A PR CHECKLIST FOR COVID-19

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January 1st, 2020. A new year, a new decade, a time for a fresh start, hope and excitement. Did we ever imagine we would be in this situation less than three months in? The world is in unprecedented times, a global pandemic, countries shutting borders and social distancing becoming our daily norm.

Of course, the most important thing right now is that we stay safe as individuals and do our part to help curb Covid-19. But what should regional brands be doing in this time of financial crisis and uncertainty? The below list is a 10- point PR checklist businesses can consider. This is by no means exhaustive, but I hope this at least helps someone somewhere, especially small and local businesses.

10-Point PR Checklist for dealing with Covid-19

1. Re-evaluate everything as often as you can
   The comms plan you had last month, or even last week is now defunct. If you haven't done this already, relook at all your plans now, get a new one in place, and keep refining it, daily if you can. Things are changing all the time and you need to make sure you're adapting.

2. Talk to your stakeholders
   Get a consensus from your immediate team, wider internal stakeholders, clients, media, your social media community, everyone that matters. This 'audit' will ensure you have everyone's input from the start, and will help shape next steps.

3. Re-define your objectives and strategy
   Last month's PR objectives would have to been to drive footfall, or secure event attendance, this month it's a different story. A phased strategy is a good idea. What do you need to do right now, this week, this month? And what will you do when this is over? Because it will be at some point.
4. Your positioning – safety and empathy with the human touch
Your overall positioning should be this and nothing more. Now is not a time to be benefitting from this situation. People want to see a human touch, a sensitive brand that cares, so this should be reflected in your tone of voice in all communications. Soften language, banish corporate jargon and ensure sensitivity.

5. Prepare, prepare, prepare
Ensure you have statements prepared for all possible scenarios you can think of. As an example, have you prepared for an employee contracting Covid-19 and it escalating to media? Have you got social media Q&A’s for customer concerns? Have all this pre-approved and ready to go. Handling this correctly is vital. This is where brand trust can be won and lost in an instant.

6. Keep communicating regularly
Don’t go quiet. Even if your business is temporarily reduced, you still need to be talking to your communities. The government directives are changing daily, and you have a duty of care to reassure people that you’re complying with this and will keep them updated as things develop. Don’t make this a one-way street. The beauty of social media is that you can have a two-way conversation with your audience, and this is a powerful thing.

7. Engaging and helpful content
A lot of PR activity will be paused for the foreseeable future e.g. events, launches etc. A content-led approach is a great way to provide a helping hand. Remember this isn’t a time to benefit, it’s a time to show you care. If you’re a restaurant could your head chef show how to make an easy dish for a YouTube video for people to recreate at home? Could you collaborate with another brand for a social media giveaway? Get creative, but in the right way.

8. Spread love
The world is in a tough place right now, it’s our responsibility to help each other get through this. What can your business do to make a difference? Can it donate money to charity or its community? Could a local coffee shop deliver coffees to tired doctors and nurses? This will create a positive impact, generate brand affinity and will be remembered for it. Whatever you do, please make sure it’s within legal guidelines.

9. Keep measuring and analysing
This is still fundamental to ensuring what you’re doing is working in the right way. Yes, the quantitative metrics are still important, but more important are the qualitative ones, bearing in mind it’s all about a humanisation of our activity right now. Looking at the comments on social media posts, feedback from media etc. will ensure that you stay on track.
10. Be strong
Elizabeth Taylor once said, ‘now is the time for guts and guile,’ and this is the time. She won’t have been referring to Covid-19 of course, but brands need to show strength, inspire unity and a spirit of togetherness. Even using a simple hashtag such as #inittogether on a social media post can inspire a mindset change.

Stay safe, stay strong, let’s help each other and remember, this too shall pass.