

# Healthcare brands: your patients and consumers need you

At a time when the nations' health is facing its biggest ever challenge, brands need to rise and appropriately play their part.

In years to come, marketing and communication courses will be full of case studies and lessons about how brands behaved in the great COVID-19 crisis of 2020. Not a day, or likely hour goes by, without reference to this being an "unprecedented", "uncharted", "extraordinary" time, for which it truly is. But equally, this means that there are no well-thumbed textbooks with which to guide our paths.

Since the crisis enveloped our lives, we've seen remarkable actions by individuals, brands and companies. Adversity can really bring out the best in people. But it's also left a lot of healthcare brands feeling a sense of inadequacy. Their budgets don't stretch to gestures of Coca-Cola grandiose proportions, and their products can feel ... well all a bit less relevant in the context of this life-threatening crisis.

In a world where successful communication relies upon capturing attention, the question that many healthcare brands are contemplating is whether there's a role for them at this time or whether the sign should simply read "Gone to ground, hope to be back in six months time ... survival allowing" for fear of looking opportunistic, irrelevant or disingenuous.

This is especially so for pharmaceutical or medical brands when the very people they rely on to prescribe, procure, dispense or recommend their products or services are likely facing far greater challenges on the COVID-19 front line.

So, it was heartening to read research recently released by Opinium Research which confirmed that far from wanting brands to retreat from their lives, the majority of consumers wanted to hear as much or more from them. Healthcare and pharma topped the list with 39% wanting to hear more from them.

At a time when doctors, nurses and pharmacists are stretched beyond belief, healthcare brands have a greater role than ever before in manning the nation's health and wellbeing ship. Because sadly, disease, illness and ailments still happen.

So, this is not the time to stop communicating externally. Your consumers and patients need you. Faced with treatment uncertainty and health anxiety, there is an overwhelming need for trusted, practical information and support.

With more time spent online, across a variety of devices, people are looking to social media and websites for accurate information, education, human connection (and may be, just occasionally, a little levity). If handled with sensitivity and with a clear purpose, brands can continue to post social content and engage with their audience.

# Healthcare brands: your patients and consumers need you (cont'd)

While earned media still has a significant focus on COVID-19, we are seeing a number of journalists requesting softer PR stories to populate their feeds and sustain our insatiable appetite for online news and lifestyle content.

At the time when the nations' health is facing its biggest ever challenge, brands need to rise and appropriately play their part. Leading by example, partnering with experts, patient groups and advocates, with a new sense of purpose to walk alongside consumers and patients on their healthcare journey and be a force for good health.