Communication Strategies in a COVID-19 World

Crisis management, outreach and planning new post-pandemic opportunities for zoos and aquariums

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Jill Allread APR, Public Communications Inc.
Today we will talk about:

- Communicating effectively in the coronavirus global crisis
- Who you need to engage during the crisis
- Understanding the lifecycle of a crisis
- Knowing who you need on your crisis response team
- Your opportunity for strategic leadership during this crisis
- Planning during the pandemic disruption
- Creating a progressive zoological institution to increase your relevance, role in global health, and public support.
COVID-19 virus has changed the world forever
People are listening and watching more than ever.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR KEY AUDIENCES
WHILE 90% ARE CLOSED, INSTITUTIONS ARE CONNECTING WITH AUDIENCES DIGITALLY
A Tiger at Bronx Zoo Tests Positive for COVID-19; The Tiger and the Zoo’s Other Cats Are Doing Well at This Time
Maintain trust of your audiences; public

THE VITAL ROLE OF COMMUNICATING AND PLANNING DURING A CRISIS TO ACHIEVE YOUR ZOO/AQUARIUM’S RECOVERY, PURPOSE
## Audiences/Stakeholders

### Internal
- Staff members
- Volunteers, docents
- Vendors, suppliers
- Board of Directors
- Accrediting/professional groups

### External
- Media (traditional, digital)
- Zoo/Aquarium member
- Major donors
- Government partners
- Corporate and business supporters
- Education partners, educators
- Conservation partners
- Public
MANAGING YOUR INSTITUTION’S CRISIS
What makes a crisis worse?

• Lack of communication: *internal and external disconnect, void*
• Failure to get worst news out quickly
• Delayed corrective action
• Incomplete disclosure
• Putting economic interests first over animals and/or people
• Slow to express compassion
Real-life examples

- Animal rights protests online or at your front door
- Animal rights legal action
- Federal, provincial or local regulatory actions threaten how you do your business
- Injury or fatality on grounds
- Theft, escape or death of an animal
- Reduction in your workforce raises doubts about ability to care for animals
- Labor disputes
- Employee accusations of harassment
- Embezzlement or other financial malfeasance
- Chemical accident or fire on grounds
- Severe weather event
- Aftermath of a data breach
LIFECYCLE OF A CRISIS
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Live your mission and values
Make post-pandemic strategies
Crisis Communications Underway. Are you doing enough?

- Communicating with your teams: Over communicate
- Risk assessments and scenarios for short, middle and long-range
- Keep refining your key messages as situations change
- Use digital channel to connect, share messages, your values
- Monitoring public sentiment and prepare to engage, respond
Crisis Comm Team

**Team Members:**
- C-suite leaders
- Marketing and communications leaders
- Legal counsel
- Financial-CFO
- Donor/member/funder relations
- Operations
- Public relations/crisis counsel
Your Messages

• What are the facts?
• What is the most important message you want publics to remember about your zoo/aquarium managing this crisis?
• What do you want them to feel?
• What do you want them to do?
YOUR LEADERSHIP DURING A CRISIS
Leadership Tips

**Do**
- Develop and drive clear, mission-focused strategies
- Keep teams focused on short-, medium-, long-term goals
- Share regular updates: Over communicate
- Keep Board informed, engaged
- Plan for reopening, post-crisis

**Don’t**
- Be reactive and don’t wait!
- Let others tell your story
- Get caught up in minute-to-minute concerns and lose the big picture plan
- Let chaos of the situation dictate pace of your response
Stakeholders want assurances

What you do is good for animals, the environment, people
• Assure you are making a positive difference
• Stories: Credible, convincing, factual
• Use science, education, inspiration
• Answer the opportunity
CRISIS RECOVERY
Now is the time to plan your recovery

Crises can bring leadership, recovery opportunities

• Take immediate action: Revisit your strategic plan/priorities
  • What will you change? Why?
  • What will be different? How can your team adjust and respond?
  • What training do people need to make changes answer needs?

• Make your institution more relevant post-pandemic
• Revise fundraising strategies for immediate and long-term opportunities
• Envision future success and reshape your messages/story
• Refine or create your institution’s crisis plan
Zoological institutions’ role: Interpret human-wildlife connection

For example:
BE BOLD

• Own your renewed story
• Reach and convert key audiences:
  • Guests/visitors = ambassadors
  • Employees = champions, experts
  • Community leaders, educators = advocates
• Set priorities that are mission, value driven.
BE STRATEGIC, NIMBLE, PLAN
Your Next Step

Answer: *What kind progressive zoo/aquarium will I lead post-COVID19?*

Become more crucial to your audiences and the public post-pandemic. Inform, educate, inspire, and make sense of an interconnected world of people, wildlife and habitats, all reliant on one another’s wellbeing and actions.
Thank you.

Jill Allread, CEO
Public Communications Inc.
jallread@pcipr.com