

Effective Communications Text

Episode 4 – Startup Survival Podcast

By Peter Harrington

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Speaker 1 [00:05](#)

Hello, and welcome to episode four. My name's Peter Harrington, and this is your startup survival podcast.

If you listened to the very first episode in the series, you'll know, adapting to change is a key message and an essential part of startup survival and taking as well as learning from feedback are other important principles too.

Okay. Frank feedback can be hard to take, but fragile startups ignore this advice at their peril. So as a startup podcasting survivor, who's been asking for feedback since this adventure started four episodes ago, I must also respond to your critical opinions. So based on your feedback, I'm taking a, Salubrity a slurp of buy own change medicine and many pivoting elements of the show's format slightly.

So to the fab feed backers and the non-hold backers, I salute you. I salute the army of early responders. Your thoughts and ideas for improving the podcast have been a powerful shot in the arm, a tonic for a trooper. So I hope you liked the slightly updated approach, but before we get into episode four, all about effective communications, I must take this opportunity to publicly thank some of you who have generously provided wonderful support and feedback.

Please excuse title emission. As far as I'm concerned, you're all stars. So big. Thanks. Go to Samuel Mwaura, John Powell, Ruth Rowe, Phillip Clegg, Ngiam Tee Woh, Sharon Allen, Colin Jones, Katie Atkinson, Vito Valenciano, David Bozward, Kate Broadhurst, John Gamba, Jules Hall, Donncha Hughes, and Kajal Sanghrajka.

Speaker 1 ([01:58](#)):

In this episode, the subject of effective startup communication goes under the spotlight

To date, we've covered mindset, resilience and trust. All of which are communication building blocks. As we know, starting and growing a business means working with and meeting many new people via social media, face to face meetings, online tech, phone calls, and more we communicate.

And to build a sustainable business means developing trust based long-term relationships. And that's with colleagues, shareholders, prospects, clients, suppliers, investors, and more.

On today's show. I'm delighted to be able to introduce two expert guests, both of whom will be providing research backed insight. Together, we will be helping you to make sense of the often complex subject of communication, so you can progress your entrepreneurial ambitions. This means developing skills and powerful ways of working that will stay with you forever. Remember there are

no quick wins or easy solutions, change takes time and focused work. So let's get going. My name's Peter Harrington, and this is your effective communications startup survival podcast.

Speaker 1 ([03:23](#)):

Lockdown means our guests are not here with me in the studio and neither is my multitalented and ever so patient producer Duncan. But with Duncan's wizardry and some wonderful Zoom technology, I hope this episode sends out a seamless sense of all togetherness.

As part of communications, we'll be covering three related topics, effective social media, the challenges of internal communications and how startups actually connect with prospects.

So let's begin with social media and to do that, let me introduce you to Cilla Richards. Cilla is a business engagement and communications manager at Edinburgh Napier University. She is part of a team that supports students and graduates who are all involved in business startup.

Cilla has also run her own digital marketing consultancy and has worked with multiple startups and SMEs. Cilla, welcome to the podcast.

Hi Peter. Cilla the amount of social media noise appears to be only increasing as a result of the crisis. So for any startup right now, does social media have any meaningful value?

Speaker 2 ([04:35](#)):

Absolutely. Peter, I think it has a lot of value with more people using social media than ever before during the pandemic, because everyone's stuck at home. You've got more potential reach as a business on social media, which essentially gives you more potential to create trust with your audience, and therefore create opportunities and hopefully get more sales for your business.

Speaker 1 ([05:06](#)):

You mentioned sales, then Cilla. And I think a lot of startups equate social media with promotion and making sales, but without really thinking their messages and actions through, if you could share a few gems of wisdom, some top tips, perhaps as to how startups might use social media, what would you say?

Speaker 2 ([05:25](#)):

Firstly, I think the most important thing for a startup to do is to identify their target market. So really hone in on who their customer is. Too many startups often think that they can service everyone.

But really that won't help with your marketing message. The more specific you can be with your marketing, the more potential engagement you'll have with your audience and you'll reach the right people that will actually potentially buy your product or service. So how do you find, how do you identify your target market?

