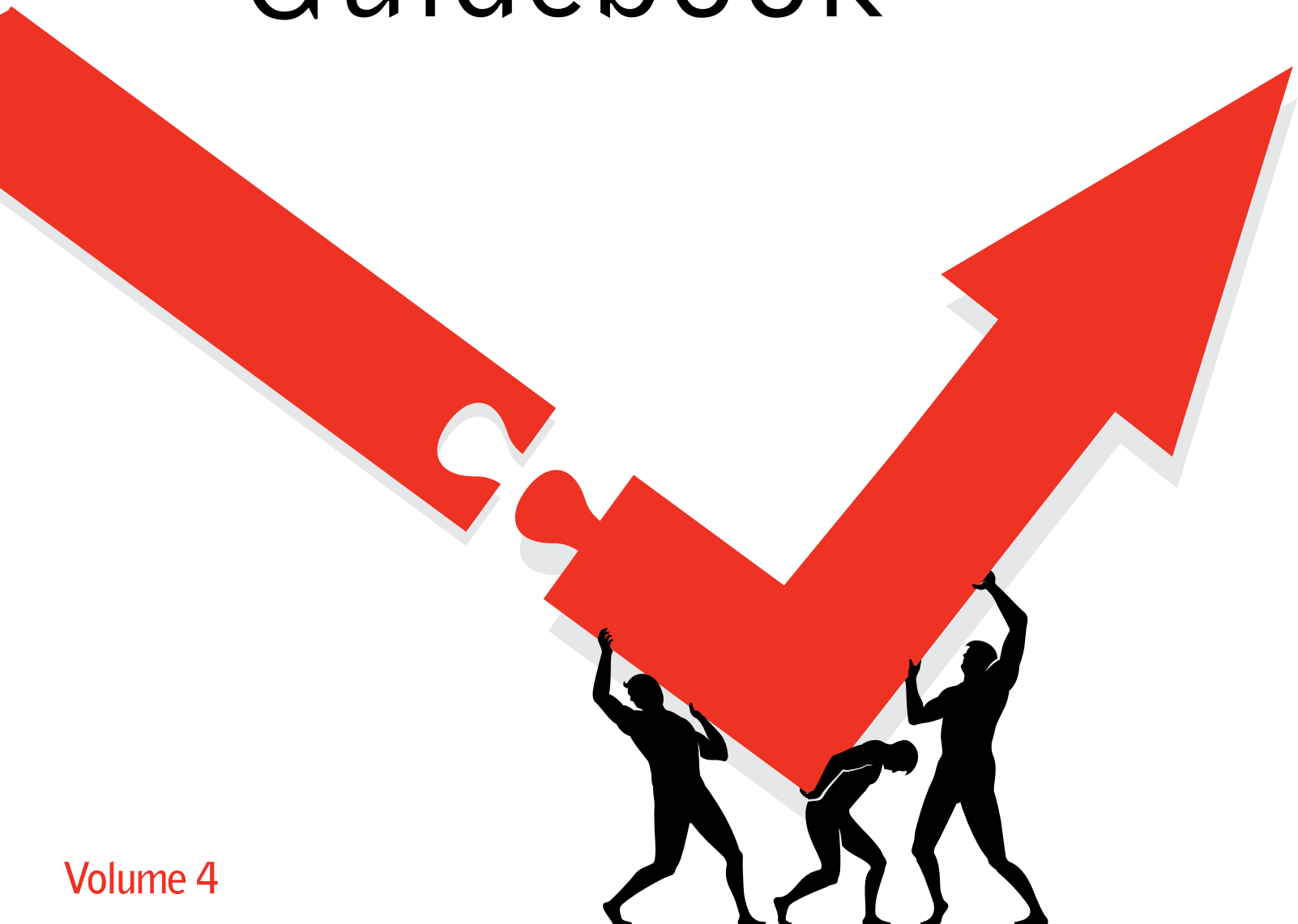


PRNews®

Crisis Management Guidebook



Volume 4



