



Executive
Marketing Recruitment.

December 2020

Female Leaders in Communications

Challenges confronting communicators into 2021 and beyond



A report from tml Partners on their recent 'Female Leaders in Communication Forum'.

Exploring the challenges for communicators into 2021 and how senior leaders are adapting communications strategies to suit the new landscape.

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Our Discussion Panel



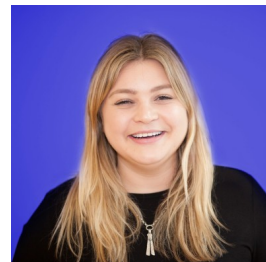
Tabitha Aldrich Smith
OneWeb



Alison Flynn
Petrofac



Jennifer Thomas
GSK



Naomi Hamilton
tml Partners



Amanda Campbell
Intu



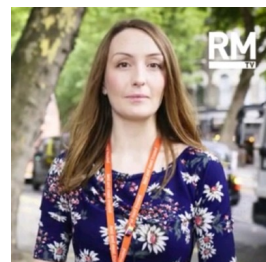
Victoria Bacon
Advisory



Nicola Green
O2



Rebecca Matts
Advisory



Jenny Hall
Royal Mail



Feeroza Patel
London & Partners



Jane Terry
Lockheed Martin



Charlotte West
Lenovo



Paula Murphy
Woods



Kristina Blissett
Coats

Communication Challenges in 2020

At the end of 2019, Gartner published a report highlighting the communication challenges of that year. Indeed, 2019 was a challenging year, with Brexit, US-China trade war and the rumblings of a recession. However, little did anyone know what was to come in 2020. The year of a global pandemic which not only shifted the way we work, live, play - but perhaps most significantly, the way we communicate.

Our discussion explored the many challenges communications professionals faced in 2020 and most, unsurprisingly, were caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Whatever sector, wherever in the world a company's location, COVID-19 majorly impacted business and communications professionals. Whether internal, external or corporate affairs; communications teams were brought to the forefront of business strategy and continuity.

The key themes explored at the event were:

- geo-politics
- health and safety
- redundancies
- planning effectively
- consumer behaviour
- burnout
- supply chain
- motivation
- US-China relations
- covid-19
- brexit
- shift to internal communications
- morale
- communication fatigue
- remote working

Communications in a Geo-Political Landscape

Jennifer Thomas, co-chair at the event began the discussion, "whether you are domestic organisation or an international, how can we manage, not only COVID-19, but political movements. And what do we do with that intel to not only communicate effectively to employees but also senior management teams. Whether you are internal communications, corporate affairs, public affairs or crisis reputation management, how can we lead on navigating geo-politic movements to positively impact our businesses?"

Our panel discussion led to many agreeing that the influx of information due to COVID-19, Brexit, US-China relations and the US presidential elections massively affected their businesses. The speed in which business response was expected by employees and customers was staggering.