Firstly, I would suggest asking yourself why, why does your business exist? There's a great book called 'Find your Why' by Simon Sinek. There's also a really good Ted talk that he does online, which I would highly recommend watching. But also most startups solve a problem for their customers. So asking yourself, what problem does your business solve, but more importantly, who are you solving that problem for?

Speaker 1 ([06:32](#)):

You speak real sense Cilla and thanks for mentioning Simon Sinek, who for me is a communications genius. If anyone in listener land wants to know in less than 15 minutes, the core principle for promoting any business effectively check out Simon Sinek and his golden circle work. For reference, Simon Sinek is S I M O N S I N E K. Anyhow, I think effective use of social media means thinking through the relationship with the audience and working out what's in it for them. Does that make sense Cilla?

Speaker 3 ([07:06](#)):

It makes perfect sense. And I couldn't agree more. I think having a user centric approach is extremely valuable for any startup, but just getting back on to how to identify your target market I would honestly suggest that any startup should do a customer persona exercise and that really gets into the nitty gritty of who your customer is by identifying the general demographics, such as age, gender income, where they live and more importantly, where they get their news from and what social media platforms that they use.

So you can be on those social media platforms. But there's no point in being present on a social media platform, such as Facebook, if that's not where your customers are going. So when it comes to completing a customer persona, really, you don't want to do any more than four. And as a resource I'd actually go to HubSpot. They've got a really good one just Google HubSpot customer personas. They've got a really good template on there for you to use.

Speaker 1 ([08:17](#)):

Your insight makes me realize Cilla how much there is to social media. And the fact startups have to consider being social on Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, et cetera, means this discipline could be very time consuming and costly if people are going to pay for advice. So if you were to advise startups about one resource that can have real impact on peoples' social media thinking and work, what would you recommend?

Speaker 3 ([08:45](#)):

Well, social media isn't hard, but it does take time to do it well, but honestly, the one thing I would recommend them do is get this book and read it. It's called 'Contagious', How to build word of mouth in the digital age. And it's written by Jonah Berger. It's absolutely fantastic.

And it does what it says on the front of the book. It shows you how to build contagious content. Not only that there's a great free course on Coursera. I've just paid to get a certificate from it, but it is the course by Jonah Berger. There's lots of digital videos on there that go through all of basically the outline of what the book goes through. It's called viral marketing and how to craft contagious content. So it is accessible for free. I'd highly recommend having a look at that. It's basically a series of videos with Jonah Berger talking, but also giving really practical examples throughout of what the book goes through.

So that's my one recommendation.

Speaker 1 ([09:58](#)):

Cilla, that's brilliant. You've been a great guest and your book recommendation, 'Contagious', what a strangely apt title?! Is already on my to buy list.

Speaker 2 ([10:09](#)):

Thanks Peter.

Speaker 1 ([10:11](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 1 ([10:14](#)):

Well as my time with Cilla Richards demonstrated there is much more to effective social media communication than putting a few simple words on a screen and having considered social media. I want to explore how a crisis impacts the way businesses communicate internally. What are the issues and implications for communicating with partners, colleagues, and all other stakeholders who have a vested interest in your venture.

To do this I turn to our next guest, a chartered occupational psychologist and executive coach with 20 years professional experience. Shauna McVeigh founded the leadership company HCubed in 2010 and her company works with individuals, teams and organisations. Shauna says, her main focus is on work relationships, helping individuals to have a better relationship with themselves. And then with others.

Shauna, how are you?

Speaker 3 ([11:10](#)):

Hi, lovely to be here. It would be good to say that I'm doing okay. There are some fantastic days and actually some days that are just maybe a little bit more difficult than others. But in the main. Alright.

Speaker 1 ([11:29](#)):

Okay. Yes. These are challenging times for everyone, as you indicated, Shauna, the circumstances, you know, they do affect us all. So, with regards to business and startups, how, how in your view might lockdown and isolation be impacting the way people communicate with colleagues and others with whom they are connected?

Speaker 3 ([11:49](#)):

It's a really good question, Peter.

Speaker 3 ([11:54](#)):

So lockdown has definitely impacted personal lives on working lives and how we are communicating with each other. There are lots of new constraints, I'm all about the place. So things on boundaries and families and connecting time and dealing with our own anxieties as well as others.

