

Next step: normalise communicating on virtual and digital channels!

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I bet you didn't quite anticipate the impact the coronavirus crisis would have on your business, and you certainly didn't anticipate it lasting this long.



Edward Jenner on [Pexels](#).

I don't just mean the obvious impact on your staff members, way of business, stakeholder relations- but also how ill-prepared you would be to communicate any next critical step effectively.

Interestingly weeks into the lockdown companies remain unable to carry out business communications with the restricted resources available to them. Even a company that is relatively advanced, is only as effective as the limited structures they have control over, which is traditionally immovable property in a form of a fully equipped office with virtual channels serving as support. In the face of global interruptions on operations, a small communications crisis has emerged disconnecting company and employees as well as employees and clients.

We have not normalised creating, using and maximising online resources as way of business. While certain pockets of industries have, if you scan the landscape of South Africa- many companies simply have not, from Government to SMME's.

Very crucial: clever and thoughtful internal communications

If you haven't identified a crisis team in your organisation, now is the time. There is no getting around this crisis without lobbying every last member of the team to be on board. Your organisation needs a set of people who will champion communications. Your team needs to be on the same page and speak with the same voice.

You cannot afford to have teams "waiting for management", your team must have confidence that they know what is happening in the company even if its bad news. The first step every company must take is to over-communicate by all means available - gathering employee communications information and reaching them to give an update on the company's position relative to the situation at hand. This gives staff confidence to initiate critical conversations with clients, suppliers and everyone in the value chain.

To the basics- audit available communications channels at your disposal

The most obvious communications tool available typically in every organisation is good old face to face interaction. In the absence of this, we have to turn to support methods such as email and telephone calls. But different industries use various methods differently, certain employees make more use of text messages, for example, others use WhatsApp on the go, others are available on video apps like Zoom, while others are available on voice call. It cannot be assumed that all players will have access to different channels, a narrow communications approach is not ideal. Some employees may not have the required structures to be on Zoom, some may not have access to WhatsApp.

Seeing as this is a crisis, it's important to impress on all staff the need to be agile and adaptable. It's important to be nudge staff members to be part of the solution to the different conditions that are a result of this crisis. For example, it may be necessary to appeal to staff to use personal resources, such as personal WhatsApp which is required in the short-term for purposes of executing a job. It's a conversation where all parties can assist in weathering the storms together.

External communication: Digital channels

By now you should have communicated that there will be disruption in services, provided a guideline on delivery turnaround times, created a detailed FAQ's list, increased resources in digital platforms, and are currently giving regular updates to clients with each government lockdown update.

Your website is going to play a major role in keeping your audience informed and engaged. Keep it regularly updated, it literally is your office or storefront during this crisis. Try and move some of the service offerings to online platforms as a way of transitioning to new ways of service delivery in 2020. For example this year I enjoyed Red and Yellow's Digital Agency Showcase completely online. A first, but insanely impactful.

Social media-shy companies need to get out of their shell and network! It is the best way to remain part of the conversation by updating and being updated. And indeed, while we can't network in person, to learn to do so online. This is the time to use this powerful asset to inform and get the general sentiment of what clients are feeling and doing at the moment. It will help your business to better prepare for the foreseeable turning tide.

A lot of the resources available may seem specialised, and some are, but the best way is to start planning for them and using what you can. You have the time while at home, jump onto search engines and social networks for information on how to use the channels available to you today.

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