

CRISIS MANAGEMENT REPORT





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Editor's Note

Sure, the Web and social media present PR executives with several new ways to demonstrate their value. But, in the eyes of C-level managers, mounting an effective social media campaign may pale in comparison to the ability to manage a crisis and mitigate the damage to the brand and its stakeholders.

Fail at crisis management and you probably won't have the opportunity to fail in other areas—say, content marketing or media training—that are less important to the top and bottom lines. Losing at crisis management could mean losing your job.

With that in mind, we present PR News' Crisis Management Report. This report runs the gamut on crisis communications: what do in the heat of a crisis; the PR stakes for when a brand or organization gets bogged down in a crisis; how not to let a crisis go to waste; and how to handle the long-term repercussions of a crisis.

We also provide some key takeaways on what communicators can do—from an operational standpoint—to prevent crises from taking root in the first place.

This often begins in-house, as some crises hide in plain sight. The onus is on communicators to have the vision to spot a problem from afar, before it becomes a full-blown crisis.

And we would be remiss if we didn't examine how social media is impacting crisis communications. Social channels can affect crises, both positively and negatively, of course. Yet whatever the specifics of a problem, the fundamentals of crisis management never go out of style.

This report, a special benefit to PR News subscribers, features both strategies and tactics for dealing with a crisis. As the report makes clear, it's not a matter of if, but when you will deal with a crisis. All the more reason to make sure this report is within arm's length on your desk or just a few keystrokes away on your computer or smartphone.

Sincerely,

Matthew Schwartz
Group Editor, PR News
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1

Crisis Management: Step by Step

- When a company is hit with a crisis, it often culminates with an apology. But giving an apology is not a foregone conclusion, and companies need to approach an apology the same way they do a PR campaign: strategically. Indeed, it's not a matter of if a company has to apologize, but when (and how). It's a similar drill for crises in general. Some companies think they are immune to crisis, the equivalent of sticking one's head in the sand. In reality, crises are way of life in corporate America. This chapter provides a comprehensive tutorial on crisis communications, including what to do during the heat of a crisis and the risk companies take when they get involved in a drag-out fight.

In the Heat of a Crisis, Will Your Communications Plan Work?

By Gene Grabowski



I once faced an embarrassing moment during a presentation to more than 300 risk management professionals. It happened when I candidly answered a question about what I would have done to better handle

communications immediately after the 2010 BP Gulf oil spill. Off the top of my head, I recommended that selecting different spokespeople, using more online visuals, inviting journalists aboard oil-spill cleanup boats and crafting more empathetic public statements might have made a difference.

I also suggested the company may have detoured from its crisis communications plan under pressure from attorneys anticipating massive litigation.

As soon as I finished, a young man dressed in a dark suit and wearing black-rimmed eyeglasses raised his hand and shot up from his chair in the last row of seats. “I’m from BP,” he declared. “And I helped manage communications for the Gulf spill. We worked from a crisis plan, but the news media was hostile to us from the beginning and things happened during the crisis that no one could have predicted. No matter what we did, we were criticized.”

He was right, of course. BP did a lot of things correctly in that crisis for which the company never received credit. Still, what happened to BP happens far too often to global corporations, nonprofit institutions and government agencies in the throes of a crisis. They put so much faith in their written plan that they have difficulty adapting quickly to the inevitable unforeseen events and developments that occur.

How then, can you ensure that your plan will hold up under the pressure of an actual crisis? Here are

some of the things I’ve learned in more than 20 years of counseling clients in crisis matters.

- ▶ **Your plan is a blueprint, not a Bible.** Crisis craves structure, of course, but successful emergency management often depends on the agility and creativity of your team. Your plan should cover the all basics, including internal communications protocols, phone trees, contact information and statement templates. But your system must remain flexible enough to allow for improvisation.
- ▶ **Focus on planning more than the plan.** As a rule, 80 percent of your time preparing for crisis should be spent testing and rehearsing your written plan. The time and effort your team puts in considering all the possibilities during “tabletop” exercises and mock crises will pay huge dividends in a crisis because you will have learned how to work together under pressure and more easily summon creative solutions to developments that arise. Harvard University, known for managing its crises extremely well, schedules and executes tabletop crisis exercises several times each year for all of its schools.
- ▶ **Limit your strategic crisis team to five or six members.** Several years ago, I worked with a law firm whose crisis team numbered 15 senior partners. We wasted countless hours on two different crises considering multiple points of view and often arguing even after decisions had been made. The result was poor handling of both matters that left the firm’s staff, clients and prospects wondering about the firm’s capabilities.
- ▶ **Start with authority.** It’s a truism of crisis communications that the first two hours are

the most important. Why? Because when your leadership team demonstrates calmness, self-assuredness and credibility right from the start, it establishes the overriding tone for the entire process. A crisis team that's confused, bickering or perceived to be unable to make solid decisions during the first hours of a threatening event will lose the support and confidence of the organization. The scandal over the Obama administration's troubled federal Healthcare.gov website revealed just how much worse things can get when no one takes command in a crisis.

- **Think like your consumer.** In a crisis, concerns about issues such as a company's stock price, loss of business, an institution's legacy, individual job security and personal

health often override everything else. But the organizations that do the best job in a crisis are those that immediately adopt the mindset of "What is my customer thinking?" If you start with the idea of satisfying the fears and demands of those who ultimately buy or use your product or service, you are far more likely to craft solutions that put you back on track.

For an example of how looking out for selfish interests will sabotage your crisis work, consider the exasperated pronouncement of former BP CEO Tony Hayward after the Gulf oil spill: "I want my life back!" Need I say more?

Gene Grabowski is partner at kglobal. He can be reached at gene.grabowski@kglobal.com.

PR Strategies Needed for Crises That Move Slowly, and Evolve

By PR News Editors

Crises come in all varieties, but some are worse than others. The kind that emerge suddenly but then evolve slowly are the worst and the hardest to deal with. It's those slow-burning crises that keep communicators and public affairs pros most on edge. And, practically, it's those types of crises that require PR pros to go beyond having a "rapid response" plan and instead, be ready for new surprises as a crisis evolves.