**Access
Intelligence**

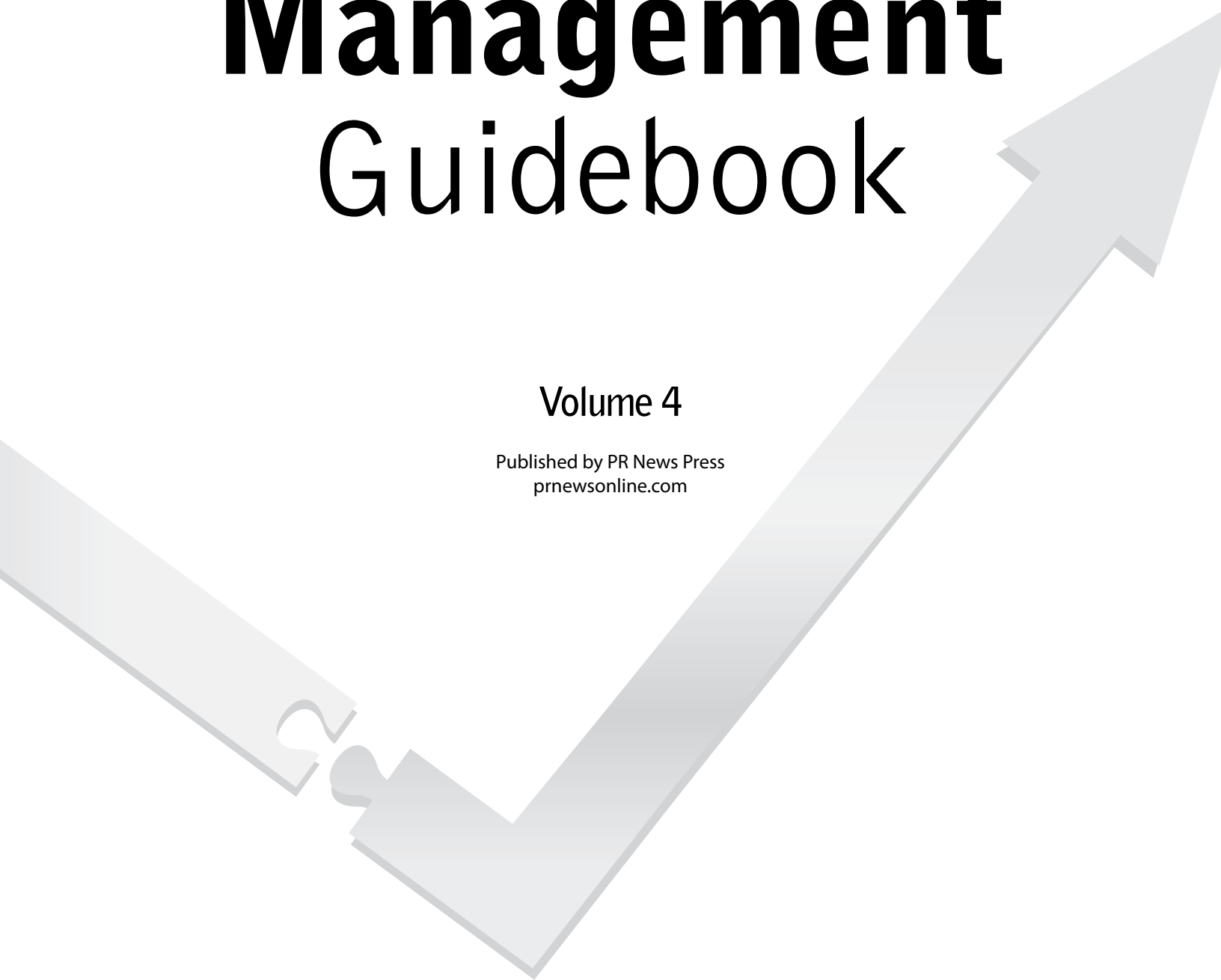
Published by PR News Press • prnewsonline.com

