

PRESENTED BY BRANDDISTILLERS

Crisis Communications



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ABOUT ANDY BEEDLE



Andy is the founder of BrandDistillers, a marketing firm with over two decades of experience specializing in marketing strategy and communications services for clients of all sizes. Prior to founding the company, Andy was a university professor, holding teaching positions at the University of Connecticut, Grand Valley State University, and Trinity College (Hartford), where he also directed the program in Cognitive Science. His scholarly work has been published in the *Journal for Neuroscience Research*, *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Philosophical Psychology*.

In his time at BrandDistillers, Andy has worked to bring insights from the world of behavioral psychology to bear on the problem of how best to help clients reach their target market and grow their revenue. His work has won national *Addy* awards and been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, *Advertising Age*, and *U.S. News and World Report*.

WHAT WE COVER IN THIS MINI COURSE

This mini-course was filmed during the COVID-19 crisis in early 2020. While the phrase "unprecedented times" became overused very quickly, it really was the only way to describe the catastrophic collapse of business activity nationwide and the large scale changes in the social lives of all Americans.

Our goal in this video and with this workbook is to help businesses and other organizations think more clearly about how best to communicate during a crisis.

We also want to help you avoid some of the more common mistakes that result in missed opportunities and weak messages.

Crisis Communication is different than your regular marketing messages. While your brand (and its promise to your customers) remains the same, in times of crisis you will need to address a different set of needs for your core audiences. **It's no longer simply about selling more stuff or about meeting the relatively narrow ranges of needs addressed by your products or services.** During a crisis, your entire audience will suddenly be suffering from the effects of the same hugely impactful event. Your tone and messaging need to reflect this unforeseen turn of events and speak to the emotions and problems it creates.

In this short lesson, we'll cover **three things not to do in your crisis communications posts, ads, and videos.** We'll also outline **two things you should be doing to deepen your relationship with your core audience** and position your business for healthy growth even when times are bad.

What is Crisis Communications?

In the public relations world, crisis communications is the bundle of messages, ads, press releases, and announcements made by an organization during an unforeseen crisis. Many companies and non-profits have an emergency communications plan in place to address things like bad weather, fire, or crime. They may also draw up plans on the fly to address product recalls, reputation disasters, or other public relations nightmares.



LET'S THINK ABOUT YOU

WHAT CRISIS IS YOUR BUSINESS FACING? WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL OUTCOME IN HANDLING THIS SITUATION?



NOTES

DON'T TALK ABOUT "YOUR RESPONSE" TO THE CRISIS

"People have their own problems. Concentrate on those."

ANDY BEEDLE

We have seen more than enough "Our response to COVID-19" emails to last several lifetimes. The emails written by these various organizations all have a few (horrible) elements in common: They use the phrase "unprecedented times" more than necessary, they offer the pretense that "we're all in this together" (whatever that means), and they all outline in horrifyingly self-centered detail what their business is "doing to address the crisis".

I don't want to suggest that there is no room for a business or organization to outline what they are doing as a result of any emergency. But those statements need to be cast entirely in terms of the impact on (and value for) your core audience. If you can't come up with a statement that indicates a positive, worthwhile result for your customers, then you are better off giving no statement at all.

NO ONE CARES ABOUT YOUR TROUBLES

At root, no one cares about your troubles as a business and they care even less about how you plan to address those troubles. And that is when things are going well! As a major crisis or period of uncertainty unfolds, people will be facing problems (and the emotions that go with them) that transcend the usual challenges that bring them to your door. Asking for their attention and then using that precious time to go on about yourself is shortsighted at best.

During difficult times, DO NOT talk about your business, how it's doing, what you are doing, and how the crisis has impacted your operations. No one cares - nor should they.

LET'S THINK ABOUT YOU



WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS THAT IS VALUABLE OR WORTHWHILE TO THEM IN THIS TIME?

NOTES

DON'T TALK ABOUT HOW YOU ARE PROTECTING YOUR STAFF OR EMPLOYEES.

“Your customers may like your employees, but they are not worried about them for any length of time during a crisis.”

ANDY BEEDLE

This tip is offered in a similar vein to the idea that it's not helpful to talk about "your response" to the crisis at hand. Likewise, unless you are a company with a very large number of employees and a known public relations problem relating to your employment practices or conditions (think Amazon, Wal-Mart, etc.), no one really cares about the welfare of your employees. That is not to say that they want to see your staff suffering and mistreated, rather, the health and safety of your employees is taken as a given as is the assumption that they have a safe, functioning work environment.

LEAVE YOUR STAFF OUT OF THE EQUATION

If you want to discuss advanced training your employees have had in response to a crisis, then do so if it directly addresses a fear, challenge, or problem that your audience is experiencing and likely to bring to you. But beyond that, leave your staff and their situation out of the equation.

This may sounds harsh or unfeeling, but it's really not. If you want to get the word out about how grateful you are for your staff or about the amazing things they do, then by all means - have at it. But that is not crisis communication. That is team building.

