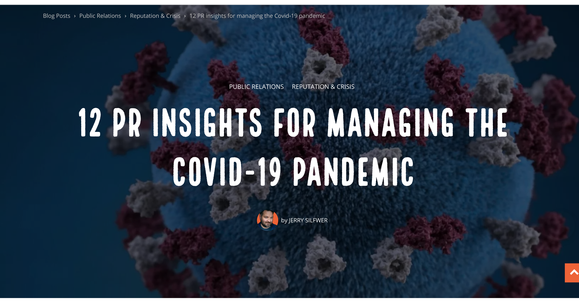

PUBLIC RELATIONS REPUTATION & CRISIS

12 PR INSIGHTS FOR MANAGING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by JERRY SILFWER

Many businesses will perish due to the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This is very sad and there's no two ways about it. However, no matter how bad things are for your business right now, there's no excuse for communicating badly in a time of crisis.

The good news is that a crisis is a great opportunity to improve your public relations.

1. Balance your Covid-19 communication

Businesses are known for exaggerating positive news and downplaying negative news. In times of the Covid-19, this is not a good strategy. The market will trust and appreciate businesses who are providing balanced and accurate information in a timely manner.

2. Don't strategically withhold any information

Building and maintaining customer trust is a long game. Even if you might see potential advantages in withholding certain information for release at a later date, there will come a day of reckoning when your conduct will be scrutinised and evaluated.

3. Communicate clear actions (and avoid jargon)

Many businesses are reciting messages already conveyed by the relevant authorities. Instead, your business must explain what actions has been taken and what actions that will be taken. In these circumstances, actions speaks the loudest.

4. Tone down aggressive sales pitches, please

Consider pausing your email automations and survey your running advertisements. Now is not the time for any hardcore sales pitches. Sales is the lifeblood of all commerce and should continue, but be mindful of your tonality.

5. Don't capitalise on public unrest or shortages

The Covid-19 pandemic (and the subsequent unrest) might open up specific business opportunities. Be careful in raising prices or preying upon irrational public behaviours. Whatever upside your business might stand to gain short-term, the long-term repercussions could be severe.

6. Explain your situation clearly and proactively

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, many businesses will be unable to maintain their regular service levels. Strive to never surprise your customers; always explain the situation and your taken actions well in advance and trust that your market will understand your situation.

7. Don't play the hero, don't play the victim

Avoid bragging about taking on extra corporate social responsibilities to support the community. And don't cry for empathy due to how tough your financial situation might become. Just keep your market informed without asking them to feel anything extra for your business.

8. Prioritise communication activities

Communicating less in a time of crisis is like removing any grease from the cog wheels that is your business. Instead, communicate *more* than your business usually does. It's okay for your market and your employees to worry about the reality, but not over lack of information.

9. Avoid talking to people like children

Many businesses are seeing the Covid-19 outbreak as an opportunity to embrace a fatherly role. However, the market is not stupid and you would be wise not to speak to them as if they were your children. Don't tell them what to do; tell them what you're doing.

10. Your website should provide all relevant answers

In times of great pressure, it might be impossible to offer just-in-time support on an individual level. However, if the market, the media, or your employees have questions regarding your business, all answers should be found on your website.

11. Consider postponing new product launches

The coming weeks will not be suitable for celebrating other news than medical advancements and stories of human collaboration in adversity. While there might be reasons to keep ahead of the competition, don't expect the usual amount of launch exposure.

12. Use digital platforms for internal communications

There are no shortage of alternatives when it comes to internal communications using various digital platforms. This is a good time to explore how much of your daily business operations that can be run without physical interaction.

Read also Sweden's Covid-19 strategy is under attack and How insights can help you improve your Public Relations during a crisis (Whispr Group).

Follow the WHO website for coronavirus (Covid-19) reports.

Photo by CDC on Unsplash.

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