

Waging war against COVID-19 – and winning the media battle

Coronavirus: PR lessons from the front line

Hong Kong, Apr 22, 2020 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - *“The world’s most populous nation has taken its expertise, and in many cases its experts, to other parts of the world as the epicentre of the pandemic shifts. And they are winning the PR battle in the process” – **Geoffrey Kembli, Asia News Bureau***

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and federal governments’ handling of the communications around it the world over, there are stark lessons for the PR industry, according to a leading Asian news agency.

“By and large, government PR handlers adhere to the messaging that decisions on tactics such as social distancing, lockdown, testing and support for medical staff are driven by the modelling of scientific advisors,” said Geoffrey Kembli, managing editor of Asia News Bureau, a news service which disseminates news and features from Asia to western media outlets.

“By extension, there is a new way of media reporting of those findings and the resultant decisions and actions. Or, in some cases, inactions.”

In the UK for instance, the PR advisors to Boris Johnson’s government have broken down the messaging into easily-digestible pieces: Stay At Home, Protect the NHS, Save Lives.

Kembli adds that in these troubling times, there has also been a reticence on the part of journalists assembled for daily press briefings either in London or Washington to challenge opinions and decisions for fear of appearing insensitive.

Hence, the resultant media coverage is largely focussed on grim statistics of infection rates and daily death tolls.

Kembli also notes a reluctance to report good news around China, where COVID19 originated in Hubei Province in January.

“This reluctance among western media is borne of a disinterest in good news originated by Asian PR operatives and news agencies. This is a failing of western PR and media outlets.

“China has successfully brought the epidemic under control through a combination of cutting-edge technology and rapid action on the movement of its citizens and there is lesson to be taken for western governments.

“However, through a combination of distrust and scepticism, these stories are not being widely reported. Asia News Bureau has distributed countless stories around how, having contained COVID-19, China is now turning its attention to assisting those countries in the west which have seen infections rates soar and death tolls mount.

“The world’s most populous nation has taken its expertise, and in many cases its experts, to other parts of the world as the epicentre of the pandemic shifts. And they are winning the PR battle in the process despite a reluctance to report these stories.”

In recent weeks, China has sent medical teams and supplies to countries around the world including Africa and Europe and the United States. Bolstered by its economic might, China’s expertise has been

transported as far afield as the Balkans and the Middle East.

Italy, Spain and France, where the death toll from the disease has reached unprecedented levels, are a major focus of support efforts with the supply of ventilators, masks and medics.

Last week, Italy's foreign minister Luigi Di Maio posted a video of himself on Facebook overseeing live delivery of a plane-load of supplies and medics from China, noting that China was the first to send aid.

China is reciprocating assistance it received. Nearly 80 countries sent supplies to China, some on charter flights they sent to evacuate their citizens from Wuhan.

"It is China's traditional virtue to repay goodwill with greater kindness," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said, citing an ancient Confucian saying: "You throw a peach to me, and I give you a white jade for friendship."

Kembli adds that the Chinese leader Xi Jinping has reassured his Spanish counterpart Pedro Sanchez that "sunshine comes after the storm" and pledged that the pandemic will bring closer so-operation after the outbreak. "This is PR gold," he says.

"Now we see Chinese officials and state media claiming that China bought the world time to prepare for this pandemic," said Natasha Kassam, a research fellow at the Lowy Institute in Sydney.

"We know the propaganda machine within China is able to rewrite history but now we are seeing that replicated overseas," said Kassam. "China's victory over Covid-19 has already been written and authorities are trying very hard for that message to be received overseas," she added.

"PR operatives and western media please note," says Kembli.

Media Contact

Asia News Bureau

press@asianewsbulletin.com

Source : Asia News Bureau

[See on IssueWire](#)