So, what do PR people need to do when the boss is under siege and a scandal has emerged? What's the communications strategy when investigations are proliferating? And what's the message when some staffers have been fired and are subsequently subpoenaed?

Exhibit A is the traffic-jam scandal that engulfed New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's administration in late

2013. Both federal and state investigations looked into whether a plan last September to close traffic lanes near the George Washington Bridge was politically motivated. Governor Christie, who was exonerated of any wrongdoing, denied any knowledge of such plans and, during his 2014 State of the State address apologized effusively for the scandal. But there yet may be political fallout from the scandal, particularly if Christie runs for president in 2016.

Crises as acute as the New Jersey bridge scandal are hard, if not impossible, to predict. At the same time, when a scandal does erupt, it's the communicator's responsibility to forecast what will most likely be a highly emotional and non-operational problem, said Jim Lukaszewski, president of The Lukaszewski Group, which is part of Risdall Public Relations.

‘GRAND STRATEGY’

Lukaszewski said there are 5 principles that PR pros need to follow when trying to navigate a scandal or crisis that shakes your brand’s foundation.

1. Stop the production of victims. Continuous victim production is what drives the media coverage, the public interest, the “emotionalization” of the situation, the commentary and criticism from 1,000 sources, and the reputation destruction.
2. Manage the victim dimension. This is what leaders and senior managers should be doing instead of hanging around and second-guessing the command center.
3. Communicate directly and frequently with employees, stakeholders, and those immediately affected.
4. Notify those indirectly affected. Be proactive with regulators, licensing authorities, neighbors, partners and other stakeholders who need to know what’s going on and who should hear from you, both promptly and directly.
5. Manage the self-appointed and the self-anointed—the news media and the new media—as well as those who “opt in on their own: The critics, the bellyachers, the back-bench bickerers, the bloviators,” Lukaszewski said.

NO-SPIN ZONE

Of course, when a crisis takes on all the characteristics of a scandal, PR pros have to be closely aligned with legal counsel. That’s why it’s crucial that PR executives cultivate relationships with lawyers ahead of time so if there is a severe crisis, communicators have an existing relationship with the legal team and there’s less strain on efforts to develop a joint communications strategy in the vortex of the crisis.

“Legal informs the communications strategy, but doesn’t govern it,” said Howard Opinsky, executive VP of Hill+Knowlton Strategies and general manager of the PR agency’s Washington, D.C. office.

REALITY-BASED

The ultimate decisions in response to a crisis “have to be made by the CEO,” he added. “They’re getting advice from legal but any leader should listen to his communications counsel to get advice from a reputational point of view. You can win in a court of law and lose in the court of public opinion and vice versa.”

When grappling with an ongoing scandal, PR pros also have to deal with the specter of a “smoking gun,” or a piece of evidence that renders your existing PR strategy moot and changes the optics of the scandal. “When evidence comes out against you, you need to be as straightforward as possible,” Opinsky said. “It does you no good to deny reality.”

Stakes for PR Pros When Brands Get Into a Fight

By PR News Editors

The dispute between Amazon and Hachette regarding the cost of e-books was real ugly before the fight was resolved late last year. The dispute broke out after Amazon reportedly began seeking concessions on book sales from Hachette, which Hachette was unwilling to give. Amazon proposed giving Hachette authors all the revenue from their e-books sales on Amazon while the parties continued to negotiate a new contract. Following the resolution, Hachette can now set its own prices

for e-books, which seemed to be a major sticking point during the dispute.

As the conflict wore on, it raised several questions for communicators who may have to provide air cover if their brand or organization is involved in a drag-out fight with a business partner, vendor or affiliate. When C-level managers dig in their heels and refuse to blink, PR pros need to think about the use of language as

3 PR Tips When Your Brand Is Involved in a Public Dust-up

The dispute between Amazon and Hachette raised an interesting PR question: How did the companies' stakeholders react to the fight? Getting a communications strategy right—and protecting the brand—requires having a good sense of what the people and groups the companies care about are thinking and doing (or not doing). Armed with this knowledge, Amazon, Hachette, or any company in a similar situation, can use one or a combination of the following stakeholder-informed communications approaches:

- ▶ **Targeted stakeholder outreach.** The Amazon/Hachette dust-up shows the importance of having a stakeholder-based communications strategy. Such a strategy recognizes that, for example, publishers, authors, investors and readers all have different interests. While a company's core messaging must never change depending on the audience, the emphasis on particular elements should. With this approach, communications is more of a partner to, not a driver toward, the business goal. Targeted communications can be used to educate, shore up and/or enlist stakeholders.
- ▶ **Mobilize a coalition.** The most proactive and resource-intensive option is to spur existing allies to become vocal advocates in a public campaign and to onboard others. This requires a base of supporters that can be moved to action in numbers great enough on social media platforms and effective enough to complement the pressure being exerted behind closed doors. In this case, the power seems to rest with customers.
- ▶ **Focus on the endgame:** If a company is confident that its stakeholders' views can withstand negative public attention, an aggressive media strategy targeting the opposing company can help drive toward the business goal. Amazon's public statements may be out of character and strike a discordant note among some customers, but these same people may continue to stream Amazon Prime movies and place diapers.com orders nonetheless. And if the heightened rhetoric shortens the time to a resolution, the brand pain may be worth it. This is not for the meek. Verbal volleys fuel media interest and can turn off brand loyalists.

Like most businesses at loggerheads, the parties will likely resolve their dispute one way or another. So best to keep your stakeholders close throughout the process with a communications approach that addresses their needs. That way, there will be less brand cleanup when the dust settles.

This sidebar was written by Jake Sargent, senior director of APCO Worldwide. He can be reached at jsargent@apcoworldwide.com.

it relates to the conflict, perception and, perhaps most important, consumer sentiment.

“You have to circle the wagons from the very beginning when the brand may be in for a protracted battle,” said Simon Owens, director of digital content at LEVICK, “You first need to develop a ‘Question’ document to anticipate every question and what the official response should be. You need one document for the media and one for rapid-response via social media.”

