

COVID-19

2020

eBook



The PR Toolkit: Communicating During a Crisis

None of us have been immune to the effects of COVID-19. We've all experienced the impact on our lives, businesses, friends and family. In fact, this pandemic has perhaps been the most universal experience any of us have ever lived through. It is bizarre to be so connected to the rest of the world as we all go through exactly the same thing.

Except, we are all experiencing this differently. We all have our own individual circumstances contributing to our experience, combined with the effect of either good or bad communication from our employers, and the businesses we depend on regularly. Because without positive communication from those businesses, we can be left in the dark, unaware of how exactly this pandemic is affecting us because we do not have the information we need.

Absolutely everything is up in the air now. So, the most important thing we can do for those who depend on us is communicate. We cannot control the rest of the world's response to this situation, but we can control how we respond, and we can control how we communicate that response.

So, as PR and communication experts, that is why we have put together this guide to communicating during a crisis. Because COVID-19 isn't the first crisis we've faced, and it certainly won't be the last. But we can use this opportunity to understand the importance of good communication, with our employees and our customers, and we can use that knowledge to equip us in the future.

How is our employer responding to the crisis and how have they been affected themselves? What are our local stores doing to ensure our safety when we shop? And what are our banks doing to support us with our finances at this precarious time?



Why communication is essential to navigating the journey ahead



Nobody likes being in the dark. It's like when you're waiting for news – the waiting is the worst bit. Receiving the news, whether it's good or bad, is actually okay. But while you're waiting it can feel as though you are trying to navigate a dark tunnel with a blindfold on. And that's exactly why communication in business is so important during a crisis, so that your employees and customers know the direction you're going in and how you plan to get there.

Not only this, but a lack of communication can build up resentment. When your customers and employees do not feel considered, it leaves a bad taste in their mouth. Especially when other businesses are setting an example you aren't keeping up with. After all, businesses need to have a long-term perspective – the way you behave now reflects your internal culture.

However, communicating well during a crisis isn't just about the way your company is perceived to be responding. It's actually much deeper than that.

Businesses have a responsibility to take care of the community they foster. If you do not reach out to that community and put strategies in place to ensure you remain connected you will experience a disconnect that may be impossible mend.



The PR winners in Fintech during Covid-19 so far

As we've all seen throughout this crisis, those companies that have managed to communicate well, while using their platform for good, have been those that have played to their own strengths. So, while they may not be able to come up with a vaccine for COVID-19, they have been able to contribute to the effort to tackle it in their own way.

Within Fintech, that has meant contributing to financial inclusion initiatives to help those who are cash dependent to access other forms of payment, as well as providing technological solutions to enable vulnerable people, and those isolating, to remain protected.

So, while it's important not to directly make a profit from a crisis (that's never a good look), it is possible to actively contribute to the cause while giving your company a clear purpose moving forward.

That's why listening is imperative to good communication. After all, conversation is a two-way street. And you cannot respond to the concerns of your colleagues and clients if you aren't paying attention to their perspective.

After all, we are living through an unprecedented global crisis. There is not one person who has not been affected by the pandemic. Some people are experiencing immense grief, while others are struggling with their mental health. And while business must continue, a significant crisis such as this can put things in perspective. So, to make sure you are paying attention to what your clients and co-workers need, as well as what your business needs, make sure you are keeping an open line of communication so that they know they will be heard if they need to talk.

By prioritising your community, you can ensure that your business is well equipped to weather the storm ahead as a cohesive organisation.



A few examples of companies that have been particularly successful at this are:



PPS's long-term partner, Sainsbury's, was able to work with PPS' team of experts to launch its 'Volunteer Shopper Card' just a few days into lockdown, enabling others to shop on behalf of vulnerable citizens.

Likewise, PPS and Edenred UK, in partnership with the Department for Education, issued and distributed electronic food vouchers (instead of the traditional paper ones) to schools, so that they can help support pupils who are eligible for free school meals even if they have to stay at home.



Phos are offering free payment acceptance to small traders affected by the crisis. The company is the world's first payment acceptance app via any NFC-enabled Android device allowing merchants to accept contactless payments anywhere.