And so when we think about how it might be impacting upon us, it's definitely a much more anxious time for people. And so I think of the 'David Rock' model, the SCARF model, if you know it, which is a

brain based model for collaborating and influencing with others. And so you can find more if you just Google David Rock and SCARF, but so what it stands for is S is for status, which is, you know, my relative importance to others, C is around certainty. So our ability to predict the future, so you can imagine certainty at the minute is quite heightened autonomy, our sense of control over things, particularly with around if you're thinking of a workplace around tasks and how we might get on with doing stuff.

Speaker 3 ([13:06](#)):

Relatedness. So how safe we feel with others, how we're able to connect. And again, in lockdown, this is something that may be being triggered more. And then fairness. So how fair we perceive exchanges between people. And so these fights they are social domains and they activate the same parts of the brain, as physical survival, um, so threat and reward.

And if they, if we're ever feeling that one of those is a little bit out of sync we then may start to go into something that was mentioned in podcasts one and two around, the fight flight and freeze positions, if any of those different areas are being triggered. And so in lockdown, the thing to be aware of as well, what what's important for you. And if you think of that SCARF model, what might be really important for you? Is it the status a certain day and knowing when that might get triggered? So then when you understand that you can then work with other people, to try and help them, manage those different things, for themselves.

Speaker 1 ([14:18](#)):

So Shauna, when we are in a crisis, you say our fight flight freeze, stress responses appear, how can we best recognize and handle these?

Speaker 3 ([14:31](#)):

So that's a really good, it's a really good question. So when let's think about, understanding how these different responses can be noticed and seen, first in ourselves and then, and others. So if we think about the fight response, it's a very defensive response. It's me trying to defend my position, and it can come out in a number of ways, so it can come out as being passive aggressive. It can come out of people, ask us a question and we respond in a very, the tone and the body language is maybe at a little bit more of a heightened kind of pace. We can try and out logic the other person. So we can, we use this, this method of, I'm going to know more about something than you and get you caught up and in knots, as I try and logic you.

Speaker 3 ([15:28](#)):

And so that would be the fight response flight is when we're trying to run away from the problem and maybe use a bit more of a distraction technique. So we might do something like humour can be a very common flight response. And it can also be things where we maybe try and duck the question that's being asked, because we're running away from it and it can also be a physical running away. So for example, you know, in the olden days, whenever we bumped into people, I met someone that I used to work with and I didn't like them. And they were coming to me as a, as a client. And I remember I saw them and didn't realize it was them and ran into the office. And then they're like, Oh, surely you look like you were running away. And it was like, actually, yeah, it couldn't be a physical thing as well as a verbal thing.

Speaker 3 ([16:24](#)):

And freeze is when we just don't know what to say when we just allow someone to just talk at us and we're still in this, I'm trying to compute and I do not know how I'm going to react. And one of my colleagues used to have a, a Monday morning meeting where that would happen every week with him and his manager, where he just felt that he was being attacked. So yeah, these are all their defence strategies and sometimes the coping strategies. Okay. So sometimes they're ways of helping us to cope with the anxiety or the fear that may be happening for us at that moment in time. So what I'd say is to be able to deal with it and others first, you have to be able to deal with it yourself. So recognize and understand when you might get triggered and what is going on for you.

Speaker 3 ([17:15](#)):

So do some noticing really, you know, tune into and try and pay attention, which was mentioned in some of the previous, podcasts. And then if you notice it in someone else, it's then being able to be able to take that step back and go, hold on a minute, why am I getting this defensive response or this flight response that I'm saying, or this freeze response, it means something's going on for this person.

So I need to try and choose in and listen, and really try and understand what's going on for that person in their work, because it's an anxiety, stress response that's coming out. And if you're able to do that and show that you're, you know, understanding, trying to tune into them, then you're able to maybe then think about, well, how do we really get to know what's going on here, what's underlying this, how do we try and resolve a move to resolution?

Speaker 3 ([18:15](#)):

And that might require a reframe or a building on something or, you know, completely changing, what you're thinking about or what they're thinking about. And then you would use different tactics for that. So know yourself understand it, then put yourself in the position that when you come up up, up against fight flight or freeze that, then you can then take a step back and try and think about how to help that individual.