PR pros also need to craft a “documentation and discovery” strategy in case certain information which could negatively taint one party or the other as it relates to the dispute gets leaked to the media, Owens added. (Think YouTube showing Viacom employees uploading YouTube video content when Viacom sued YouTube for alleged copyright infringement.)

THE LINGUISTICS

When companies are bogged down by conflict, media statements may come fast and furious, so PR pros have to exercise caution when it comes to the use of language. In late May 2014, for example, Amazon released a statement, including, “If you do need one of the affected titles quickly, we regret the inconvenience and encourage you to purchase a new or used version from one of our third-party sellers or from one of our competitors.”

“Telling me to buy from a competitor means you don’t care about my business or, more important, my loyalty,” said Ethan Rasiel, CEO of Lightspeed

Public Relations and former PR director at Samsung Electronics America. “If skilled PR people were in the room when this statement was drafted, they would have jumped out of their seats upon hearing this. Message to PR people: Grab a spot at the table when a statement is fashioned, even if you have to push your way into the room, and don’t be shy once you are there. Be the voice of reason.”

Another factor for PR pros to consider is whether a company’s behavior during a conflict could come back to haunt the brand.

“There’s a potential that you create a perception of the company that you will have to deal with down the road,” said Larry Parnell, associate professor and director of The George Washington University Master’s in Strategic PR program. “You can’t get caught up in the moment, because you have to consider your company’s reputation in the future, including how regulators, employees, customers and your industry will perceive you after the situation is resolved.”

Chris Hammond, a senior VP for corporate communications at Wells Fargo, amplified that sentiment. Even for corporate juggernauts such as Amazon and Hachette, a solid reputation can be ephemeral.

“The longer a kerfuffle goes, the more risk there will be for compromising the organization’s reputation,” Hammond said. “At a certain point, consumers will take their pocketbook somewhere else for their reading needs.”

Bracing for When (Not if) Your Brand Has to Apologize

By PR News Editors

Hardly a week goes by without a public figure, celebrity or CEO apologizing for something.

For PR pros, educating clients on how to apologize has become a key part of their counsel. That's because, in the majority of cases, it's not a matter of if someone at your brand or organization will have to publicly apologize, but when.

Apologies are a delicate art. Of course, a lot depends on the severity of the crisis and the blow-back from the public.

Calling it "the most egregious error of my career," ESPN sportscaster Stephen A. Smith apologized in July 2014 for remarks about domestic violence. Smith said on-air that female victims of abuse should be aware of actions they take to provoke their assailants.

"Unfortunately, I did an incredibly poor job of asserting my point of view this past Friday. For that, again, I am truly, truly sorry," Smith said. "Particularly the victims of domestic abuse and to my female family members and loved ones I've disappointed, and who know I know better. You all deserved a better professional, and quite frankly a better man sitting on this set, in this very chair. My heartfelt apologies." (ESPN suspended Smith.)

Smith's apology was eclipsed by the next high-profile penance. Americans love forgiving people. But they hate it if you fail to apologize in the first place.

With that in mind here are few tips on how to apologize and, as we all like to insist, move on, compliments of Karen Friedman, a professional communications coach:

- ▶ **Own up.** Rule number one is take responsibility and do it on your own—not because you're pressured. If you made a mistake, admit it and then explain what you're doing to fix it and make good to those who were hurt.
- ▶ **Fix the problem.** An apology is not a fix. If you are truly remorseful, then offer something tangible to those who were affected. It might be a discount, a flight upgrade or free product.
- ▶ **Put a face on it.** How you say it is as important as what you say. From eye contact to gestures to posture to facial expressions, all of you must convey sincerity and heartfelt sorrow.
- ▶ **Make it about them.** Unlike the BP executive who said this was the worst day of his life, make sure the apology is about those who were affected. Apologize for their inconvenience, for your underestimation of a situation, for something spiraling out of control that could have been prevented. Talk about them, not about you.
- ▶ **Use the right platform.** Tweeting an apology to your followers might be OK as long as you've reached out to those you've wronged first and offered a more detailed and forthright apology on your website or Facebook page. One hundred and forty characters aren't enough to make amends. Finally, think through your actions in advance. A well-crafted, genuine apology is the first step to moving on.

When Your Actions Speak Just as Loud as Your Words

By Bill Nowling



(In November 2014 a judge approved a plan for Detroit to get out of bankruptcy. Bill Nowling, who helped manage communications for Detroit Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr and is a partner in the Detroit office of Ruder

Finn, takes a look back at the strategy for dealing with a multifaceted crisis.)

Detroit's financial emergency and trip through Chapter 9 bankruptcy have been more than 60 years in the making, so it is no surprise that the crisis management lifespan for this event is longer and more protracted than others.

Crises, by their very nature, are unpredictable and unruly beasts. This is especially true in Detroit, with its labyrinthine politics, decades of racial and geographic biases and the relative long nature of its resolution. But there are lessons learned here that are applicable for senior PR managers at corporations big and small where you have to hunker down and "get comfy" with your crisis.

My first bit of advice is to relax. You can and will get through a slow-burn crisis with a long-view vision. Here is some other advice to consider.

Forget the spin. It is my experience that nearly every crisis involves some lost trust. In Detroit there was plenty of mistrust, more than 60 years of it. All you have is your word. Speak plainly, speak often and don't get cute.

Your stakeholders want facts and clear information. What you have to tell them will probably upset them. That's OK. Rebuild the trust by being consistent and honest.

Explaining is winning. This is the antithesis of

political communication, but absolutely essential in a crisis. You can't explain enough. Start with those stakeholders who will first carry your messages (usually the media and socially connected influencers) and expand.

I still spend about three-quarters of my long days "explaining" to reporters what the city is doing with regards to the bankruptcy and what our restructuring plan looks to accomplish. I would say you have to be almost evangelical about it.

Focus on the fix. Nobody likes a good fight like Detroit. I knew the pressure for recrimination around Detroit's woes would be fierce. There were plenty of places to point: convicted former-Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, organized labor, white flight, lingering racial tensions, the suburbs. Everyone had a horse they were betting on as the one thing responsible for the current state of affairs. But the issue is resolving the crisis and moving forward. You have to focus on the fix, even if it is at the expense of the why.

