

TELL IT WELL 0.5

When M&A Deals Hit the Pause Button, Don't Put Your Communications Strategy on Hold

Since 2018 we've seen an uptick in M&A activity in the financial services industry. But can this trend continue through a global pandemic? In recent months, we've heard our clients raise the question: Should we move forward on a deal or should we put our plans on hold?

In a *Harvard Business Review* poll, 51% of the responding companies said they had suspended all M&A activity for the remainder of 2020. But here's the thing: Even if you've put your deal on pause, this is not the time to disrupt your communications strategy.

The fact is, you may be in extended wait-and-see mode as you work through a longer-than-usual due diligence cycle necessitated by COVID-19-related factors (increased cybersecurity risks, impact on

valuations, etc.) In the interim, having a strong communications strategy in place is crucial. But in today's environment, it's easy to lose sight of the things you need to keep top of mind to avoid post-transaction problems.

At Carpenter Group, we've worked with many clients over the years on developing an internal and external communications M&A strategy. Here are 10 steps to take while your deal is on hold:

1

RECONVENE THE WORKING GROUP

Through the lens of the current and foreseeable environment, develop an internal and external impression of the landscape to ensure that everyone is looking at the same picture.

2

GET FACE-TO-FACE

Proactively get in front of your key stakeholders or steering committee through video conferences. Address all questions or concerns honestly and make sure everyone is on the same page.

3

BE CANDID

Update your employees on where you are in the process and communicate new timelines. If you don't know the timeline, make sure to communicate that as well. During uncertain times, lack of information will only fuel further anxiety among your employees.

4

KEEP AN OPEN LINE TO HR

Wherever you are in the deal lifecycle, a global pandemic has likely placed extra stress on your Human Resources department. Constant communication will ensure that your HR staff remains equipped with the resources to successfully support current and future employees.

5

ESTABLISH FREQUENT TOUCH POINTS

The challenges of working in a virtual environment will require you to take extra steps to remain connected to your team and address time-sensitive issues. At the same time, you'll also need to remain flexible given the evolving nature of today's WFH environment. The communication protocols you set, together with your contingency plans, will keep you on track.

6

OVERCOMMUNICATE

There is no such thing as Too Much Information during periods of uncertainty. Share progress, even when it seems too small to share, by establishing a centralized resource for employees to access. Any positive news will help boost morale.

7

FOCUS ON CORE VALUES

While the town hall you planned for the announcement has been delayed until further notice, don't forego the opportunity to host a webinar to get in front of staff and focus on your core brand values. The last thing you want to do is jeopardize a company culture that has been cultivated over many years.

8

CREATE A FEEDBACK LOOP

Now, more than ever, it's essential to take the time to listen to your employees. Survey your entire staff and establish a dialogue that is inclusive of all perspectives.

9

BE CONSISTENT

All communications must deliver clarity and intention. Continue to use your messaging framework which should clearly tie into your brand purpose and core values through simple, clear language.

10

DON'T DO NOTHING.

Don't be afraid to admit what you don't know. Communicate your intention to find the answer rather than pivoting, concealing, or avoiding the question.

Contact us to learn how we can take your financial marketing strategies and activities to the next level.

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