

Date: 20.8.2020

Publication: Business Insider.in

[A brand's perspective on the critical role effective communication played during Covid-19](#)

Communications played an important role in making everybody feel safer and less anxious



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- The pandemic brought with it a lot of fears and anxiety among all stakeholders, and effective communications help in making things simpler and clearer.
- Corporate Communications has to put out the best foot forward for the organisation internally and externally, and ensure all changes are towards the greater good, writes Nikhil Bharadwaj, Head – Corporate Communication, Bajaj Allianz General Insurance.

The role of an effective communications team is to drive change management throughout the organisation, and its ecosystem, consisting of employees, partners and customers. There has been no change greater than what we are going through right now with the Covid-19 pandemic. I think one of the toughest parts of this was that there was no playbook, no previous experience to go by! We all made the rules as we went along and pivoted as the situation evolved.

There was a large amount of uncertainty, anxiety and fear amongst all stakeholders. As a communicator, where everyone saw negativity and anguish, we had to see the silver lining on the grey cloud. We had to ensure that there was transparency and cut out the irrelevant noise. Thus, far we have been able to achieve significant impact for all our stakeholders, which I will break down as below:

Employees & Channel partners:

With a lot of information around this pandemic, it was and is difficult to determine what's factual and what's not, what should you believe and what not. Such a situation naturally creates anxiety and panic amongst people. The challenge here is to ensure that the right communication goes out amongst stakeholders, providing them with much needed guidance wherever required.

Employees of our company were naturally very apprehensive about the virus and there was over information on social media, which led to further panic. To mitigate this, we created a sort of ready reckoner for employees which gave information on COVID-19, this spoke about signs, symptoms, how to detect, test centres, Govt. Helplines and even hospitals that were treating COVID19.

As insurance falls into essential services, we still had limited staffing for office work, and for them instructions needed to be crystal clear in terms of dos and don'ts. We went about creating dos and don'ts posters as well as instruction posters on the safety measures in office and even the smallest things about how to wash hands, and how to use the sanitiser. Similar communication was also sent to our channel partners & our distributors who are our backbone.

Another critical element to note here is that, all other communication to employees that was not pertaining to Corona or relevant information thereof, was put on hold. To keep the employees engaged, we came out with a Work from Home digest in a pdf format, which had curated content, comprising of leadership podcasts, handpicked ted talks videos, articles, and even Jokes & riddles. This gave employees something to look forward to, which was a change from their day to day work and provided much needed optimism.

Customers and Citizens at large:

In this stage, thinking that we would be able to serve our customers exactly how we did, when we worked from office would have been a wrong approach. We have always been a forward thinking, digitally capable organisation, which stood us in great stead to bring all customers onto a digital platform, especially when all offices were shut. But merely having digital platforms wasn't enough, this had to be communicated effectively to current as well as potential customers. One of the best modes which we chose, was their trusted source of information i.e. media. We shared relevant pitch notes with media charting out clear proposition of what we were doing to ensure customers are serviced well. This resulted in participation in multiple stories clearly highlighting the changes in the customer journey from a service, renewal and sales perspective. All our Leaders and spokespersons ensured that they spoke about this in all their interactions on print, television or even social mediaably led of course by our MD and CEO. As an organisation we sent out email, SMS and app notifications to all our customers about these changes and they were displayed on our website as well. The results were amazing, we saw customers move to Digital channels, get self help from WhatsApp and our mobile app. And what's more, we were able to issue close to 3 million policies and settle close to 1.5 million claims.

I strongly feel that expanding industry interest and product awareness goes a long way towards increasing penetration of any product/service. If your brand is strong enough, you will be a part of the consideration set of the customer, as long as they have trust in the base product offering of the industry. We felt that the time was right to also create more awareness on importance of health insurance, though this may seem opportunistic, I would like to think of it as topical. At the same time, we participated in a lot of industry stories about insurance with a sea change of regulation centred around giving customers more breathing space in terms of a delayed premium payment etc.

In times of changes like the one that Covid brought about, Corporate communication played a key role in change management. In times like this, I would now say that it is ok to communicate more than normal, even at the risk of over communication, especially when it comes to employees and current customers. A good communicator's role is to be the wingman for marketing functions and help with the 1st and 2nd stage of AIDA (attention interest desire action) & play a complimentary role. Corporate Communications has to put out the best foot forward for the organisation internally and externally, and ensure all changes are towards the greater good!