



Using Business Principles to support ethical communication

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Introduction

Vodafone is one of the largest phone companies in the world. It has more than 15 million users in the UK alone. Every business organisation takes inputs of one sort or another and turns them into outputs. Constantly changing markets and technology mean that new products and services have to be developed to keep pace with change. It is therefore important for businesses to communicate clearly to all stakeholder groups, but especially to customers. Customers use the information that the business puts out in order to make choices regarding the products that they buy. Vodafone's communications are based on the guiding Business Principles that it has developed.

Channels of communication

The two main ways to communicate are verbally and non-verbally. All communication relies on information being sent, received and understood. Barriers to good communication occur when channels are blocked in some way. Barriers could be complicated language or technical jargon. Vodafone works to reduce barriers to make sure that communications are clear and understood.

Talking to customers

Vodafone has developed a set of ten Business Principles. These help to guide its actions so that it is behaving in an ethical way. One Principle relates to the way in which communications take place. Communication with customers is both verbal and non-verbal. Verbal communication takes place via call centres or in shops. Non-verbal communication covers many areas including visual elements such as the company logo and advertisements and text messages. Vodafone has a number of reasons to communicate with customers:

- * promotion and sales. Open and accurate information is provided clearly
- * awareness and information. Vodafone supported the ban on using mobile phones whilst driving. It produced clear guidelines
- * explanation and guidance. Scientific research, for instance regarding health concerns and mobile phones, is communicated clearly, but without losing the sense of the science.

Talking to other stakeholders

Vodafone needs to communicate with other key stakeholder groups. Examples include shareholders, government, charities, non-governmental organisations and regulators. Communications have to be adapted to be appropriate for each stakeholder group. Consultation takes place with these groups all the time through a programme that Vodafone has established. These are designed to provide feedback, i.e. views and opinions on the actions of Vodafone. This feedback helps Vodafone to take action to make improvements. Vodafone cannot always act on suggestions. In line with its Business Principles, it promises to explain clearly why it cannot act on feedback if this is the case.

Internal communications

These take place inside the business. The main internal stakeholders are employees. Communication within the business is either

- * vertical – from senior to junior employees and back in the opposite direction

* horizontal “ across teams and departments at the same level. A key feature of internal communication is the intranet.

Conclusion

Vodafone has established a range of Business Principles to help it act ethically. One of the key ones is related to communication, which it must ensure is clear and accurate. This builds trust and loyalty and, ultimately, profitability.