PRNews®

Crisis Management Guidebook

Volume 4

Published by PR News Press
prnewsonline.com



Order Reprint Articles and Extra Copies of PR News' Crisis Management Guidebook

Billing Address

From the **PRNews** Press

Mail to: PR News

4 Choke Cherry Road, 2nd Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

Fax: 301-279-7219

E-mail: clientservices@accessintel.com

CMI: 888-707-5184

Name _____
 Company _____
 Telephone Number _____
 Street _____
 City _____
 State/Zip _____
 Country _____

Article Reprints Designed with Guidebook Logo at the Top:

(Minimum order \$10.00)

Quantity	Price
1-9 copies	\$6.00 each
10-49	\$5.50 each
50-79	\$5.00 each
80-99	\$4.50 each
100-499	\$4.00 each

PR News will design reprints to your specifications.

To Order Bulk Reprints or additional copies of this Guidebook call 888/707-5814.

Shipping Address

Name _____
 Company _____
 Telephone Number _____
 Street _____
 City _____
 State/Zip _____
 Country _____

☐ Home Address

☐ Organization Address

☐ American Express ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Discover

Card Number _____

☐ Check Enclosed (*payable to Access Intelligence in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank.*)

Expiration Date _____

Access Intelligence Fed ID # 521784832

Name on Card _____

Signature _____

Page No.	Title	Quantity	Price Each	Total Price

* Canadian Residents: Add 7% Goods and Services Tax to your order. U.S. Residents: Please add applicable sales tax to shipments to CA, CT, IL, and TN.

Shipping/Handling

Sales Tax*

TOTAL

Shipping and Handling

	Standard Delivery U.S., 48 States	2-Day Delivery U.S., 48 States	2-Day Delivery AK, HI, PR	Delivery to Canada	Int'l Delivery
Reprints					
1-15	\$5.00	\$6.00	\$10.00	\$14.00	\$22.00
16-49	\$6.00	\$10.00	\$14.00	\$16.00	\$34.00
50-99	\$7.00	\$15.00	\$22.00	\$20.00	\$60.00
100-199	\$11.00	\$30.00	\$40.00	\$30.00	\$76.00
200-499	\$20.00	\$60.00	\$60.00	\$50.00	\$168.00

Multiple Copies of This Book

Contact *PR News* Client Services
 at 888-707-5814 for
 Discount Team Pricing.

PRNews

PR News Editor: Scott Van Camp,
svancamp@accessintel.com

Managing Editor: Greer Jonas, gjonas@accessintel.com

Editorial Director: Steve Goldstein,
sgoldstein@accessintel.com

Guidebook Managing Editor: Jessica Clegg,
jclegg@accessintel.com

Events & Special Projects Manager: Regina D'Alesio,
rdalesio@accessintel.com

Director of Marketing Communications:
Amy Jefferies, 301.354.1699, ajefferies@accessintel.com

Director of Circ Marketing:
Carol Brault, cbrault@accessintel.com

Designer: Tara Zaino

PR News SVP/Group Publisher: Diane Schwartz,
212.621.4964; dschwartz@accessintel.com

Division President, Heather Farley

President & CEO, Don Pazour

PR News ADVISORY BOARD

Paul A. Argenti - Tuck School of Business

Ned Barnett - Barnett Marketing Communications

Neal Cohen - APCO

Carol Cone - Edelman

Peter Debrecey - Gagen MacDonald

Chris Hammond - Wells Fargo

Mike Herman - Communication Sciences

Mike Paul - MGP & Associates PR

Deborah Radman - Senior PR Consultant

Brenda C. Siler - Best Communications

Helene Solomon - Solomon McCown & Co.

