

Article Date	Headline / Summary	Publication
15 Nov 2023	Corporate Communications In An Insurance Company: An External Comms/PR Perspective	Bw Marketing World

[Corporate Communications In An Insurance Company: An External Comms/PR Perspective](#)



It's essential to know that a large crisis, if not well handled on the PR front can bring down a brand, no matter how big or reputed it might be, writes Nikhil Bharadwaj

What comes to your mind when I say insurance? It's typically fear and a sense of negativity. This is unfortunately the narrative that insurers have built over the last few decades. Also, the human brain is not wired for risk, because if it was, we would still be staying in caves. How can someone protect something when they don't see the risk associated with it? Here is where effective communication steps in.

In India, General Insurance has a very low penetration of just above 1%. This is an awareness issue, but it also is a trust issue. General Insurance is a pure risk cover, which means that you pay an annual premium, and if there is no claim, you do not get your money back unlike a mutual fund or a life insurance investment product. Also, many people tend to think what if I pay the premium and suffer a loss, will I get my claim? This is where the trust deficit comes on. Why does this happen? Let me explain, insurance services are like a wicketkeeper in a cricket match, hardly go noticed if they do their job decently or even well, but the second there is a dropped catch or a missed stumping, everybody takes notice, easily forgetting the great work done. Well trust deficit is caused because people may not

appreciate the work that insurers do, but they certainly criticise a scenario where they or someone they know does not get their claim. Reasons are seldom understood, it is assumed that the insurer is at fault always. A perception has thus been built that insurers don't pay claims! The facts and data however seem to indicate otherwise. The industry is bleeding with a 118 per cent combined ratio, i.e. the industry is paying back Rs. 18 more than they get from the customers! Change of image required? This is when the PR machinery steps in.

In insurance, the job is largely about awareness, thought leadership, Crisis Communication, and of course then comes the PR-ish part of putting your products out there, new launches, releases, etc. Let us look at them in a bit more detail.

Awareness: India has low insurance penetration, and a large part of this is due to a lack of awareness. Corporate communications do their bit towards solving this. Simplification is the name of the game, talking about products in a general sense, the benefits that they can provide in times of need, and of course different types of products in a category. Going beyond jargon to address apprehensions that customers may have, even helping them choose the best cover for them in a broad sense and telling them where they can buy insurance. This has to break barriers of language and geography, and the more hyper-local you go with content, the farther the reach is. Solving problems for customers, such as positioning spokespersons to answer specific queries, be it on print, online, or even television. Nudging facts on how insurance has made a difference to the society and country at large is also very crucial. This also involves talking about the “good” that insurance has done for people's lives, in their direst time of need. Always remember this is for the readers, the potential customers of the industry and you must add value for them, it is only then that media will carry what you want to put out. This is for the industry and expansion of it and is going to get more people interested in knowing more and ultimately opting for insurance.

Thought leadership: This has to do with the prowess of the spokesperson an organisation has. It involves attending to media queries on the sector, regulation of the sector, or even new laws passed etc. It also involves positioning the leaders of the organisations as champions of the industry as well as experts in their field, such as IT, operations, Underwriting, etc. It sometimes even goes beyond that to management thought and action. There are also a number of awards aimed at showcasing a brand's prowess in a particular area which definitely also helps build credibility and thought leadership to the fore. One needs to be careful about awards, the selection criteria thereof, and avoid conflict of interest from a pure branding standpoint and choose awards that build credibility and confidence for the brand and industry as a whole. The number of awards out there with “deliverables” should be avoided as they perpetuate a sense of inauthenticity about the brand. Ensuring that spokespersons attend and speak at events related to their area of expertise in a way that the brand is seen as a forward-thinking and innovative brand is essential too.

Crisis Communication: To my mind one of the most critical elements of any corporate communications professional, especially when it comes to insurance. This is a scenario that plays itself out a lot in the service industry, especially in an industry that has a major role to play in society in collaboration with the Government at various levels. This is one of the major risks of government schemes, health, and crop insurance for instance, whereby a Crisis scenario may play itself out for whatever reason. That however is on a very broad scale, crises can happen on a day-to-day basis

nowadays with a dissatisfied customer speaking their mind on social media. Ideally, a good comms team is prepared for scenarios of crisis, well in advance and has a course of action defined. Tracking each crisis and ensuring it's closed, mitigated, or even followed right till the very end is important. It's essential to know that a large crisis, if not well handled on the PR front can bring down a brand, no matter how big or reputed it might be. Some brands get to tell their story and put their side, but most times opinions are made overnight and there is very little brands can do to tell their story. It might sound controversial but sometimes the most important thing a comms professional must know is when to just keep mum and let things play out, knowing fully well that in this age of information overload, a crisis in the PR space will sooner or later become yesterday's news. Dispel myths, and biased opinions, focus on the facts and hope for the best, prepare for the worst!

Making your brand presence felt: A large part of a corporate communications team is doing the PR-ish stuff like press releases and press conferences for new launches/ initiatives etc. Insurance is no different. Press releases for new products, new initiatives, financial results, and significant changes are important. A large part now of this subset is spent on talking about the difference that insurers make to society through their CSR and ESG efforts. Insurers get enough of a negative rap anyway, anything positive or neutral is always welcome to offset any possible crisis or negative news. Press conferences and events to launch important products and initiatives are an important part too. Though media is hesitant to carry brand-specific releases, it's important to focus on the broader impact for customers and citizens at large to be considered for decent enough coverage.

Once you are going through all of the above, you should measure the effectiveness of what you put out or get mentioned in. Measuring value in MAV or media advertising value is important, but even more important is measuring where you stand when it comes to “share of voice” and sentiment. You want to be present where it matters, where you get maximum eyeballs, but more importantly, you want to have a positive or neutral sentiment attached to your presence in the media space. In times ahead as the industry expands, insurers must go vernacular and should look to simplify their approach to topics and how content is put out. We, the communicators of the industry are the torchbearers of its image, and must work tirelessly to ensure no stone is left unturned to ensure every citizen knows about the significance of insurance and the difference it can make to our society and country!

(Nikhil Bharadwaj is the Head of Corporate Communications at Bajaj Allianz General Insurance)