

Why choosing the right comms partner is more important than ever

 By [Rachel Irvine](#)

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If there's one thing the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us, it must surely be the phenomenal ability of businesses, large and small, to adapt to the world's ever-changing new normal.



Image source: [Pexels](#).

Sure, the novel coronavirus and lockdown measures have shaken the private (and government) sectors like nothing for a very long time before. As always, however, companies have risen impressively to the challenge, coming up with creative ways to keep their doors open even when they were physically closed, to add value in a variety of ways, to strengthen their brands, expand their reach, and ultimately to continue attracting new business. And they've achieved this by simply getting busy.

The pandemic is an opportunity

Take Airbnb for example. They've launched programmes in partnership with various European governments to provide free, safe accommodation for medical staff on the front lines of the pandemic. In South Africa, various hotels have offered similar options, while small breweries – which weren't allowed to produce or sell alcohol during the first two months of the country's lockdown – turned themselves into soup kitchens to feed society's most vulnerable. This has boosted their reputation and expanded their fan base, and will surely help them rebuild their ventures now that Level 3 allows them to start trading again.



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For other companies, the pandemic has been nothing short of an opportunity. And not only for the obvious manufacturers of face masks and hand sanitisers. Yebo Fresh, the start-up founded two years ago as South Africa's first online grocery shopping and delivery service catering for underserved township residents, has seen the number of orders skyrocket since the start of lockdown.



E-commerce startup Yebo Fresh easing access to food supplies in townships

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A few clever tweaks to their service offering, including the introduction of pre-selected all-inclusive food hampers that can feed a family for two weeks for a very reasonable price, not only saw operations run more smoothly but also attracted more customers - and lots of local and international publicity. This has set them on the road to future expansion and many potential new customers.

The power of effective, consistent, transparent, and honest communication

A key ingredient in these and other successful attempts to make the most of a tough situation has been how companies have communicated their new and amended narrative to their internal and external audiences. The world of business may be shifting towards new ways of operating, but one thing that remains constant is the power of effective, clear, consistent, transparent, and honest communication – particularly now.

While some ventures have the internal capacity, know-how, vision and skills to efficiently and professionally communicate whatever they are doing, many others don't. There's also the threat of being too close to the issue, which could cloud your view of what's needed, what's possible, and what you absolutely have to do. What, for instance, may seem ultra newsworthy to you, may not even get a ho-hum from a journalist, and so no publicity for you.



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So if your aim is to share your innovations and initiatives with the world, you won't go wrong if you seek the advice of an external specialist. The world of communications is, after all, littered with potential stumbling blocks. And if media isn't your comfort zone, you'll need a professional to help you land your message where it'll do your business the most justice.

So what are some of these hurdles? Too much of an advertising push could undermine the credibility of your message, using faux sentiments, clichés and the wrong tone won't win you support, and people will see straight through any "jump on the bandwagon" strategies. Then there's the pitfall of using inappropriate humour, of introducing racism, sexism or any of the other isms to your content, of over-inflating or downplaying trends and statistics, or of just being way too serious (or too lighthearted) when what your audience really needs is a break from the relentless pandemic messaging.

Choosing the right communications partner

The list of potential mistakes you could make, and the risk of sinking your communication before you even get started, is a very long one. It's critical to avoid doing anything to hurt your credibility or damage the very company you are trying to regenerate from the ashes of the Covid-19 lockdown. As Warren Buffet said: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."



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So how do you choose the right communications partner? First off, ensure that your chosen specialist is prepared to invest the essential time and resources in getting to know everything about your business, what it stands for, its value proposition, its strengths and weaknesses, how it makes money - and perhaps most importantly, your audience profile. This will be critical if they are to determine the key messaging of your content and ultimately engage with you in a way that delivers on your aims and objectives.

That relationship, backed by the hard work of getting to know your business intimately, will provide the solid base on which you'll build a clear, consistent and effective communications plan - together.

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