Speaker 1

That's fascinating. Shauna, thank you. So I'm interested to know for any startup at a time of crisis, what are the key principles that underpin effective internal communication?

Speaker 3

So what I would do is I'd go back to Emmy Edmonson and psychological safety, and I believe Martin Summerfield referred to Amy in podcast two. But what I'd like to do is just deeper dive into that. So you can understand what that means and how you can use it.

Speaker 3 ([19:12](#)):

So she talks about three kind of key stages related to psychological safety. And when you hear the term psychological safety, actually it sounds quite soft and fluffy, but it's not. It's about creating an environment where people feel that they can bring their best selves open up and challenge, and that leads to better innovation, better productivity, better outcomes. And so Google have it as one of their core team competencies actually. So it's not soft, but it's creating an environment where people can feel safe enough to be able to challenge. So her three key stages are, how do I frame the

work? How do I invite participation and how do I respond whenever I'm getting participation from others? And so from things to think about in here are around, you know, if you're having interactions with people, how do you prepare for those, not just the what, but also the how and thinking about how you're going to try and get the most out of those conversations, the agendas, the purpose, all of those things are really important for getting the frame right, and getting the context right for people, and thinking about the roles that people might play, and the conversations that you want and knowing when you need to push your agenda.

Speaker 3 ([20:47](#)):

But also when you need to pull in your agenda and how you try and manage participation, where decisiveness, from you and how you try and manage all of that. Brene Brown has got a wonderful little phrase. I don't know if you've heard it. It's from Daring Greatly. And she talks about clear is kind, which means, tell him, be really straight. You know, if you're able to be transparent, it's much kinder to someone than rather than, than not saying. So say what it is that you need that needs to be said and bring some of that clarity and that structure. The respond bit is how do we make decisions? How do individuals contribute? How do I want people to be working together? What are our ways of working? How do we know that we're being trusting, that we can challenge that, you know, we can invite conversation, let's have a conversation, let's discuss this stuff and agree it? So everybody understands.

Speaker 3 ([21:53](#)):

And the last one, which is around how you respond is again, thinking about your triggers and how you might manage that and how you can deal with feedback. And there's a wonderful book by Stone Heen and Patton called 'Thanks for the Feedback', which is actually saying that if we want to be in an environment where challenge and creativity, which is so important for startups are welcomed, we need to be able to take on-board feedback for ourselves and how we learn, how to deal with that is much more important in their view than necessarily hide to give feedback to others, because most of us can be able to, you know, pick out what's needed, but it's learning how to take on board, our own feedback. So the frame invite and response bit from Amy Edmonson, if you're able to master that, then you will have a cracking team.

Speaker 1 ([22:54](#)):

I'm learning so much as I'm listening. To be honest, it feels like a personal counselling session. Anyhow, whilst I don't want to let you go. I do have one last question. Shauna loneliness is a big issue in society and it's probably only heightened in a crisis. What advice would you offer people who are seeking to go solo with their startup?

Speaker 3 ([23:18](#)):

Yeah. Thank you. That's a very strong question, Peter, around loneliness, because you're right. It is only heightened in a crisis. What I'd say is firstly, think about yourself and your own mentality towards cooperation and competition. If we have a mindset of scarcity, where we think things are finite and this kind of fixed mindset, we're probably going to find it maybe a little bit more difficult to cooperate and collaborate and therefore find a tribe. If we have a bit more of a growth mindset and see things as you know, there's kind of possibilities, then we'll probably find it easier to collaborate. And this has worked best from Carol Dweck who's a Stanford professor Professor and looked at,

learning mindsets. And so, first of all, what I'd say is for yourself, just think about your own attitudes around this.

Speaker 3 ([24:33](#)):

And if you are in a position where you're like, actually I think I would quite like to reach out, collaborate more. There are tribes out there, find your tribe. And there are lots of organizations that are very happy to mentor support, put you in contact, making use of LinkedIn. If you're on there because loads of people want to feel like they're helping and enabling and especially in a time of crisis. So I know my own organization, we have specifically said we are going to help smaller organizations, those that are more of a social enterprise, we'll provide them with coaching and support. Because we recognize this is a really difficult time for people and can be, and we will do what we can to help those, that may find it a bit more difficult. So if you're in that position, think about where you're coming from and then reach out because there's, there's people out there I want to help. Yeah, that would be my advice.

