

Communicating in a Crisis

Best practice checklist for Hotels and Attractions

The coronavirus pandemic, and measures in place to limit its impact, present an unprecedented challenge for the hotels and attractions industry in the UK. Everyone has to make fundamental changes to the way we behave, in our businesses and in society at large.

To make your communications as effective as possible during the pandemic (and beyond), we are sharing some simple best practice guidance based on our extensive experience of delivering effective behaviour change. As we are seeing in the government response, communications at a time like this are absolutely critical – and a poorly received message can be disastrous.

With this in mind, we've developed the PERCEPT acronym as a simple way to apply key behavioural science insights to optimise communications efforts – and help ensure that they drive desired guest and employee behaviours.

1.  **Personal** - to maximise saliency, ensure your customer communications are personalised as much as possible (i.e. "Dear Richard", rather than "Dear Customer"). We are more likely to pay attention to information that is salient (and behave accordingly) – and we are subconsciously trained over many years to listen out for our names.
2.  **Emphasise** – that measures taken are for your customer benefit, not you as a business. Do not imply that you would stay open if it weren't for government sanctions (for example) – but that you are taking measures to protect customers and their families, and your staff. These are the most salient worries for customers right now.
3.  **Recognise** – that the circumstances are challenging for customers, as well as your business, and they will be especially distracted/inattentive. Customers will be bombarded with messages about coronavirus right now, and so it is important for your comms to gain attention and be as brief as possible – or they will not be read.
4.  **Community** – now, more than ever, people want to feel part of an 'in-group' (i.e. a community). This both provides a feeling of safety and security, but allows the opportunity to leverage 'social norms' (our tendency to be influenced by others). Messaging such "as most customers are deferring their bookings until June/July" will encourage deferral, rather than cancellation.
5.  **Easy** – if you make changes as easy as possible for customers, this will make them more likely to comply, and be more loyal. Current guidance prevents any unnecessary travel, so you should default to cancelling and deferring existing bookings then notifying, for example, or provide one-click cancellation online, rather than require customers to call to cancel – which will likely require long wait times. This may also benefit customer service capacity.
6.  **Power of free** – cancellation fees etc. may already be being waived, but to increase loyalty and favourability to your brand go 'above and beyond' and provide something free to customers (especially to incentivise deferring bookings). We disproportionately value free items as they generate feelings of reciprocity – so a free extra night, or free week on a season ticket, will go especially far in a time of uncertainty.
7.  **Tone** – everyone is facing uncertainty and heightened stress. Reassurance is critical, but also a positive/optimistic (but realistic) tone will generate greater self-efficacy (confidence) in your ability to manage the current circumstances, and their belief/desire to visit when times are back to normal. Positive/aspirational imagery, saying "when" rather than "if", and so on, will inspire confidence and favourability to your brand – long term.

Our COGNITION audit service optimises communications using best practice behavioural science principles to not just **inform**, but ensure people **act**. You can find out more about it in this [short video](#).

If you need help with specific customer communications (emails, letters, website copy or call scripts) we are happy to offer a **free COGNITION audit** to any clients in need. Email contact@bvanudgeunit.com for more information.