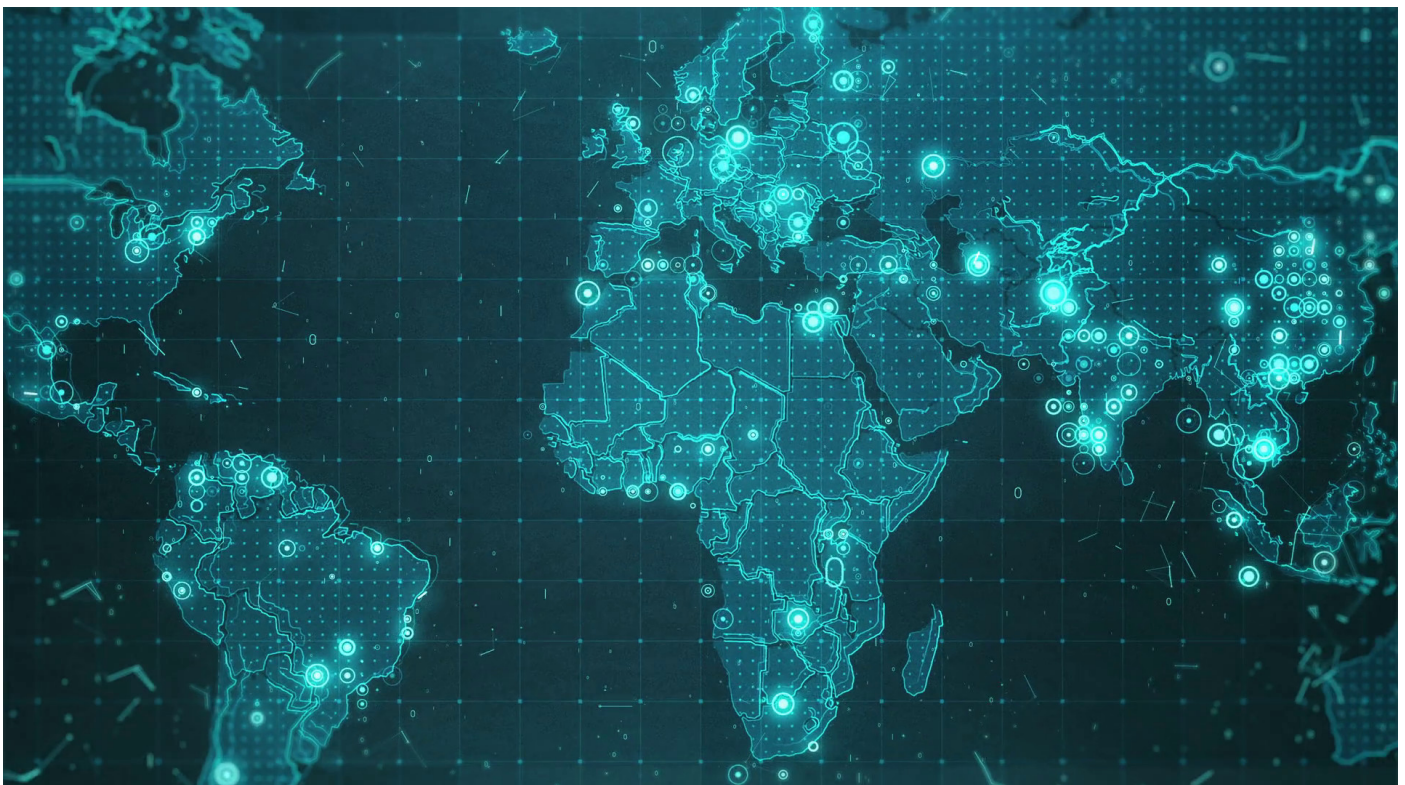
So how can communications leaders navigate the ever-changing geo-political landscape, especially during a worldwide pandemic? Charlotte West, Executive Communications, Lenovo, commented "this

responsibility is a positive - an opportunity."

Communications professionals roles are changing, it's their time to shine by taking this outside information and helping people understand the impact of these events on businesses.

It may leave planning nearly impossible but it's also a huge opportunity to show real value. It means communications professionals are at the forefront of businesses, being relied on to navigate the geo-political landscape, and interpreting it to not only employees but the most senior levels of business too.

"Geo-politics has a huge impact when managing global communications, the unpredictability of government positions is impossible to plan for."



Innovate & Evolve

The discussion began by exploring how do we keep business going when there's redundancies, furlough and general uncertainties about roles. What are we doing to reinvent engagement? How can we innovate and evolve?

"Keeping your workforce going, without physical contact is difficult.

Theres nothing better than sitting face to face with people"

Nicola Green, o2, Corporate Affairs Director commented "Putting executives front and centre has actually improved our employee engagement score by 14%. The accessibility to senior leaders has made a massive difference."

The group agreed that visibility for senior leaders has made a real impact to employee engagement, and that they will continue this strategy post-COVID. But what about other layers within the business?

Amanda Campbell, Corporate Affairs Director, Intu said "Middle management teams also realised they had to step up their level of communication. The middle management layer has been a huge communication barrier and what COVID taught us all is that they are very capable to communicate effectively, they just didn't know how"

"How do we keep business going when there's redundancies, furlough and general uncertainties about roles?"

Shaking hands enthusiastically before a face-to-face meeting, sharing pens to scribble down ideas during a brainstorming session, bonding with our colleagues whilst taking part in a team building session. These are all innately human social interactions that we wouldn't have thought twice about doing before the pandemic hit.

We all agreed that, not for a very long time, if ever, classic communication and interaction would be back in our work lives.

Luckily, we live in a time where technology is a huge help, and the overall consensus in our discussion was to ensure all the people managers in your business have the skills to execute key communications. This will allow the communications are filtering through all layers of your business effectively.

"In times of crisis, people want to know their leaders have a plan, so putting our CEO 'out there' has been key."

Leading the Way

How can communicators manage and ensure an effective communications strategy when there is a constant avalanche of news. And when so much of it is unpleasant and whilst they are also trying to manage their own concerns and fears. We explored the usual connotations around remote working; the lack of human contact, family, the importance of carving out a workspace and it's impact.

