

The importance of crisis communication.

By Dan Moyane - 23rd Jun 2020



Dan Moyane has four decades of experience in media and communication.

Covid-19 is a global health crisis that has highlighted the need for clear and regular communication by all types of organisations, including business. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of communication on a global scale. It has become imperative that organisations must be factual and concise when communicating their messages. Communication has become of paramount importance.

Although communication is at the heart of everyday life; it is a skill that requires appropriate knowledge and technique.

The pandemic has made it hard for businesses to operate and the need for suitable and regular communication with employees, clients, customers, suppliers, regulators, and other stakeholders has increased tremendously.

We have reached a point where it is essential for South African businesses to have crisis communication plans in place. A plan gives a business the best chance of communicating the intended message and ensuring that the message reaches the target audience. The Covid-19 pandemic has literally redefined Crisis Communication, not only is it about the business image but it has now also become a way of educating the public.



Every business will go through a crisis at one point or the other. A crisis comes with uncertainties, especially one that is beyond one's control, but business can still plan and set out objectives that will ensure effective brand communication. Covid-19 has made businesses aware that the least likely situations are possible and that it is better to have planned for them, rather than getting a surprise and panicking.

Could small businesses have planned better?

Theoretically with the benefit of hindsight, the world, governments & their countries, and the various sectors of society could have planned for a pandemic. Yes, it is an expensive exercise that takes long to put into practice, but we could have planned for it. Any company that is in existence and has leadership in place needs to realize that we need to plan for crisis. We could plan for the worst-case scenarios, but only a few could have planned for the Covid-19 pandemic.

If you think about what has become vital; the need for effective communication from leaders has been emphasized at every stage. Some leaders have done exceptionally well across the sectors of society while others have stumbled as they try to make sense of the devastating global pandemic as it is overwhelming.

A robust business continuity plan must include crisis communication as a key component of crisis management.

Important communication factors to look out for during a crisis

- **Being timeous in your response** – communicate with your stakeholders as often as you can.
- **Clear messages** – clarity is important in what you are saying to stakeholders, people want to know how to navigate out of the crisis and not panic.
- **Accurate information** – educate yourself about what you are dealing with to counter fake news, speculation, and rumours.
- **Have empathy** – check in with people who are of your organisation. Be they employees, suppliers, and clients. Be visible.
- **Be ready to be of service** – find out what they need, be honest about where you can help and express sympathy when necessary.

Can we assume that there will be another pandemic in future such as Covid-19 or worse? We may never know. What we do know is that it is not a case of “if” your company will experience a crisis, it is “when”. What we might not know is what kind of a crisis we might experience, but we can always plan for it before it happens. This demonstrates that every organisation – big or small – needs an effective and active crisis communication plan in place for today and tomorrow, to ensure that it will survive and recover from a disaster.

Having a crisis communication strategy has become a need and the Covid-19 pandemic has only reinforced the need. As the saying goes “if you don't plan, then you plan to fail”, this goes for communication as well. It is never a good idea to communicate as situations arise. Businesses need to look at their nature and try to predict worst case scenarios and have active communication plans put in place to ensure that they leave nothing unsaid and cover all likely disastrous events. When a crisis strikes, with a plan on hand it becomes a straightforward case of focusing on the appropriate messages depending on the nature of the disaster emergency. Stay safe, resilient, and strong.

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