Mark Weiner - PRIME Research

Mary Wong - Office Depot

PR News BOARD OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dave Armon - Context Optional

Andy Gilman - CommCore Consulting

Bruce Jeffries-Fox - Jeffries-Fox Associates

Angela Jeffrey - VMS

Richard Laerner - RLM Public Relations

Richard Levick - Levick Strategic Comms

Ian Lipner - Lewis PR/YoungPRpros

Katie Paine - KDPaine & Partners

Rodger Roeser - Justice & Young

Lou Thompson - Kalorama Partners

Reid Walker - T-Mobile

Tom Martin - College of Charleston



**Access
Intelligence**

PR News published weekly by Access Intelligence, LLC
4 Choke Cherry Road, Second Floor,
Rockville, MD 20850 USA 888.707.5814

FAX: 301.309.3847
e-mail: clientservices@accessintel.com

New York Editorial Office:
110 William St., 11th Floor, New York, NY 10038
Phone: 212.621.4875 Fax: 212.621.4879

Order Multiple Copies

To order additional copies of this
guidebook call 888.707.5814 or
clientservices@accessintel.com

Article Reprints

To order Article Reprints from this
guidebook call 888.707.5814 or
clientservices@accessintel.com

EDITOR'S LETTER**More Potential for Crises,
More Tools for Crisis Experts**

"Bad news spreads faster than ever before."

That was one of two underlying themes during the 2010 *PR News* Digital PR Next Practices Summit panel, "Smart Digital Tactics During a Crisis." The bad news can start small—a Facebook page launched by a consumer who objects to your company or client's depiction of moms in an ad, a video posted on YouTube of creatures scurrying about in a darkened shop or restaurant, a blog post from someone taking issue with an off-the-cuff comment made by a CEO in a speech to what she thought was a small crowd of 75 people. Never mind something as massive as an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Which brings me to the second underlying theme of the Digital PR Summit panel discussion: There are more ways than ever of establishing transparent, two-way conversations with audiences. The technology and new modes of communication that increase the risk of business and reputational crises are also tools for PR professionals to master as they find new ways to prepare for, manage and, best of all, prevent crises. And that's where this book comes in.

PR News' Crisis Management Guidebook Vol. 4 is your up-to-the-minute toolkit to be used before, during and after crises. In these pages you will find insight, best practices, tips and case studies from crisis management professionals and *PR News'* editorial staff. You'll learn how to distinguish a crisis from a simmering problem, keep top executives on message with the media, manage your online reputation, build a crisis response team, incorporate social media into your crisis plan, manage user content on Facebook, respond to online criticism and much more.

We'd like to give a special thank you to all of our guidebook contributors who lent their case studies and expertise to this fourth edition of the *PR News* crisis guidebook. And to our readers, we know this guidebook will give you that sense of preparedness you seek. Keep us posted on your successes so that your crisis management story can be featured in the next edition of this guidebook.

Sincerely,

Steve Goldstein
Editorial Director, *PR News*

Table of Contents

Editor's Letter	3
------------------------------	----------

Chapter 1—Overview	8
---------------------------------	----------

"Managing Reputational Risk: Be Accountable, Analytical and Prepared" by Harlan Loeb	10
"Climate Change: How to Prepare for the Emerging Front in Crisis Communications" by Robbin S. Goodman.....	13
Ethics and Integrity in Crisis Communications: Finding Your Organization's Ideal Balance" by Peter Morrissey	15
"How to Take a Public Relations Crisis by the Horns" by Ed James	17
"The Severity Scale: Distinguishing a True Crisis From a Simmering Problem" by PR News Editors	19
"After the Dust Settles: How a Crisis Postmortem Can Reanimate an Organization" by PR News Editors.....	22
"Crisis Trend Report: Fewer Fires, But Plenty Of Sparks for Media Coverage" by The Institute for Crisis Management	24