There is no profit or future in the past. We made it clear from the beginning that our job was to provide a restructuring plan that would right Detroit's listing financial ship.

After 60 years of indifference and political can-kicking, we produced a comprehensive \$18 billion restructuring plan after only four months. Our message was the plan. The facts of the why were laid bare for all to see and they have been rarely debated since.

Simple plans get executed. Your crisis communication plan need not be elaborate but it needs to be executable. The city's crisis communication plan takes up a tree-saving three Excel pages.

I've seen a lot of lofty strategies and goals never make it off the deck slides from which they were presented. Know what you can do; know what you can't. Do it. Track its success. If it doesn't work, get rid of it and get a new tactic. The purpose is to navigate the crisis, not make a pretty plan.

Don't argue. But if you do have to argue, make it count. In the Detroit restructuring and subsequent bankruptcy, the emergency manager's office is constantly called upon to respond to what seemed like a hundred different issues every week. We decided that we were going to live and die on the hill of our restructuring plan. It's where we built our credibility and trust.

We knew we had to defend it in the media and with stakeholders. The shots came from all sides and about all issues. What mattered was the plan. We made a point of not getting mired in responding to ad hominem attacks and political gamesmanship.

ABC—Always Be Closing. After six decades in which the population went from nearly 2 million to just under 700,000, crime soared and blighted and abandoned homes became the norm. Detroiters were impatient. And they had a right be.

We knew we couldn't give them more lofty rhetoric about how it would get better. We had to show them that the sacrifice the city was making by restructuring—and filing for bankruptcy—was producing results.

We lit dark neighborhoods, found new ways to collect garbage better, put new police cars and EMS vehicles on the road. These were core parts of the city's restructuring plan and we made sure Detroiters not only knew it, but also could see it in action.

Old-media relationships matter. Navigating a crisis is about telling a story of where you are going and doing it in a way that people will want to listen and walk along with you.

To do that you need to provide context, vision and insight. Without question, the people who will help you do that are the traditional or old-media reporters and editors who have the time and resources to devote to understanding and helping you tell your story.

Always get a second opinion. Don't do a crisis alone. I don't care how good you are, a second pair of eyes or a fresher perspective will save your butt.

Early on, the City of Detroit engaged Abernathy MacGregor of New York to consult on Detroit's restructuring and help it build relationships in the financial community and media. Choose an outside communication agency that fills in the expertise you lack.

No daylight between you and the boss. In a crisis, your PR director becomes a de facto consigliere to the CEO or primary decision-maker. As the crisis manager, your view and opinion on business decisions and strategy are crucial to getting and staying on the success trail.

That has certainly proven true in Detroit. I am not in every meeting the emergency manager has, but I am always part of the discussion on major decisions to make sure that our communication and core mission goals are aligned.

You will make mistakes. Accept them. Acknowledge them. Fix them. Move on.

Follow Bill Nowling on Twitter, @NowlingPR.

2

Don't Let a Crisis Go to Waste

- How you manage a crisis can help inform new ways of how to communicate. It's all a matter of owning a crisis and using it as a teachable moment. Of course, part of crisis management is trying to prevent a crisis from happening in the first place. That's why communicators need to take pains to wipe out bad corporate behavior that, if not addressed, can cost the company dearly. But when a crisis does erupt, communicators are responsible to help manage the fallout and cauterize the wounds.

PR Pros Need to Take the Lead As Brands Emerge from Scandal

PR News Editors

In a digital age, when changes in marketing communications move at warp speed, rebranding campaigns have become somewhat routine affairs. Whether it's a name change, a new logo or rethinking business practices to boost their online presence, companies can't sit still. But there are some situations where a rebranding campaign definitely won't cut it. Cases in point: The Los Angeles Clippers and General Motors.

In late May 2014, it was announced that former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer agreed to buy the Clippers for \$2 billion. The sale followed a major scandal in which then-owner Donald Sterling was caught on tape making racist comments; Sterling was banned for life from the NBA.

Likewise, in 2014 GM was wracked by a scandal concerning why it took more than a decade to recall defective cars that have been linked to at least 13 deaths.

An internal investigation GM released in June 2014 laid out a narrative of incompetence and neglect, specifically citing poor communications, per *The Wall Street Journal*.

Where do these organizations go during crises such as these, and how can PR execs play a key role in helping to drive legitimate change, both internally and externally?

"It's a medical approach," said Jason Maloni, senior VP and chair of the litigation practice at LEVICK. "You can cut out the cancer, but there's a rehab program that follows any major procedure. Both organizations need to reinvent themselves, and present new faces and leaders who will be the standard bearers of righting the ship and taking consistent steps to change their culture," he added.

NO QUICK FIX

These two examples can be used to outline broader principles and best practices for reputational rehab. PR pros have to pay careful attention to whom the company is hiring for leadership positions post-scandal and what signal that hiring sends to stakeholders, Maloni said.

But it really starts with something that's core: Culture. One mistake that PR pros need to avoid is thinking that remedying what was previously a dire situation will take a few weeks to fix. "It's not a new coat of paint," said Robert Ludke, executive VP of the corporate advisory practice at Hill+Knowlton Strategies. "It takes a number of years."

Ludke shared three recommendations for PR pros who are tasked with changing a corporate culture in the wake of a serious scandal:

- ▶ Deploy all media channels to get the message out. "What you say is much more important than how you say it," Ludke said. "You don't have to worry about awareness among employees; they can't get away from the crisis, so you have to offer a new path."
- ▶ Listening to stakeholders cannot be underestimated. "Those in the communications and PR field need to stress the listening, rather than one-way communication," Ludke added.
- ▶ All hands on deck. "If GM is going to truly change, it can't be just [GM CEO] Mary Barra alone talking about change," Ludke added. "Everyone needs to talk about how they are going to improve the culture."