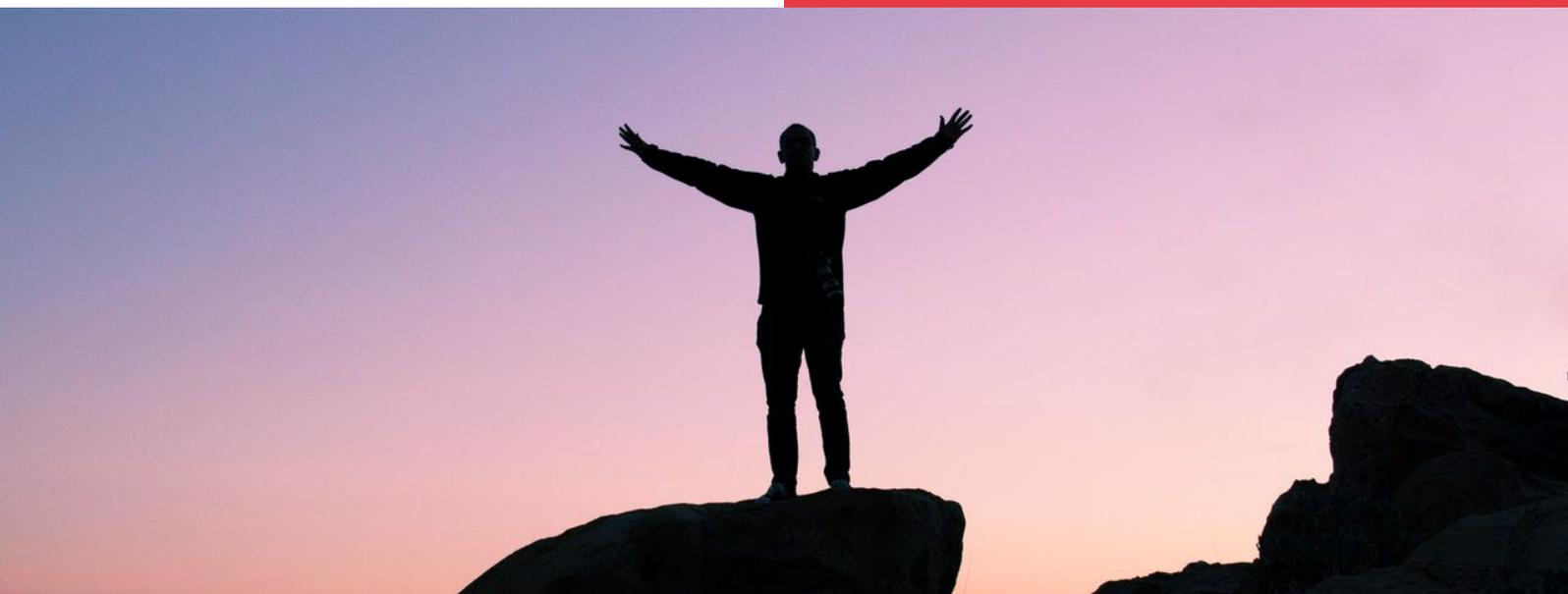
Currently, Phos is offering free payment acceptance to those affected by the crisis, and free support to those who volunteer to deliver food and essential supplies to elderly and vulnerable residents.



A prime example of using what they have available to help, Starling Bank launched their Connected Cards in April, to enable customers relying on friends, neighbours, and community volunteers to get their shopping for them. Using the card, money can be spent on someone's behalf without the need to exchange cash or bank details.



Using their position of influence for good, issuer-processor GPS has spoken out on how the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need for financial inclusion worldwide. The CEO, Joanne Dewar, has written about the issue online, suggesting: "Many excluded communities are difficult to reach and not economically viable – more so during this pandemic – and it is therefore imperative that fintech companies work hand-in-hand with governments and regulators so the former can focus on driving economic growth while the latter provide an environment which fosters innovation and protects consumers."



What's the cost of not communicating well?



The Fintech industry is the long-time custodian of trust in the movement of money, and leaders in the sector have a responsibility to maintain an open-line of communication with customers, end-users, competitors, partners, investors, governing bodies and the influencing media.

At no other time is this truer than in times of crisis and, in today's global crisis, being in the spotlight can often come with a price if we fail to communicate effectively.

Not only this but according to a recent Holmes report, the cost of poor communication in business worldwide can reach \$37bn. Why? Well, companies that foster poor communication are less likely to have employees who are engaged. And when employees aren't engaged, they are less likely to be productive. But not only this, employees who aren't engaged are less likely to interact well with customers – and we all know how damaging that can be.

And yet, despite this, many companies still choose not to prioritise good communication. However, we have seen the result of this, particularly during this pandemic. The bad press for those companies choosing not to empathise, and not to communicate has seriously damaged their reputations. And in a crisis as personal as this, people are unlikely to forget which companies let them down.



Turning crisis into opportunities – *What lasting changes to how we communicate will we see in Fintech?*

When crises happen, it can be easy to focus on the negative impact on your business. However, a time like this can be a great time to review strategies that are no longer fit for purpose, or ones that you have wanted to update for a while but not got around to. In fact, using this time to find a true voice for your business may be the best way to turn a crisis into an opportunity.

At SkyParlour, we are the go-to PR and content agency for international Fintech, RegTech, Payments and eCommerce organisations. So, we understand the power of corporate communication when it comes to developing some of the most promising Fintech companies in the world.

Founded in 2009, SkyParlour shapes the relationships between B2B audiences and clients in new, creative ways through meaningful content, targeted PR, stakeholder engagement and social media. In the era of online communications, SkyParlour makes each voice matter, bringing together a multi-disciplined team to deliver brilliant ideas, high standards and measurable engagement resulting in shared success.

Our content range includes sharp infographics that make complex technology easy to understand, videos profiling business leaders and broadcast stories, and by-lined articles expressing original and thought-provoking opinions on newsworthy topics.

To find out more about how we can help you find a voice for your business, get in touch at ... or take a look at the website:

www.skyparlour.com



Applying good communication strategies

So, to give you the tools you need to approach this crisis positively and make sure you come through it with your team firmly around you, here are 5 tools for communicating effectively:

1.

Be inclusive

Consider everyone who may be listening – internally and externally - and where they may be listening – e.g. Use multimedia to be personable and available.

2.

Be generous

Don't just consider what you should do, but rather consider what you can do. Covid-19 has brought about so many positive changes in businesses and people. A good communication strategy will also include a positive message for society at this time and, if possible, a positive action.

3.

Be clear

There is a wealth of content around at the moment. So, be sure you have a purpose for communicating - being informative, educational, understanding, showing leadership. At the moment people want clarity - vague purposeless content won't engage your audience

4.

Be consistent

Keep the story going. Keep updates regular, stay relevant and current. Don't leave long gaps in your narrative - talk about your business, your staff, your response to COVID-19, and why that matters.

5.

Be a good listener

Communication goes both ways. Consider what your audience want or need to hear, what your peers are saying and how you respond, and what is happening at a regulatory or governmental level that you can pass on or curate to your audience.



Contact

management@skyparlour.com