Your goal is to speak as directly as possible to the underlying emotions that will drive people's decisions during a time of distress. It is not hard to see that those emotions are almost never centered on "gosh, I wonder how the employees at [where-ever] are doing??" Your audience's thoughts may stray there on occasion, but they are definitely not focused on that issue for very long.

LET'S THINK ABOUT YOU

HAVE YOUR EMPLOYEES HAD SPECIFIC TRAINING IN RESPONSE TO THIS CRISIS?



NOTES

DON'T FOCUS ON SELLING YOUR STUFF

“When times are difficult, 'salesy' messaging amplifies bad feelings and hurts your brand.”

ANDY BEEDLE

Here, we are really speaking to opportunistic selling that plays on fear and uncertainty. If, as a result of whatever crisis is going on, you have a new offering or enhanced experience for your customers, then go ahead and promote it.

Where we live in Virginia, ABC laws were changed to allow restaurants to offer takeout cocktails during the COVID-19 crisis. Promoting this made a lot of sense and many restaurants did a great job of letting people know of the new options while also providing a little lighthearted stress-relief. (The number of "Quarantini" recipes and promos skyrocketed here shortly after the regulations changed.)

DIRECT SELLING SHOULD NOT BE THE PRIORITY

On the other hand, we've seen several ads that played on fear selling new products such as masks, sanitizer, and so forth. There were also businesses whose pitch "made sense" in that with people at home, it was a great time to work on home projects or home safety upgrades.

But during a difficult time, this kind of messaging only amplifies bad feelings and misses the opportunity build a genuine and deeper relationship with your customer base. We'll talk more about how to better serve your customers during a crisis - and how to grow your revenue while you do it. For now, just keep in mind that direct selling should **not** be the priority in your messaging.

DO ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR AUDIENCE'S EMOTIONS

“You are not facing the same challenges that your customers are facing.”

ANDY BEEDLE

A lot of poor crisis communication attempts to offer a "we're all in this together" message suggesting that everyone is feeling the same set of emotions and facing the same set of challenges. This simply isn't true in the context of almost any organization's priorities and challenges in a difficult time.

When your business is in trouble because of larger issues that are having an effect on your entire region, you are not experiencing the same issues or emotions that your audience is experiencing. Sure, you may "get it" when you're not in your role as a leader of your organization, but in that role, you are experiencing very different pressures than your customers.

SHOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND THEIR FEELINGS

Rather than suggest that "we're all the same", speak instead to your customers emotions. If you are restaurant, acknowledge that a beloved and valued part of your patrons lives has been disrupted. If you are running shoe store, speak to the sense of loss people are facing when the marathon they have been training for over the last six months is cancelled.

Demonstrating this deep understanding of your customers' emotions during uncertainty and loss is the key to building a stronger relationship with them in the future.

LET'S THINK ABOUT YOU

WHAT SPECIFIC EMOTIONS AND CHALLENGES ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS FACING RIGHT NOW?



NOTES

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of multiple horizontal lines.

DO OFFER YOUR EXPERTISE AND IDEAS

“Meet the core needs of your customers without making it transactional.”

ANDY BEEDLE

This idea follows from the last point: When things are bad, people still have the core, emotional need that drives them your way in the first place (we call this your Product's Product's Product). It's just that this need has been buried under the avalanche of mixed emotions that come with a crisis.

When bad times come, offer your expertise and ideas as a way of continuing to address these core needs - and deepen your relationship with your audience. And where it's appropriate, you can do some selling at the same time.

PEOPLE STILL HAVE THE CORE NEED YOU MEET

Own a restaurant and can't do regular service? It's time to start showing people how to make some of your signature foods at home. One local place started offering cocktails with to-go service and included the complete recipe for each along with your order. That's smart, speaks to the dining out experience, and sells more drinks during a really tough time.

If you have a cleaning business and people don't want you in their homes for whatever reason, do a video or an email about "how the pros clean toilets" or some other unpleasant aspect of keeping the house clean. And then offer a "limited clean" of just the awful spots to minimize contact.

No matter the crisis that threatens your business and your area as a whole, it's always a good play to concentrate on the things that make you the perfect solution to your customers' core issues and challenges.

LET'S THINK ABOUT YOU



IS THERE A WAY YOU CAN STILL MEET YOUR CUSTOMERS' CORE NEEDS DURING THIS CRISIS?

NOTES

WANT MORE HELP WITH CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS FOR YOUR BUSINESS?

<https://branddistillers.com/>

If you are interested in better understanding your customers' core needs and how your business meets them, then check out our FREE course "Sell More Stuff". This course will help you find your Product's Product's Product.



Join our Private Facebook Group and connected with our coaches and other business owners and entrepreneurs just like you!

facebook.com/groups/branddistillers

Learn Marketing with BrandDistillers

Want to better promote your business and sell more stuff? We can help! BrandDistillers is now offering online courses and training on a range of topics related to marketing and business growth.

We're here to support your small business, side hustle or other entrepreneurial dream. Plus we offer in-person training and live events!