LONG HAUL

Another way PR pros can play a meaningful role in rehabbing scarred brands is to create a comprehensive plan to ensure that communications initiatives do not get stalled at any middle level, which beset GM, said David Johnson, CEO of Strategic Vision.

GM needs a “mechanism in place” so important information flows into the right hands, he said.

In the case of the Clippers, its PR pros need to “persuade fans and sponsors that the team is about winning and that’s the culture,” Johnson said. He added that the team also has to convince stakeholders that Ballmer has no intention of moving the club to Seattle (home of Microsoft). “They need to outline a five-to-ten year vision of what it’s doing as a team and how it’s growing its roots” in Los Angeles, Johnson said.

How to Wipe Out Toxic Behaviors



Take it from a boss: We all report to someone. I figured out long ago that I work for my staff more than it works for me. It’s in my best interest to create a healthy workplace environment where my staff can produce its career-best work and live a fulfilling life. That’s what generates ideas that seemingly defy gravity and yield happy clients. Here are three strategies for dealing with toxic bosses and inoculating the organization from their harmful ways.

► Focus on the behavior, not the person. Very few of us are willing to put our heads on the chopping block and call out a bad boss by name. Instead, you should identify the leadership

behavior that is creating a hostile or unhealthy work environment. Don’t name names at this point. Instead, inventory the root cause of what’s holding back the organization from achieving its goals of financial success, employee productivity, customer loyalty and competitive success. Then develop ideas that will address these flawed leadership behaviors and enhance the reputation of the organization in other words, your big-picture job description.

► Find a safe harbor for your ideas. Now that you have your well-thought-out answers to what behaviors are holding the organization back, you need to find a friendly audience to present your assessment of how to help the organization be all that it can be.

First, stay away from human resources. Truth be told, owners and C-suite execs often view HR as the complaint department every time it’s too cold, too loud or too cheap around the office. Instead, have a nonthreatening conversation with your immediate superior regarding your observations and ideas for enhancing value. Go to your chief communications officer. If you’re the CCO, go to the general counsel, CFO or president. Anyone other than the offending individual. Stay focused on the leadership behaviors and ideas for organizational change and your intentions will be pure.

► We all answer to someone. Make the call. If your efforts prove ineffective, muster some courage and identify the toxic boss by name. C-suite executives report to other C-suite executives or a board of directors. CFOs report to presidents. Presidents report to CEOs. CEOs report to board chairs. And board chairs report to boards of directors, which have a responsibility for (and an intolerance of) ineffective leaders who create workplace environments that handicap the success of organizations.

Odds are, you’re not the only one naming names when it comes to that bad boss. As added protection, America offers so-called whistleblower laws for employees who lodge complaints against supervisors or officers of the organization. Legal shields may help to embolden your strategy of last resort.

This sidebar was written by Doug Spong, founder and president of Spong. He can be reached at doug.spong@spongpr.com.

How to Manage the Worst Crises Using Basic Rules and Practices

By Mark Maley



When an armed gunman entered a Sikh temple in a Milwaukee suburb on a sunny August morning in 2012 and killed six people and injured four more before taking his own life, the entire incident was over in five minutes.

However, the aftermath of that tragedy, on Sunday, August 5, in Oak Creek, Wis., lingered for weeks as state, federal and local authorities—as well as the community itself—struggled to sort out what exactly happened and why.

Taking the lead in consoling a shaken city and providing continuous updates to news outlets around the world was Oak Creek Mayor Steve Scaffidi, who had taken office just four months before the mass shooting rocked his community of 34,000 people.

Scaffidi, who had never even conducted a press conference before the day of the shooting, quickly learned how to work effectively with the media in a time of a crisis. And while mass shootings remain rare, many of the tactics used by the mayor and other city leaders are ones that can be used by others who have to deal with the media during any type of crisis.

For starters, Scaffidi said, it's important to have a detailed plan for dealing with the media and to determine who is going to be the public “face” of the crisis—and what role that person will play.

In this instance, Scaffidi and Oak Creek Police Chief John Edwards clearly delineated their responsibilities before talking to the press.

Both would speak to the media, but Scaffidi would only talk about how the city was dealing with the tragedy. Edwards would provide reporters with updates on the investigation into the shooting.

At the first press conference, held hours after the shooting, Scaffidi focused on the impact of the tragedy on the city and tried to reassure Oak Creek citizens.

“My piece was very brief. It was a basic city message—that our thoughts and prayers were with the families of the victims and that the situation was under control,” said Scaffidi. “We were going to do everything within our power to calm everyone down. That was the message.”

Scaffidi also believes that, in any kind of crisis, officials shouldn't give media updates unless they actually have something to say.

That first press conference on the day of the shooting didn't take place until nearly six hours after the incident.

During that time, phones were ringing nonstop at City Hall and the Police Department—not to mention the personal cell phones of Scaffidi and Edwards.

“Our strategy on Sunday was, ‘We're not talking to media because we don't know enough about the situation and aren't comfortable having a press conference,’” the mayor said

Scaffidi has watched other police agencies throughout the country deal with similar situations, and he's miffed when he sees authorities provide hourly updates with no new information.

"There's no reason to rush out there and talk to the media," he said. "This shooting happened at 10:30 in the morning, and we didn't say anything until 4 p.m. Don't rush out there until you know that the situation is calm and that you have some actual information."

MEDIA REQUESTS

When you do finally have information to provide, use every means possible to get it out there, Scaffidi advises.

After that Sunday afternoon press conference, authorities said nothing else to the media for the rest of the day. However, starting at 5 a.m. Monday morning, Scaffidi and Edwards did back-to-back-to-back appearances on the national morning news programs as well as local media before holding a joint press conference at 10 a.m.

Being accessible to the media was a key part of the city's communications strategy throughout that first week—a week in which Scaffidi and Edwards conducted more than 150 interviews. The two didn't turn down a single media request.

"If there are things that are public information, there's no sense in trying to hide them," Scaffidi said. "We talked about what we knew, what was helpful for the public to know—like that there was only one shooter—or whatever background we could provide on this person. Once we had information we could provide to the community, we didn't hold back on that."

