

PM HUMANISES HIS BRAND IN MANAGING CRISIS

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THE Covid-19 pandemic is unrelenting in its attack on humanity. In its wake, the virus has left millions infected and heart-wrenching deaths globally. Studies have shown that reducing uncertainty is key to ensuring that our interventions do work as evident during the 2009 H1N1 swine flu pandemic.

Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, in a textbook crisis communication move, was swift, transparent, honest and timely in stemming out panic, anger, fear or mistrust, which become prevalent in the form of inaccurate or fake news.

A solid crisis communications plan should be clear and concise, keeping in mind the varying aptitude of the audience.

Muhyiddin is known for his relatable speeches, usually accompanied by anecdotes of ordinary people, like the now-famous Makcik Kiah and

Pak Salleh.

He has never failed to include the common Malaysian greeting “*Apa Khabar*”. He was quoted in an interview as saying: “My speeches are ordinary, as I always remind myself. Even if I am the prime minister, when I take part in an interview or explain things, I have to know who my audience is.”

Muhyiddin has been savvy in observing trends on social media, including his “*ke sana ke sini*” line in one of his speeches, which has since become a catchphrase and even immortalised in songs. Muhyiddin has humanised his brand.

At a micro level, crisis communications experts from Precious Communications said the message premise should be clear words of reassurance, especially when there are signs of panicky behaviour, like bulk purchasing of necessities at supermarkets.

Professor Paul A. Argenti, in his

article titled “Leadership Communicating Through the Coronavirus Crisis”, said in fast-moving and uncertain situations, many leaders face questions they may not even have answers to. There is a need to communicate early and often with key constituencies throughout a crisis.

There is also the need for creating a team for centralised communication, especially in large, complex organisations. But in an emergency or fast-moving situation, you need a crisis-response team. It should include a member of the leadership team, corporate communications, a human resource executive and an expert in the area of concern. They should meet regularly to monitor the situation closely as it continues to evolve.

It should be the main source of information about the crisis and give regular updates to key constituencies. Always be transparent, explain what



The clear, fast and transparent move by the prime minister has calmed the public to continue to be careful and adhere to the guidelines during the pandemic. BERNAMA PIC

you know, what you don’t know and your sources of information. Be succinct. Long turgid messages written by health professionals or lawyers will not be read or easily understood.

Organisations should post information regularly in a highly visible location. This can be a physical location or virtual email, the company intranet, or Facebook. Communicate no less than every other day and try to provide timely information rather than wait until having all of the answers.

However, communicating regularly with customers requires a different approach than employees given that companies do not have the same access nor frequency with this constituency. Companies should focus

on what is important to the customer. Focus on empathy rather than trying to create selling opportunities.

Companies should rethink advertising and promotion strategies to be more in line with the current zeitgeist. Be transparent in communicating near-term challenges.

Jonathan Bernstein, in his article “The 10 Steps of Crisis Communications”, said companies should also be proactive with communities as what happened within organisations affected everyone in the communities around them.

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