Speaker 1 ([25:47](#)):

Whilst Shauna was hundreds of miles from me throughout that interview, I couldn't help, but feel so close to what she was saying. Every word resonated with clarity. And with that discovery, I realized Shauna had performed communication magic.

She had made the complex simple for me making the complex simple is the perfect link to move from the subject of internal communications to external communications. Right from the outset, communicating effectively with prospects and customers is a challenge. All startups, indeed, all businesses must continually address, but so many ventures fail to prosper or even fail together because their promotional missives are either not understood, not heard or not wanted.

Speaker 1 ([26:45](#)):

So let's quickly understand how people get this crucial first communication, wrong. A surprising number of startups fail to reach out to new people because they fear being ignored or rejected. Then there are those whose communication is just way too familiar, too personal. They assume best buddy status from the off, there are many who love long-winded descriptions and dull or cryptic communication. And finally there are those whose impersonal style and the mass market methods means no prospect is ever treated like an individual. If you have listened to it, you will know that all these approaches fail at least one of the three trust principles highlighted by Professor Francis Frei in the previous podcast. And when trust is threatened effective communication grinds to a halt.

Speaker 1 ([27:43](#)):

So what do you do? Well, having spent more than 30 years growing various companies here are my seven tips that will help you to make the complex, simple and connect with new people. Number one, regardless of your level of self-confidence, practice meeting people, make mistakes, get feedback, and go again. If necessary, invest in quality training to research people's backgrounds, using tools like LinkedIn. So you can communicate in a more informed and personal way, but not in an overly familiar manner. Three. In any first communication, make a single request and keep it simple and easy to understand and act on. Remember, trust takes time to build so always be your authentic self and be professional. This is the customer discovery phase where the priority is to question a listen and learn. Five. Assume you will be asked about what you do in the meeting. So

practice short, clear answers that ideally communicate the clear benefits of what you offer for more on this issue. Review Simon Sinek's golden circle work, which was referenced earlier in this episode.

Speaker 1 ([28:48](#)):

Six, if you make a communication mistake at any time own up apologize. Trust is so fragile in the early stages. Buyers are scared of and scarred by bad supply choices. You may be afraid of rejection, but buyers' greatest fear is making a mistake. And seven. Where appropriate find and work with people that you know, will have more influence and a greater number of trusting relationships. These people are your potential trust ladders, and can help open doors. Mentors can be great trust ladders and for more on the subject of trust, ladders tune back into episode three.

Speaker 1 ([29:42](#)):

Finally, whilst the format of the podcast has altered slightly, I'm always going to recommend a book to buy.

If you can use the extra time you have now to read or listen to the suggested text, I guarantee you will be better equipped to get wherever you're headed far more quickly than you thought possible when this crisis started. Communicating effectively with prospects and customers to help sustain and grow your business is a complex subject. It is so easy to spend time honing communication campaigns only for the results to be disappointing. And sometimes pitiful. Trust me, I have made many mistakes and learnt the hard way.

If only there was a research bank resource that made it clear how to get a message across so that it stuck and people felt compelled to respond well. Fortunately there is, and it is my book recommendation for this episode. So go and get 'Made to Stick' by Chip and Dan Heath. This is a phenomenal read or listen because the book shares the fundamental principles for creating sticky messages. So not only will you learn how to reach out to people, but you'll also have a much better chance of those people wanting to respond to you. And like the herbs and spring plants, I'm nurturing with so much care and attention in my garden. Your business will grow.

Speaker 1 ([31:12](#)):

In the next episode, which will be released on Monday the 8th of June, I'll be building on our trust and communication work by examining the subject of making sales. And after that, I'll be moving on to effective leadership and then teamwork. Through all this mayhem, your feedback is not just welcomed. It's needed.

Like you, this is the first time I've ever dealt with a pandemic whilst in business. So please let me know your thoughts and the questions via the Hitchhiker's guide to entrepreneurship blog. I'd love to hear from you. And finally, before we close huge applause and appreciation for my expert guests, whose details are referenced on the blog page. Thank you. Cilla Richards and Shauna McVeigh. My name's Peter Harrington.

And this has been your startup survival podcast.

Go well, stay safe and thank you.