

# DYNAMIC COMMUNICATION FOR A FAST-CHANGING GLOBAL CRISIS



**Client:** FESPA

**Client since:** 2001

**Campaign market focus:** Speciality print

**Activity:** Crisis communications

## THE CHALLENGE



The coronavirus crisis that unfolded from the beginning of 2020 created a significant challenge for FESPA, whose Global Print Expo event was scheduled to take place in Madrid in March 2020.

Initial concerns focused on the attendance of exhibiting companies from China, but as new clusters of infection emerged and escalated in Western Europe, the situation evolved rapidly.

Against this fast-changing backdrop, FESPA needed to take into account the views of diverse stakeholder groups and to engage clearly and effectively with exhibitors, contractors and thousands of pre-registered visitors.

## THE RESPONSE



From the earliest reports of the business impact of the virus in Asia, we provided a media monitoring service to give the FESPA senior management team access to market insight into the potential impact on the events sector, and the response of the global event organiser community.

By February 2020 it became clear that the presence of a significant contingent of exhibitors from the Chinese mainland at FESPA Global Print Expo could pose a health and safety risk to other exhibitors and visitors.

We worked with the in-house team to prepare a co-ordinated communication to all confirmed exhibitors on 20th February, announcing robust precautions for representatives from Chinese companies.

## THE RESPONSE continued...



Meanwhile the last-minute cancellation of some high-profile consumer events such as Mobile World Congress 2020 in Barcelona was beginning to provoke reactive questions from media and other commentators. This created the need for us to develop and agree clear reactive statements for FESPA to use in response to questions about its own plans.

The FESPA Board and senior management team were now monitoring the situation constantly and taking soundings from both the Madrid venue and the Spanish authorities. Within a week of the announcement regarding Chinese participants, it had become clear that the coronavirus was now a matter of serious concern in Europe.

However, opinions still varied enormously among FESPA stakeholders as to the right course of action regarding the event. Many vendors were still keen to see the event take place as a platform for their most significant product launches, and continued with their own assertive pre-event marketing.

Following direct consultation with its major exhibitors, by the beginning of March FESPA's position was clear: the event could no longer proceed in March.

We worked rapidly to communicate the decision to postpone the March 2020 events via a co-ordinated statement to all stakeholders on 4th March 2020. Again, we supported this direct communication with an exhaustive FAQ for customer-facing teams within FESPA.

As FESPA's media agency, we also took charge of communication with the hundreds of trade media outlets covering FESPA events, including managing the postponement of the remaining paid visitor promotion activity.

As the pandemic and consequent business and travel disruption continued to unfold, it became clear that it would be advisable to reschedule the event to Spring 2021, allowing more time for business confidence to recover and for event venues to adapt to new post-COVID guidelines for social distancing and health and safety.

We continue to work side by side with the FESPA team to manage both pro- and reactive stakeholder communications around the event, now scheduled for March 2021 in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, as well as to produce online business guidance content to help print businesses accelerate their recovery.

## THE SUMMARY

While we recommend that every business has some sort of crisis communications protocol in place, such a fast-changing situation with so few 'knowns' is virtually impossible to plan for. For FESPA, a co-ordinated communications approach to deliver a consistent message regardless of channel was imperative.

In addition, the speed of developments demanded an agile approach, extensive modelling of multiple scenarios, fast creation and adaptation of communications content, and seamless co-ordination between the FESPA and AD teams.



The rapid development of the coronavirus crisis throughout 2020 and its dramatic impact on the global event calendar demanded that we respond dynamically to a constantly changing feed of information and opinion.

As our long-standing communications partner, we could rely on AD to support us every step of the way. They offered an invaluable sounding board as we considered various scenarios, and helped us to pre-empt the needs and responses of all our stakeholder audiences.

They crafted clear and straightforward communications materials that we could deploy quickly and consistently, both directly with our event participants and across our web sites and social media channels. Their guidance to our in-house team to develop concrete timelines and assign individual responsibilities ensured optimal co-ordination of complex outbound global communication in a short timeframe.

We were very appreciative of their calm advice, expertise and hands-on support as we managed an extraordinary series of challenges for our business.

**Executive Director, FESPA**



## THE OUTCOMES



Detailed preparation for multiple scenarios and outcomes



Clear and timely communication to all stakeholders of rapidly changing information



Co-ordinated and consistent message to all audiences across all channels



Seamless collaboration between client and AD team for maximum agility

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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