



THE ONLY WAY OUT IS TO COMMUNICATE THROUGH THE UNCERTAINTY

17 April: No person is an island. No organisation or sector will be unaffected. The uncharted and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has left us agape. To name yourself, or your business, as part of the agricultural industry is a beacon. One of gratitude and hope we can all share.

More than ever, now is the time to communicate with your employees, customers, suppliers and broader stakeholder group. No one knows the answers, and it is OK to say this.

Out loud.

During this time individuals and businesses can build longstanding trust into the future. Choose to not fall into an abyss of anxiety about what to say and how to say it, and in so doing the abyss of your customers' minds. Choose to be present and to navigate this space with honesty and humanity. Bad (or no) communication during this time could result in more reputational damage to your business than the virus itself.

Your communications job is not to speculate. Nor is it to offer certainty in a time where there is none. It is to take your audience with you on your journey, to tell your story, with transparency. Signal empathy and understanding and invite your stakeholders to take you on their journey. This is likely to earn your business the same in return.

The pandemic has highlighted how crucial agriculture is.

Practically, this means talking through what is working and what is changing in your business and the impact this may have. If relevant, address public fears about food shortages and how this is affecting distribution channels. Own your message in the market, especially when it is bad news. You want to carve the occasion to manage perception and understanding of your brand.

Although it would be in bad taste for your business to be perceived as cashing in on the crisis, this is also a time of opportunity. We now find ourselves in the eye of the storm, and so it may not be immediately obvious, but we are all innovating and adapting. This is a good thing.

Share and showcase what your business is doing in reaction to the pandemic. This will help to build awareness and loyalty over the long term. Whether it is offering flexible working for employees, or how it is keeping staff safe if they are needed on site. Possibly your business is donating food that was destined for restaurants or wholesales, or perhaps consider telling an anecdote or idea of what to do with your product from home. Dig out granny's homemade marmalade recipe if you must!

Make the decision to ride the wave of the collective togetherness of humanity at this time and create a narrative for your business that everyone can relate to. It might be easier to do that now than ever before. We are storytellers, and we are lucky in agriculture: creating the story for reasons to eat (healthily) is relatively easy. You're in some part selling survival.

This is a time for flexibility. It is a chance to build connection with your customers. Brands of all sizes can step forward and think about how they can help or serve – and it doesn't necessarily have to be monetarily - it will be remembered in time to come.

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About:

Koko & Tree is a niche communications agency that specialises in telling the stories of companies active the agricultural sector. We communicate our clients' vision to external stakeholders ranging from local and international clients, the media, neighbouring communities and the public sector.

We do this through building authentic and meaningful relationships, as well as storytelling and message crafting that speaks to the very essence of what our clients are doing to boost food security, job creation, wholesome nutrition and community upliftment.

Website <https://kokoandtree.co.za/>

Contact Annelle Whyte, annelle@kokoandtree.co.za, +27 711 638719