Chapter 2—Media Relations	30
--	-----------

"Crisis Message Training for Leaders: Can the Touchy-Feely Stuff, Stick to Practical Basics" by Naomi Decter	32
"Error-Proof Executive Speech: Curing Leadership Lip Dislocation During a Crisis" by James Lukaszewski	34
"Case Study: PR Helps Solve Zoo Budget Impasse While Curbing Outcry Over Animal 'Sacrifices'" by PR News Editors	36
"Restoring a Small Town's Name With the Media in the Face of a Violent Crime Spree" by Elizabeth L. Boineau	39
"Don't Wait: Plan Your Leadership Strategy for Your Next Crisis—Which May Occur Today" by John R. Brooks.....	42
"Case Study: Credit Card Payments Company Handles Financial Scare With Media Transparency" by PR News Editors.....	45
"Case Study: Message Overboard: PR Comes to the Rescue in a Stand-Off With Somali Pirates" by PR News Editors	48

Chapter 3—Internal Communications52

"Controlling Internal Information by Classifying Influencers Within Your Organization" by Emily Kumler.....	54
"How Communications Professionals Can Remain Aligned With Internal Audiences" by Thomas J. Rozycki Jr.	58
"Five Steps to Managing a Crisis Internally Through Your Company's Intranet" by Kate Rezucha	62
"How to Train Your Company's CEO to Communicate Quickly, and Coolly, in a Crisis" by Joan Gladstone	65
"The Selection, Instruction and (Let's Not Forget) Feeding of a Crisis Response Team" by Susan Diekman	69
"All Hands on Deck: Employees as Brand Ambassadors in a Sudden Utilities Crisis" by Chase Kelley	72

Chapter 4—Reputation Management74

"Comments and Actions May Be Forever, But Messages Can Still Be Controlled" by Cari Brunelle.....	76
"Image Repair Strategies: Lessons Learned From Politicians' Public Apologies" by Dionne C. Clemons	78
"Controlling Brand Image and Perception in the Age of the Instant Image Upload" by Annemarie Marek	81
"Top Guns: Reputation Management and Refinement Strategies From the CorpComm Elite" by PR News Editors	85
"Choosing the Outgoing Message: What We Should Have Already Learned From Nixon" by Tracy Williams	88
"Google Your Reputation: How to Properly Manage and Monitor Your Online Trail" by Elizabeth Lampert and Jonathan R. FitzgarraId	90
"Does Your Reputation Make the Grade?: Testing Your Conduct Code for Cracks" by Gary W. Patterson.....	93
"Case Study: Splash of Environmental Stewardship Recasts a Water Bottle Maker's Tainted Reputation" by PR News Editors	95
"Building and Owning a Corporate Reputation" by Laura Kane	99
"High Stakes: Addressing and Reassuring Your Critical Stakeholders During a Crisis" by Mike McDougall.....	101
After the Deepwater Horizon Catastrophe: What BP and the U.S. Should Do Now" by Larry Furman.....	102
"Image Patrol: Target Misses Mark, While PG&E Connects With Post-Explosion Relief Fund" by Katie Paine	104
"Image Patrol: Practicing PR in the Unfriendly Skies—Pinnacle Air vs. Air France" by Katie Paine.....	106

Chapter 5—Issues Management 108

"Capitalizing on the New Crisis Timeline: Issues Management in the Social Media Age" by Scott Allison	110
"As the Front-Line Responders, Public Sector Organizations Must Be Crisis Ready" by Barbara S. Gainey	112
"Rules of Effective Public-Private Partnerships" by PR News Editors	115
"When Legislators Want Action: Dealing With Political Leaders in the Midst of Public Crisis" by Huw Williams	118
"Fighting Fire With Facts in an Early PR Skirmish Over Subprime Lending" by Michael Flagg.....	123
"Issues Engagement: From 'Respond and Defend' to 'Own and Lead'" by Margaret P. Farley	126
"Case Study: iHOP Gets Egg on Its Face After Humane Society Goes on Digital Offensive" by Shabbir Safdar	129