LEADERSHIP IS CRUCIAL

Whether it's the mayor of a city or the president of a corporation, Scaffidi believes it's crucial that the leader of the organization play a prominent role during a time of crisis.

"There are a lot of cities where the mayor refuses to do any media. None. He'll defer everything," he said, "That's fine, but as the leader of the city, if you're deferring everything, I don't think you're doing your job. You're asking a lot of the people who then have to make those announcements for you."

Crisis Management Media Tips

- **Don't rush to get the story out there.** Don't have a press conference just to have a press conference. If there is no new information, then wait until you have a legitimate update.

On the day of the mass shooting in Oak Creek, Wis., authorities waited nearly six hours before talking to the press. "Our strategy on Sunday was, 'We're not talking to media because we don't know enough about the situation and aren't comfortable having a press conference,'" Oak Creek Mayor Steve Scaffidi said.

- **Chose your words carefully.** Simple misstatements can be easily misconstrued and escalate into something that you didn't intend to say.

On the night of the shooting in Oak Creek, Scaffidi received a phone call from Steve Hogan, the mayor of Aurora, Colo., where 12 people were killed in a mass shooting just two weeks earlier. "He told me, 'Talk about what you know. Don't speculate.' That has to be one of the basics for any mayor in this kind of situation," Scaffidi said.

- **Stick to the message.** Determine in advance who is going to say what to the media. In the case of the Oak Creek mass shootings, the police chief talked about the crime and the investigation, while Scaffidi talked about how the city was dealing with the tragedy. "We knew each other's borders and we didn't cross them," the mayor said.
- **Be brief.** "You don't have to talk for two hours to say something you could say in two minutes," Scaffidi said.

—M.M.

Following the temple shooting, Scaffidi said it was important that citizens of Oak Creek knew the situation was under control and that they were safe. He believed it was important that both he and the chief faced the TV cameras together.

"I think the mayor of a town where something like this happened needs to be out front. The police chief is not my boss—I'm his boss. So both of us had to be visible," he said. "People can see that we're together and on the same page. People want to hear that."

If there are any personality differences among the leaders of an organization, they have to be set aside in a time of crisis. “You have to check your ego at the door,” Scaffidi said. “You need to be on the same page and be saying the same things.”

He added: “If you allow all that other crap to get in the way—even to the point of not allowing

someone to speak because you don't like them—you've got a problem.”

Mark Maley is the public information manager for the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. He is also a Milwaukee-area journalist who directed the coverage of the Oak Creek temple shooting for Patch.com. Mark can be reached at mmaley1234@gmail.com.

How One Company Turned a Crisis Into a Major Branding Opportunity

by Amy Toosley



The business of Valentine's Day is a serious one for large online gifting retailers like ProFlowers and Shari's Berries. When Winter Storm Pax started dumping snow on many parts of the U.S. in early 2014, it became an un-

welcome disaster for Valentine's Day deliveries.

ProFlowers and Shari's Berries strive to deliver an exceptional gifting experience, no matter what the circumstance, even if it means a winter storm.

While weather conditions are out of our control, the way we treat our customers is fully within our reach. There's no denying that we had a difficult Valentine's Day due to weather conditions. Regardless of these unpredictable events, we stood by our promise of fresh flowers, delicious gourmet dipped berries and a great customer experience—no matter what.

Once we knew that Winter Storm Pax could potentially impact thousands of customers and delay their Valentine's Day deliveries, we developed a swift, three-pronged approach to mitigate the crisis and turn customers into loyal fans that will, I hope, last for many holidays to come.

BE PROACTIVE

Having a strong relationship with your customers even before a crisis happens is imperative when that crisis actually happens. We were accountable to that relationship before our customers could even demand it.

As soon as we knew the storm could affect deliveries, ProFlowers and Shari's Berries sent emails to customers alerting them of delivery delays. It meant a promise to remedy the situation at any cost.

We also notified customers that we would no longer take orders in affected areas. We had no intention of taking orders when we knew we could not fully deliver. We echoed this messaging throughout social media platforms and other communications.

BE GENUINE

In a crisis situation, companies need to be committed to their mission, vision and values. Part of our mission is putting our customers first, no matter what, and that is exactly what we did.

We didn't just apologize. We made things right by listening to customers and acting on our prom-

ise. We put our customers first, yet empowered them with information via several channels of communication.

We decided to email our customers, giving them the option of a refund or a replacement with a credit toward their next purchase. That was very impactful and effective at giving customers a chance to decide.

Over the course of the week following Valentine's Day, ProFlowers and Shari's Berries fulfilled its promise by honoring those replacements or refunds and continuing constant communication.

We responded to every single customer call, email, tweet, post and communication. The entire company rallied, and even our CEO Chris Shimojima personally addressed customers.

A two-way dialogue and transparency were parts of the catalyst for shifting negative sentiment to positive branding.

HUMANIZE THE MESSAGE

It's easy for consumers to forget that there are real people behind the company veil. We avoided artificial messages. We showed customers that we are people too and that we're sorry for the fact that

their Valentine's Day gifts didn't arrive, even though the weather was to blame.

We humanized our responses and put a face to customer service by posting photos of employees working hard to correct the problems.

By Saturday, the day after Valentine's Day, Shari's Berries customers posted overwhelmingly positive messages, sometimes even urging us to stop and go home. By Sunday, we received two times more positive comments than negative, which continued through the rest of the week.

Initial negative sentiment for ProFlowers due to the Valentine's Day turned positive within four days—by February 18.

Staying true to our customers' satisfaction is part of our philosophy and way of doing business that we live and stand by, even if it means putting their needs ahead of our business plan. Turning those customers into loyal fans was an outcome that we hope will last for years to come.

Amy Toosley is director of PR, public affairs and corporate relations for Provide Commerce. The gifting company's e-commerce brands include ProFlowers, RedEnvelope, Shari's Berries, Personal Creations and others.

