As tempting as the 'wait and see' approach may seem, the damage of inaction may be stronger. Align your communication strategy to support future plans, build foundations for new developments.

Be true

At all times, return to your core values as a human being, and to the values that lie under the culture within your organization. No matter how difficult the situation may be, or how innovative you may strive to become, your communication shall always be true for who you are and what you want to be known for.

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Reach out to us, we can help

Being true to our global values of collaboration, leadership, excellence, respect, responsibility and agility - our approach is to provide practical and proven guidance to help organizations align their communication strategy with their ambitions, build the reputation on the market and create long-lasting relationships with their stakeholders.

We hope that this publication will help you take a fresh look at the communication plan of your organization, or shape one anew. Contact us for more information and we will help you navigate through this process.



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