

Change management: the internal PR/communications agency's role

By [Marie Yossava](#), issued by [Grapevine Communications](#)

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With recent incidents like the Boston Marathon bombing, one has to ask, has the world gone mad or is it simply a case of access to too much information? People cannot process tragedies like these in such volumes. The news available these days in one week is more than people were exposed to in a lifetime a century ago. And it's always readily available and instantaneous.

Similarly how does the business world cope with economic turmoil? We are still trying to recover from the housing market crash of 2007 in the US, the last stock market crash in 2008, as well as the bank crisis in Greece and Turkey and the ripple effect around the globe.

At the Global Alliance World Public Relations Forum, which took place from 18 - 20 November 2012 in Melbourne, Australia, one of the topics raised was how companies manage change during economic turmoil. A balance needs to be established between the business focus on the bottom line, which has led to the change, and the leadership style, which now has to become more empathetic and creative in terms of winning over employees so that they come on board with the changes.

What is change management?

Change management is about a structured approach to shifting from a current state to a desirable future state as smoothly as possible by developing strategies that deal with the impact on employees or customers, due to the changes to company strategy, structure, processes or technology.

Change does not happen in isolation and always has a wider impact. Therefore the focus of change management is on individuals and teams within an organisation and how they will move from their current situation to the new one. People do not like change and during volatile periods, companies are required to become flexible and adaptable, thereby setting an example for employees.

How can internal communications help?

The situation is opportune for PR agencies to work closely with internal communications and HR and implement a strategy to communicate the changes to employees, obtain their input and buy-in, restore or preserve balance within the company, and support leadership's change management strategies.

To achieve this, the benefits of the change need to be communicated so that employees are able to acknowledge the need for the change, understand the positives of it, their role in the process and how they can help it succeed. It is also imperative for management to receive feedback so that they can track results and where improvement in communication and support is required. It takes time to develop new habits and settle into new roles, so constant communication is vital.

An external communications strategy is also required targeting customers, suppliers and the media. Whatever changes occur, for example, if a business unit is absorbed by another department and as a result a new product is launched to market, the communication needs to reassure the target audience that quality and standards will be maintained. It also needs to explain why job cuts may be necessary while demonstrating sensitivity to this issue.

Beyond the change

The next step is to seek opportunities within this change, push boundaries and find new ways of doing things differently. This can be quite challenging, making feedback sessions crucial to monitoring how management and employees throughout the ranks are dealing with, and committing to the changes.

Organisations and PR professionals that work hand-in-glove on change management strategies, have demonstrated the ability time and again to overcome the volatility and uncertainty of economic turmoil by including employees in the reasoning behind the change and drawing them into the new vision. Change is inevitable and necessary for survival. Adapting to change can be less daunting by implementing the right approach together with a good dose of empathy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marie Yossava is APR and managing director of Grapevine Communications.

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