3

How Social Media Impacts Crisis Management

- Social media has fundamentally altered most every aspect of PR, and crisis communications is no exception. Companies need to craft social media guidelines that clearly spell out what employees can and cannot do on the company's social platforms. Yet despite the best of intentions, social chats (whether internally or externally) can backfire, so companies need to prepare for how they will respond if a social conversation goes off the rails and sparks a crisis. This chapter features some essential tips on how to use social media during a crisis. It also makes a case for how to deal with social media activists or, depending on the circumstances, "trolls." Either way, don't alienate people who are chiming in. It'll make a bad situation worse.

Crisis-Proof Your Social Strategy With Protocols and New Policies

By PR News Editors

In times of crisis, the public's first reaction is to go to social media. With a direct line to the companies involved in a crisis situation, the public doesn't have to wait for news outlets to get information on a brewing situation.

For brands, that means that a crisis management strategy needs to include preparation not only at a managerial and media relations level but also at a social level.

According to Carolyn Mae Kim, who is on the public relations faculty at Biola University in the department of journalism and integrated media and a contributor to PR News' Crisis Management Guidebook Vol. 7, there are three things that should be in place to help you weather any crisis on social media: user policies, communication protocols and community trust.

USER POLICIES

In any community, there should be clear guidelines regarding expectations, consequences and standards. This is precisely what a user policy does in the world of social media. You'll need several kinds of policies in place.

- 1. Community user policies.** These policies are the kind that relate to the way the general public interacts on your social media platforms. The community policy is designed to make everyone feel welcome, respected and able to share perspectives. But certain kinds of language, over-posting or threats cannot be tolerated on your social pages. Also remember that if your organization waits until it is in a crisis to create and enforce a community policy, it will appear that you only did it to control conversations.
- 2. Internal social media policy.** This policy relates to how employees who are manag-



ing the brand's social media can interact. It will be the guiding force behind knowing who can post, when to respond, which platforms to update and where to direct traffic. This plan should clarify who needs to approve posts, particularly in a crisis. It should include legal considerations and parameters specific to crisis situations.

3. Internal employee social media policy.

This policy covers your employees' personal social media usage. Employee social media policies are a significant area of focus for companies, as too many violate employee rights. Be sure to review any employee policy with your legal team. Make sure employees are aware of the situation and clear on their outlets that they do not speak for the company while making sure they have access to information to point people in the right direction.

PR PROTOCOL

When a crisis hits, it's already too late to decide who should do what. While the internal social media policy will guide employees managing social media during a crisis, making sure that a communication protocol is in place to empower social

media to be effective during a crisis is vital.

One of the key considerations that should be addressed is who needs to approve what before it goes on social media. Social media happens in real time, so waiting 24 hours to get an “official post” up is far too long. However, your social media team also can not be updating and addressing every little area along the way. Consider creating some generic posts that could be posted immediately depending on a disaster. Get it pre-approved by everyone involved. You’ll also want to have a website be the source for your posts. You can point back to it and share pieces throughout all your sites.

Additionally, make sure that your social team is kept in the loop throughout a crisis. If a new post is going up, they should be alerted immediately. Finally, avoid feeding into the crisis through social media. Follow basic policies about avoiding disputes on the

platforms, posting any information before it is confirmed and being aware of what others are saying.

BUILDING TRUST

The single biggest factor in crisis-proofing your social media will be your ability to build community trust. This absolutely cannot happen after a crisis has begun. It should take place weeks, if not months, before. Your organization should regularly interact with the public online. Be known as a brand that is ready to be transparent, shares information as early as possible and is interactive. Brands that are helpful during good times tend to find themselves supported during bad times. There’s nothing a brand could hope for more, at least in social media, than to have fans come to its defense when a crisis hits. Building trust, having a plan and establishing expectations will go a long way toward crisis-proofing your social media.

Social Chats Can Backfire, So Have a Plan in Place First

By PR News Editors

Simon Owens, director of digital content at LEVICK, doesn’t mince words when advising his clients on the approach they should take when proactively engaging their audiences via social media channels. “They have to go into it the same way they would go into an interview with a journalist, especially one who isn’t afraid to ask tough questions,” Owens said.

It’s pretty sound advice, particularly in light of a spate of social media snafus involving some recognizable brands in 2014:

- NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell got slammed when he hosted a Twitter chat, using the hashtag #AskCommish. Goodell was

inundated by snide remarks, tasteless jokes and outright insults. Goodell was able to roll with the punches, but an effort to plug the NFL’s draft (which started the day after the Twitter chat) was most likely lost.

- Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley’s “Ask Me Anything” session on Reddit was flooded with tough questions about politics and policy, and the final assessment was that Gov. O’Malley took a beating from his constituents.
- Using the hashtag #mynypd, the New York Police Department’s attempt to engage on Twitter backfired miserably when the department was deluged with pictures of the NYPD

3 PR Tips on How to Use Social Media During a Crisis

By Tracey Weise



Crisis management is complicated and challenging. Throw in some social media platforms with #responserequirednow and the complexity of communicating with your audiences can go from difficult to #thisisinsane. Social media exposes the raw truth in a crisis faster than ever before. This means communication teams can no longer take the time to confer in their command centers, discuss legal implications with their counsel and tweak specific words ad nauseam while crafting a reply. Advanced preparation is essential. Here are a few tips on how to meld social media with crisis management.

- ▶ **Preparing your team.** Make sure your team members, those with the “keys to the kingdom,” have good judgment and know when to take a breath before posting content. Falling into a situation similar to US Air’s horrific #pornographyisnoresponse and #epicfail—stemming from an X-rated image posted on the airline’s Twitter account—will destroy most brands. Make sure you know who has access to all of your social media channels. And be aware of the power they hold.
- ▶ **Controlling your online presence.** Consider how your brand is visually reflected during a crisis. For example, images used on Facebook profiles or Twitter backgrounds may need to be changed or removed in respect to a crisis situation. Every aspect of your brand will be critically evaluated online and offline. Don’t neglect anything anywhere. Be clearly transparent about where and when you will be online and monitoring sites. Either post links to your rules of engagement or clearly define them on your social sites home pages. Date and time stamp all of your crisis communications so that postings stay timely and appropriate, especially if your crisis lasts several days.
- ▶ **Managing the media.** Know that social media, if used effectively, also allows you to control and manage traditional media. By monitoring online chatter you can better prepare for interviews and the potential upcoming (and critical) questions. You can manage media events, immediately correct inaccurate media information and provide audiences with additional technical information. By using platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, you can increase the reach of your message and manage the media that have access to the information you want to provide. It also enables you to increase your transparency and, therefore, trust, with your audiences.

