

# You know what? Public entities communications strategies suck!

 By [Zimaseka Njomi](#)

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They are absolutely atrocious. But wait... I provisionally take the above statement back because, well... I am a public servant.

I have worked for four public entities in total. Two, traditionally "Government" departments (think the 'Department of Health') and the other two "agencies" (think the 'Public Protectors') and I am simply unimpressed and severely underwhelmed by communication activities that take place in our public space. It's actually disrespectful. Critical service providers that think its OK to leave their communication responsibilities to chance. It's just not right.

Communication is seldom understood for what it is in the context of organisations, so let me outline what it means.

It is an active decision to shout out (as loudly as possible) your achievements, it allows for an opportunity to ask for feedback, warn people and manage bad press before it even happens. It's such an important tool that shapes perceptions.



Governments around the world place a great deal of importance on ensuring their public relations efforts are the best they can be. (Image attribution: [www.kremlin.ru](http://www.kremlin.ru), via Wikimedia Commons)

As Government, we have proven through our actions that we are ill equipped to handle communications crises in-house. We are influenced by our internal PR machine and adopt a defensive public relations strategy that is weak at best. It's natural, when we feel attacked we gather together to defend ourselves, but we also lose all objectivity.

## Sorry, not interested

In the time spent in the public space, less and less credible and fully capable communications and public relations agencies have bothered to respond to RFP's. It's like private companies made a unanimous decision that they are JUST.NOT.INTERESTED.IN.THE.LEAST.

This is telling.

Communicating as well as public relations has never been about telling a lie. It is standing up to the stories reported about you and enhancing them. PR is not about being defensive, lying, pleading, it's about setting the facts straight. It's about correcting the untruths. Apologising and fixing the mistakes. It's about sincerity.

I suspect however that the structure of Government is really flat when it comes to communications and PR. It is hugely reactive and really, no form of pro-activeness on our part is as ambitious - and vicious - as when we have to defend ourselves. The bulk of communications conducted in Government is spinning and crisis management.

## We got it...Why can't Government get it?

When I worked a Wits Business School, every staff member "got it", the media was our friend. Publicity was most welcome. Oh arggg, we courted publicity at all costs to be more accurate. I suppose we could afford to. I worked there at a thorny time, with a few lecturers accused of sexual harassment. A complete disgrace. A hard and emotional time at the prestigious university. The media attention was difficult but we welcomed it because Wits University was not a few rotten lecturers, we stood for something bigger. Some eggs had rotted in full view of the world, threatening YEARS of preceding work to our good name. At the end, however, what won was the will to communicate the good, allow the tragic stories to also be told but have the resolve to eliminate anything that didn't stand for our "story", who we were, where we came from and

certainly where we committed to go years before a few rotten eggs joined us and made us all look bad.

Government can learn.

## ABOUT ZIMASEKA NJOMI

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