

Top crisis communications and brand fails of 2020

By  Madelain Roscher

15 Dec 2020

For people, corporations, and global brands, 2020 went from "twenty plenty" to "twenty empty". While the pandemic blindsided most, some reputational damage suffered by brands, organisations and even governments this year, could have been avoided if they focused on improving their communication or crisis management efforts.

Here are some of the most notable crisis and communication brand fails in 2020.



Source: www.pexels.com

1. Covid-19 election calamity

Everyone will agree that during a pandemic, communication from experts, scientists, governments, or global organisations like the World Health Organisation (WHO) must be timely, accurate and consistent.

While the rest of the world recognised the need for quick, constant, and factual communications, the outgoing United States President Donald Trump doubled down on trivialising the deadly effects of the Coronavirus. He said 40 times that Covid-19 "would go away". Media analysis believes that because Trump downplayed the pandemic, his followers also disregarded health precautions, and with the spread of the virus, he lost critical voting regions. According to the media, Trump could "have won re-election if positive cases had been between five and 10 percent lower".

His miscommunication and the trivialising of Covid-19 led to Donald Trump's defeat.

2. Clicks catastrophe

Closer to home, one of the most recent brand blunders came from Clicks. SA's leading health, beauty and lifestyle retailer came under fire for calling black women's hair "dry and damaged" while in the same TRESemmé advert, said white women's hair was "fine and flat" or "normal". Having focus groups to provide independent input or even having a diverse group of people review and greenlight a campaign before it goes public, could be the difference between going viral for the right or wrong reasons.



Racist Clicks haircare campaign leads to backlash and picketing

7 Sep 2020



While Clicks was quick to apologise, reputational damage happened even quicker. Clicks were also slapped with a series of punitive actions for their gross oversight. It included practising constitutional values of equality and dignity in their work culture and across all their stores; and identifying areas that have not been transformed, and that are not inclusive in marketing departments and advertising agencies. Clicks are also supporting social initiatives that set out to build the self-esteem, dignity, and identity of young, black, South African girls.

3. Dis-Chem gets dissed

Dis-Chem, one of SA's largest pharmaceutical retailers, found itself in a similar position as Clicks when a white mannequin donning an Ankara dress posing next to a makeshift "African homestead" was spotted - with a 'blackface'. But when the picture went viral on social media and Dis-Chem were called out for it, they claimed the incident was just a "bad make-up job".

When you have made a serious error and offended hundreds of thousands of people, it is not enough to come up with excuses or a lukewarm apology. Communications must be sincere, heartfelt, and companies must open themselves up to learning from their mistakes to avoid committing similar fails later.

4. Insulting influencers

In the age of using celebrities or influencers to increase a brand's awareness, make sure those partnerships not only ring true for both the brand and influencer but are authentic. Diamond Mist, a United Kingdom vaping company, used a celebrity lookalike as their campaign influencer. Rather than getting the clearance from the athlete Diamond Mist were impersonating, they associated his face and name to a brand he does not endorse. When the campaign eventually reached the attention of the athlete, he sued Diamond Mist, which had to settle out of court for their transgressions.

In a bid to chase brand visibility, make sure your campaign is authentic, original, and most importantly; legitimate.

How to do it right

Brand blunders are not unique to specific sectors. External forces can lead to communication crises breaking out when they are least expected. However, how a brand, organisation or government conducts its communication efforts during those tremulous times, can assist it to better weather those storms. Some crises erupt simply because of bad planning and poor execution, which could be attributed to conducting marketing-communication strategies haphazardly.

To get the most out of your communication efforts and marketing budgets, thoroughly understand your target audience; your brand's unique selling proposition; smart messaging that resonates with your consumers and communities; the

mediums that will be the most effective to disseminate your messaging; and knowing how to measure success – beyond just sales.

If you are uncertain about which approach will maximise your returns, utilise the services of a consultant to ensure that your brand resonates with its stakeholders – even during a crisis.

ABOUT MADELAIN ROSCHER

Described as a Public Relations (PR) guru by her peers, Madelain Roscher is the CEO of PR Worx, a full-service marketing-communications agency, which she established in 2001. With 22 years' in-depth industry experience based on an impressive consulting and corporate career, the firm has achieved remarkable successes under her leadership.

- Is the new Oscars crisis team too little too late? - 8 Mar 2023
- PR and legal: adversaries or allies? - 2 Feb 2023
- 3 crisis management steps to protect influencers from reputational damage - 1 Dec 2022
- Top crisis communications and brand fails of 2020 - 15 Dec 2020
- How to avoid online campaign disasters - 28 Aug 2019

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>