Spread the Word, Not the Virus: Communication in the Time of COVID-19

Dr. Shaniece Criss, Furman University
First confirmed case in U.S. | Jan. 20
---|---
U.S. officials approve widespread coronavirus testing | Mar. 3
Hawaii’s governor orders a mandatory 14-day quarantine to arriving visitors and residents | Mar. 21
Roughly 80% of all Americans are under lockdown, as 35 states issue stay-at-home orders. | Mar. 31

Feb. 29
The U.S. records its first coronavirus death and announces travel restrictions

Mar. 15
The C.D.C. recommends no gatherings of 50 or more people

Mar. 26
The U.S. leads the world in confirmed coronavirus cases

Apr. 3
The C.D.C. recommends people wear cloth face coverings in public
S.C. Executive Orders for COVID-19 (2020)

• March 13: Declaring State of Emergency in Response to COVID-19
• March 15: Closing Schools, Other Provisions in Response to COVID-19
• March 21: Regulatory Flexibility to Facilitate “Social Distancing”
• March 23: Authorizing Law Enforcement to Preserve Public Health (prohibits gatherings greater than 3 people)
• March 27: Self-Quarantine for Individuals from High-Risk Areas
• March 30: Emergency Access Restrictions for Public Beaches & Waters Due to COVID-19 Pandemic
• March 31: Closure of Non-Essential Businesses
• April 3: Closure of Additional Non-Essential Businesses
• April 3: Lodging & Travel Restrictions for Individuals from High-Risk Areas
• April 6: Home or Work Order

Due to high demand and to support all guests, we will be limiting the quantities of disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, hand & face wipes, toilet paper and 24-pk bottled water to 4 per guest.

We apologize for any inconvenience.
Anchoring Affects Decision Making

People tend to rely too heavily on the very first piece of information they learn.
By understanding how people take in information during a crisis state, we can better plan to communicate with them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We simplify messages.</th>
<th>We hold on to current beliefs.</th>
<th>We look for additional information and opinions.</th>
<th>We believe the first message.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use simple messages.</td>
<td>Messages should come from a credible source.</td>
<td>Use consistent messages.</td>
<td>Release accurate messages as soon as possible.</td>
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Source: https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/ppt/CERC_Psychology_of_a_Crisis.pdf
Less clear

“Practice social distancing.”

More clear

“Stay at home. Get groceries once per week.”

× New term
× Unclear
× Not specific
× Conceptual

✓ Use known words
✓ Be clear
✓ Be specific
✓ Be concrete
Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) Rhythm

Engage Community • Empower Decision-Making • Evaluate

**Preparation**
- Draft and test messages
- Develop partnerships
- Create plans
- Determine approval process

**Initial**
- Express empathy
- Explain risks
- Promote action
- Describe response efforts

**Maintenance**
- Explain ongoing risks
- Segment audiences
- Provide background information
- Address rumors

**Resolution**
- Motivate vigilance
- Discuss lessons learned
- Revise plan

Source: https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/ppt/CERC_Introduction.pdf
People receive, interpret, and evaluate messages before they decide to take action. Expect your audience to immediately judge the content of your message as well as the delivery. **Successful communication depends on credibility and trust.**
• Step 1: Create a Team for Centralized Communication

• Step 2: Communicate with Employees

• Step 3: Communicate Regularly with Customers
  • Focus on what is important to the customer.
  • Provide relief when possible.
  • Focus on empathy rather than trying to create selling opportunities.

• Step 4: Reassure Shareholders

• Step 5: Be Proactive with Communities

Source: https://hbr.org/2020/03/communicating-through-the-coronavirus-crisis
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• Simple
• Credible
• Consistent
• Accurate information as soon as possible.