

Communication is important. No, really?

Sometimes it takes crisis for companies to understand that communicating (actually, communicating effectively) is important. Washington's Metro has been having a really bad couple of weeks. First, the tracks at one station were blocked by a freak storm. Then there was a derailment, then a kink in the tracks and today, they have a fire in one of the tunnels. (All of which begs the question how safe is Metro, but that is another story). Metro has been repeatedly criticized for not communicating effectively with its customers. The problem starts with really bad PA systems, which make it impossible to understand what is being said. Then, they have internal communications issues, where headquarters knows something that people on the ground don't or vice versa. In fact, the general manager of Metro was on the air this week saying that they can always improve their communications. Of course they can. They have to! When there is a bad situation, people want to know about it so they can make a decision on how they will respond. If there is a delay on Metro of over an hour, maybe it is worth it to take a cab or walk or whatever. Same thing happens on the airlines. It is frustrating when you are sitting in a gate area seeing the minutes tick by and not knowing why you haven't boarded yet.

Clear and real communications are important in all situations, but more so in a crisis situation. In Metro's case, they need a complete overhaul of their communications systems. In other cases, it is almost common sense. Tell people what is happening. Don't misinform or propagandize. People see through that or will resent it. You know the drill—nothing is happening, just a minor delay. Instead say, there is a delay and we do not yet know the extent of it. We will get you more information as we get it.