This sidebar was written by Tracy Weise, president of Weise Communications. She can be reached at tracy@weiseideas.com.

using apparent excessive force. According to the *Daily News* more than 70,000 people posted negative comments to the Twitter hashtag.

PR execs can enhance their value if they prepare their senior executives for, and then drive, the responses when a Twitter chat or something similar goes off the rails.

“You have to ask yourself, ‘How are we going to conduct ourselves online?’” said Shonali Burke, president-CEO of Shonali Burke Consulting. “Feedback is useless unless you are actually going to use it. Too many brands engage in selective listening.”

If PR managers want to generate more value from social networking, they have to start wedding their social channels to the top and bottom lines.

“Some brands have been skeptical about social media, which makes them ill-prepared,” Burke said. “If you don’t take it seriously, you don’t prepare. And you must prepare for digital events just the way you would for offline events or interviews.”

To its credit, the NYPD released a statement that seemed to acknowledge the backlash. “The NYPD is creating new ways to communicate effectively with the community,” the statement said. “Twitter provides an open forum for an uncensored exchange and this is an open dialogue good for our city.”

TAKE IT OFFLINE

One of the biggest PR lessons from these episodes is to recognize your detractors and what their intentions are, according to Lisa Denten, social media manager at Cision.

“These public Q&As can bring out jokers and trolls, but it’s more important to keep in mind the value: an open forum with your community,” she said. “There are obvious downsides to negative mentions, but the upside is it gives PR managers insight into the public’s perception of their brand, and the ability to use the feedback to guide it in another direction.”

Whether they are social media trolls looking to start trouble or people with a legitimate gripe about your products and/or services, PR managers need (in most cases) to address detractors in a dignified way, one way or another.

“Not all conversations should happen online,” said Laura Kane, VP of corporate communications at

Aflac (and a member of PR News’ Advisory Board).

She added: “If someone is talking about a specific event—and it’s a complicated issue—it’s OK to thank that person for expressing his opinion and ask to take the conversation offline.”

CLEAR GOALS

Of course, in a social media setting your brand is not going to please everyone. Social media is designed to be freewheeling, without filters. Yet one way to mitigate the naysayers is to choose the social platform very carefully, rather than feeling the need to have a presence on every single social channel.

“When making these decisions you have to be real clear on what you’re trying to achieve because some people are just trying to be cool,” Kane said. “Do you want to share information? Do you want to engage on certain issues? If you can answer these questions upfront, the effort is easier to manage when things go awry.”

How to Use Social Media as a Digital Lifeline During a Crisis

Social media has completely changed crisis communications, forever altering the way organizations both field and respond to people experiencing problems with their products or services. While new technology allows teams to communicate with external parties quicker and more efficiently, these modes of connection have also come bearing new challenges.

John Hallock, VP of corporate communications for CareCloud—a Web-based electronic health records, revenue cycle management and practice management solutions provider—says that social media platforms have become increasingly more important during crisis situations at his company.

In this Q&A with *PR News*, Hallock provides some tips on how social channels can improve your crisis management.

PR News: *What are the advantages of social media over traditional media during a crisis?*

John Hallock: Social media can act as a very fast and effective way to communicate with key stakeholders in the event of a crisis, as many individuals now use various social media conduits as their primary means for getting information. Whether it’s Facebook or Twitter, these social media conduits can be just as effective in terms of broad-based communications as opposed to just issuing a press release.

PR News: *In times of crisis, how do companies involved in healthcare use social media differently? Is it easier or more difficult?*

Hallock: Healthcare is obviously a highly regulated industry, and therefore you need to be mindful of the rules surrounding the use of social media when communicating with providers or patients. So, in this regard, it can be more difficult. But we use social media routinely to communicate with clients and/or learn of various issues impacting them.

PR News: *How are companies like CareCloud helping to stem crises before they start?*

Hallock: CareCloud has a rather extensive crisis or incident response plan in place that we use in the event of different kinds of crises such as if we have network issues or if we ever have any kind of

data breach. We have key internal team members as part of our incident response team, and each have assigned responsibilities in terms of communicating with clients and/or patients when needed. Monitoring social media is a critical component of how we have or would deal with a crisis incident.

PR News: *What's next in social media? What will blow us all away in five, even 10 years?*

Hallock: I think we will see companies leveraging social media to ever greater extents in the years ahead as core elements of their overall communication programs—whether that be during a crisis or just general communication with their various publics. It's clear that more and more people are consuming social media outlets as their primary source of news, and that will require PR practitioners to stay on top of emerging trends.

Don't Avoid Activists on Social Media, Join the Conversation

Social media makes it very easy for consumer activists to get their message out these days. That's a good thing, in that ill-intentioned or thoughtless business leaders can more easily be called to task for shoddy products, poor treatment of employees or other bad practices. But it can be a headache for brand communicators who let themselves become overwhelmed by the messages coming from activists.

Just remember, when activists come knocking, it doesn't have to unfold into a full-blown crisis. There are ways to work with consumer activists on social media that can be beneficial. Gene Grabowski, partner at kglobal, shared some thoughts on how navigate the terrain in PR News' Digital PR & Social Media Guidebook, Vol. 6.

- ▶ When you see a potential crisis stemming from consumer advocates using social media channels, join in the conversation as a participant. Don't try to dominate and control the conversation with consumer activists or you'll play right into their hands.
- ▶ Share information. It's crucial that communicators share data or a point of view with consumer activists that might alter their opinions.
- ▶ Possess a genuine understanding that brands can no longer just toss information over the castle wall to be accepted by consumers. The walls have been breached by social and digital media.
- ▶ It's important to be a good listener and let the disenchanted air their grievances. You just might learn something about your brand, and that could lead to an improvement in how your company does business.

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