Chapter 6—Digital Communications 132

"Maximize and Monitor Your Social Media Channels—Before a Crisis Hits" by Stafford Kendall	134
"How Not to Create a Crisis: Suppressing Online Speech and the Streisand Effect" by Shabbir Safdar.....	137
"Spheres of Online Influence: Using Social Media Outreach in a Crisis" by Heidi Sullivan	139
"BP Oil Spill: Digital Lessons Learned" by Liz Mair	142
"Mastering Two-Way Communication: Turn a PR Crisis Into a Social Media Success Story" by Gayle Pohl	144
"How to Deftly Manage User Content on Facebook: When to Engage or Step Back" by Jason Winocour	148
"Five Building Blocks for Managing Your Company's Social Media Program" by Jonathan Spampinato	150
"How Royal Caribbean Communicated Its Return to Haiti Through Social Media" by Cynthia Martinez.....	155
"Virtual Drills: Add Key Digital and Social Media Elements to Crisis Simulations" by Andrew Gilman	158

Chapter 7—Litigation PR 160

"Stake Out Your Power Position for Messaging During a Chapter 11 Filing" by Kathy Scott.....	162
"Keep the 'Head' and 'Heart of a Bankruptcy Filing in Balance for Stakeholder Support" by Scott Tangney.....	165
"Prevent Lawyerly Leaks and Stay on Message" by James Lukaszewski.....	167
"Your Company Has Been Sued: Now What?" by Montieth M. Illingworth.....	169
"Anticipation Litigation: Get Ahead of the Storm With a Rock-Solid Lawsuit Action Plan" by Sherry Treco-Jones.....	171

Chapter 8—The Crisis Plan 176

"Navigate Crises With Opinion Research" by Bill Dalbec.....	178
"All the World's a Stage: Take Your Crisis Plan Off the Written Page and Act It Out" by David Walter.....	182
"Tackling a Crisis via a 12-Step Recovery Plan" by Laurence P. Gottlieb.....	185
"Emergency Rx: 10 Steps to Build Your Healthcare Crisis Communications Plan" by Tori Vogt.....	188
"It's Crisis Time: Managing the First Four Hours" by Rose McKinney.....	191
"The Crisis Process Template: A Roadmap for Team-Oriented Quick Response Time" by Julie Livingston.....	195
"Everybody Into the Fire: Why the First 48 Hours of a Crisis Mean Everything" by Lee Echols.....	201
"Get SMART About Crisis Preparedness" by Scott Farrell.....	205
"In Case of Emergency: 13 Steps Toward Cool Decision Making in the Heat of Crisis" by Krista Umscheid-Ramirez.....	208
"Get Familiar With All Your Industry's Nightmare Scenarios Before Crafting Your Crisis Plan" by Mark Thomas.....	211

