Edelman’s Guiding Principles for Employee Communications During Coronavirus

As with the management of any reputational issue, maintaining the engagement of your people is critical. Companies and organizations are advised to apply communications best practice to reach their internal audiences in the right way, at the right time.

Employee response communications should be considered, balanced, simple and timely in crises and when dealing with issues, leading with the facts and ensuring that all outreach is shaped around the relevant local policies and governance as well as coordinated in partnership with HR, senior leaders, communications leads and other necessary stakeholders.

Tone

- Balance facts with a layer of empathy to ensure communications are mindful of employees concerns for their own health and that of colleagues, family, and friends.
- Provide support for and position your focus on their health and wellbeing during this time, outlining efforts being made to protect employees as a vital asset.

Audience segmentation strategy and cadence

- Assuming initial communication has already been shared with employees identifying the situation and the company’s response process, providing regular and relevant updates is important, particularly as the situation develops in the media.
- Ensure you understand your demographic and how they receive information. Updates around the situation present a non-negotiable message, requiring targeted communication to ensure all employee segments are informed with relevant updates.
- Assess your channel infrastructure and ensure you are reaching all audience segments, including frontline employees. Cadence planning should also include frameworks for local adaptation in response to differing prevalence.
- The situation is different for each location, so equip local communicators and managers to respond and react with the right information for their region or market while being consistent with global policies.

Key internal stakeholder visibility

- Show employees that you are in control of your issue’s response, with senior sponsors leading from the front. Ensure the leadership team has an aligned view and feel prepared and confident to talk to teams about relevant developments, policies, and procedures.
- Connect and activate your communications network, providing clarity on ownership in partnership with HR as well as signposting where employees can go for further information.

Tailored information and guidance

- Position your communications as a trusted source for information by crafting updates with simplicity and brevity in mind.
• Distill technical or scientific information clearly for all internal audiences (e.g., breaking down self-isolation, alternate ways of working, etc.) and consider local translation efforts.
• When providing information on prevention and protection measures do not assume blanket understanding and ensure that even basic instructions and methods are reiterated in accordance to the relevant health authority guidance.
• Consider tailored guidance based on sector/industry focus, differing roles or ways of working (e.g., reiterating or adapting hygiene measures for workers in hospitality or retail).
• Each communications touchpoint must also include the relevant and certified sources for further information, from health authorities or local governing bodies.

Prepared by Edelman’s Coronavirus Task Force – April 2020
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