“How can communicators manage and ensure an effective communications strategy when there is a constant avalanche of news, when so much of it is unpleasant and when they are also trying to manage their own concerns and fears”

Self-care and wellbeing have become hot topics over the last few years and, it's safe to say, there's been no greater time to invest in both - for leaders and employees. In our discussion, we explored what a leader's primary responsibility is; to keep the team safe, cohesive and productive. But how can we do that during a global crisis?

Firstly, by taking care of ourselves. Burnout was a word that came up a lot at our event. With more and more senior leaders worried about 'burnout' where does that leave our staff?

It's imperative that we lead by example and make it clear to ourselves and our teams that we don't have to work 18 hours a day or are glued to our mobiles in bed at night.

Our panel discussed ways in which we can lead by example.

Take time away from work

Whether it's going for a walk or doing the school run, and make it clear to your teams it's OK to do the same.

"As senior leaders, how do we take care of ourselves and how do we make sure we are fit for our teams and lead by example"

Make expectations and priorities clear

It's undeniable that workload for communications professionals has increased. If you have to work all hours to finish a project, make it clear you don't expect other people to do the same.

Encourage regular reprioritisation of work, change the dynamic and encourage teams to question workload and empower them to say 'no', if needed.

Be authentic

There's a sentiment around COVID-19 in that we are 'all in this together'. Absolutely everyone has been impacted by the new ways of working and it's never been more important to convey to your teams that if they are struggling, you can help them.

Figure out your own boundaries and challenges and share with your team to allow them to think about what's the best working style for them in the 'new normal'.

Conclusions

There's great value in bringing communication professionals together to share experiences. We have all experienced a big shift from external communications to internal communications, the pace is hugely different – much more fast-paced & and we have had a real challenge to get ourselves & our teams up to speed.

The impact of COVID-19 is likely to be sustained and will be significant across the wider economy. In the coming months, many organisations will be considering avenues to cut costs as they come under pressure to manage up balance sheets devoid of once-reliable income streams. Businesses, probably now more than ever, will recognise the importance of strategic communications as organisations seek to differentiate, relate to their audience & demonstrate how they are adjusting to the 'new normal'. What is more than likely is a fundamental review, not just in communications but across wider industry, of the role and set-up of offices and the benefits of working from home. As a result of this crisis, never again can it be said 'you have to be in the office to perform that task.'

Despite these challenges, communications professionals have really demonstrated their added value to businesses in times of crisis. Here's our final conclusions of how communications teams can manage 'the new normal' in the coming months.

Horizon scanning

Communications professionals must keep up to speed with the most accurate and pertinent information, while all around you are 'transmitting'. As the government operates a response to the crisis, it is crucial to ensure that key announcements and their impact on business and employees are clearly summarised and explained.

Continuous, meaningful communication is key

Given business and employment uncertainty, keeping up internal communications is crucial. Employees

are looking at the same newscasts and social media as you and will be wondering what it all means for them and their continued employment. One cannot over-communicate to the very people who drive and make your business what it is.

Our discussion didn't focus on the importance of effective communications with customers but this cannot be overstated. If there are product delays, service provision difficulties, or any other issues – say so. Reiterate the importance of clients to your business and build that brand loyalty.

Continue with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives

How is your company enhancing society, its working environment, or in this specific case, assisting those on the front line risking their lives fighting the disease and nursing us back to health? The public demands and expects that large corporates specifically will think beyond their bottom lines and assist in the effort. CSR means connecting with communities and stakeholders and companies that are defined by and link their service or product to improving wider society have better customer loyalty and are seen to be more transparent and trustworthy.

“Could we create a blank canvas? If our businesses were all borne today, in this environment, how would we operate, how would we do things differently?”

The threat posed by COVID-19 is likely to have a lasting impact on the way businesses function, regardless of sector or location. How our businesses adapt during and after this crisis will be key to ensuring success going forward.



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tml Partners is an international executive recruitment firm specialising in senior communication and marketing appointments

With a team of highly experienced consultants, we provide specialist communication expertise that is unrivaled by generalist headhunters and in-house resourcing teams. We network extensively in this community continually adding value with thought provoking events and publications to help facilitate the agenda for the marketing leaders of tomorrow.

Finding the right communications and marketing talent is far from obvious and ineffective hiring is high risk. tml Partners mitigate this risk with a truly dynamic perspective on hiring the best talent. We're trusted and connected networker's in the senior communication & marketing community and spend a lot of time understanding the motivations and building meaningful relationships with the best, hard to find, passive talent.



@tmlPartners



www.linkedin.com/company/tml-partners

tml Partners Ltd
154-160 Fleet Street
London
EC4A 2DQ

T: 0203 908 4440
E: info@tmlpartners.com