Index of Companies Covered 214

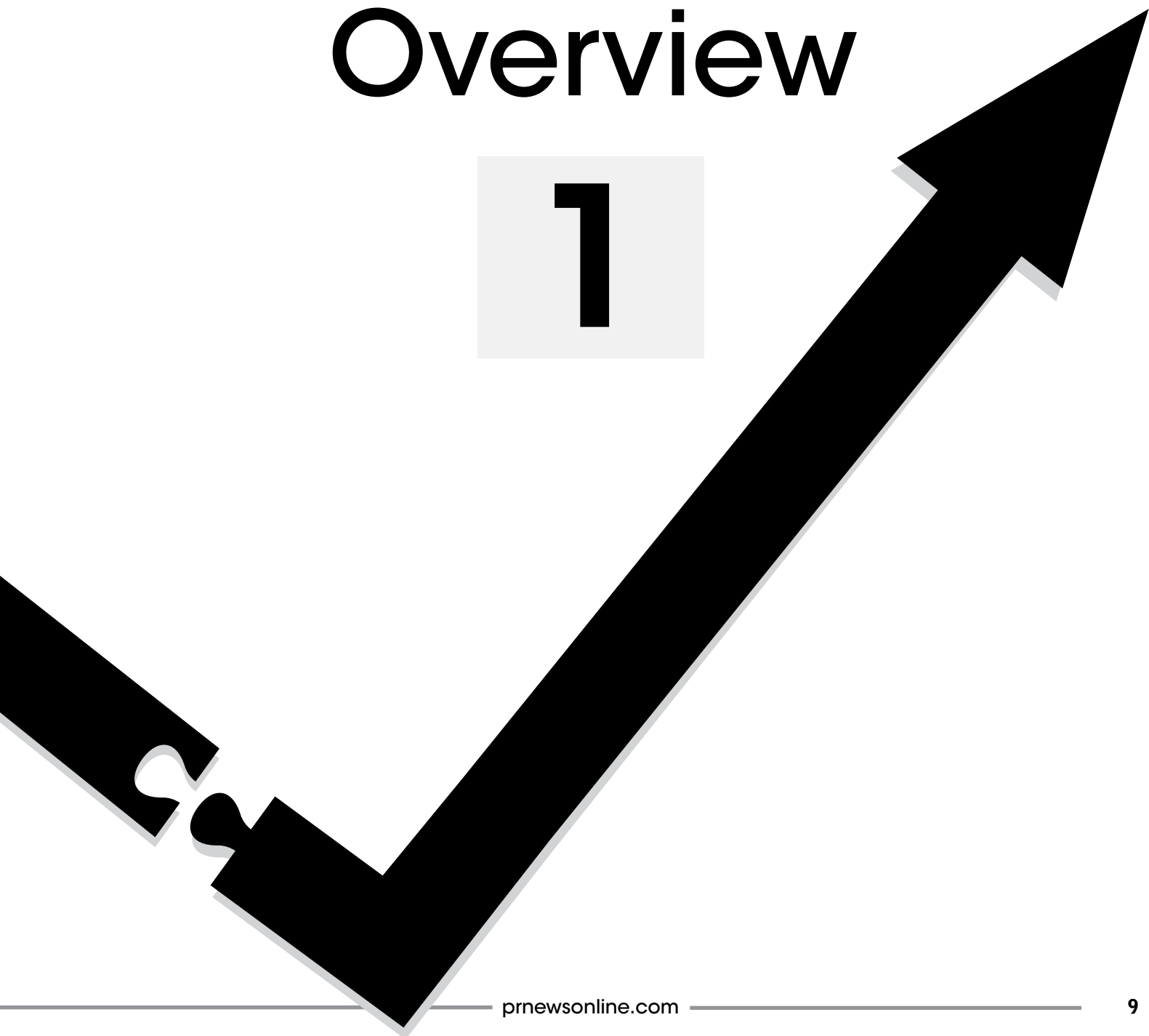


“Organizations want to put a crisis behind them, and many of them stick their heads in the sand after the fact.”

—Bill Dalbec, Senior VP, APCO Insight

Overview

1



Managing Reputational Risk: Be Accountable, Analytical and Prepared

By Harlan Loeb

Crisis happens frequently (see Toyota, Mattel and Lehman Brothers, etc). Yet most companies do little—if anything—to prepare for the damage to their reputation that can result from crises, not to mention the ripple effect of that damage on almost every area of business. The fact is, most organizations react to a reputational crisis as if they're shocked that it was a possibility, let alone an inevitability.

It's not that companies are unaware of risk of any kind. Enterprise risks—including operational, competitive, financial, legal and regulatory and governance—are routinely managed by a senior member of an organization's corporate leadership team who is held accountable for controlling damage. Additionally, metrics that guide planning and management efforts in each of these categories of risk, and "report cards" that review and address actions taken in response, are frequently generated to track risk levels, as well as companion activities to manage them.

But reputational risk is woven into each facet of enterprise risk, whether companies recognize it or not. If, for example, a company's guidance on earnings is misleading, financial and regulatory risk both become reputational risk. Similarly, consumer product recall moves from operational risk to enormous reputational risk in a nanosecond. Moving in the other direction, reputational risks arising out of a high-profile news story frequently trigger government investigations, which lead to regulatory risk. Despite this, most corporate crisis management efforts are fatally flawed from the start. Managing reputational risk is not embraced as a serious corporate priority.

While a variety of reasons may exist for why this is so, it comes down to shortcomings in three key

behaviors: accountability, decisional analysis and preparedness. Companies, however, can take a series of practical steps to counter these.



Contrary to most media training models, risk communication training should concentrate on the personality type and specific nature of the individual.

Step 1: Assign Accountability

An organization's general counsel is responsible for its legal and regulatory risk, and the chief financial officer is responsible for its financial risk.

But in most organizations, no one has the authority, accountability and broad license to manage reputational risk. In other words, no one "owns" it. Toyota's massive recall in 2009 vividly demonstrates this fault line: inconsistent public statements, and competing talking heads indicated that no one at Toyota was in charge of the risk to its reputation. Toyota, like most companies, could have used a chief reputational risk officer ("CRRO"). Attributes and characteristics of such a CRRO would include:

- **Authority.** The CRRO must be able to make final decisions.
- **POV.** The CRRO must have a strategic point of view that embraces reputational risk management as a proactive, dynamic process.
- **Expertise.** The CRRO must have the capabilities, credibility and resources to evaluate enterprise risk holistically and introduce a corresponding reputational risk plan.
- **Gravitas.** The CRRO must have the authority to drive a cultural change that embraces

Crisis Preparedness Test

A decision-making architecture is the critical linchpin for effective crisis management. Frequently, organizations in crisis are stymied by inadequate decisional analysis in their crisis preparedness efforts. This short questionnaire provides a window into your organization's crisis-driven decision abilities.

Strongly disagree	1
Disagree more than agree	2
Agree more than disagree	3
Strongly agree	4

Our corporate structure and culture helps rather than hinders the decisions most critical to crisis management.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Individuals understand their roles and responsibility in our critical areas of crisis risk.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Our crisis management protocols and processes are designed to produce effective, timely decisions and action.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Tested systems are in place to provide information and direction to people in critical decision-making roles.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

We have the strategy and the resources to make good decisions in crisis situations.

1	2	3	4
---	---	---	---

Add up your individual responses.

18+ = You're doing well.

13-17 = Fair, but improvement needed.

9-12 = Organization face real systemic risk.

5-8 = Major action required.

reputational risk management as a corporate priority.

None of this will mean a thing, however, if the CRRO is not included in the organization's risk management efforts.

If, for example, a company is contemplating an acquisition or a divestiture, a rigorous reputational risk analysis including forensics should be embedded into the process. Similarly, in the face of litigation risk, an audit should be done to identify the reputational risks in order to create a mitigation strategy. Once the lawsuit is filed, it's too late to deploy a plan that can comprehensively protect the company's reputation. Likewise, operational risk analysis must include reputational risk as part of the process. Supply chain concerns present immediate reputational and crisis concerns. Companies are held accountable for how and where they source materials. Chinese products and parts, for example, now raise quality and product safety concerns that can affect reputational risk.

Step 2: Institute Decisional Analysis

Crises often are created or greatly exacerbated by an organization's inability to make decisions quickly, usually due to the highly charged emotional environment that a crisis creates and the absence of tested procedures that allow the emotions and strain of a crisis to be channeled into action and constructive public engagement.

Brain studies demonstrate that sound strategic decisions are rarely made in the heat of battle; the military obviously doesn't wait for live fire to train and prepare for combat. It's equally unwise for companies to wait for significant reputational risk or a crisis to occur before making genuine reputational risk and crisis management efforts.

Therefore, to succeed, the CRRO must structure and implement a reputational risk decision-making process and protocol to facilitate needed information gathering, and identify and

dismantle cultural and operational silos that impose positional bias into decision making. This process will provide the opportunity for early engagement to avert crisis.

A sound reputational risk decisional model includes three tenets:

- Reputational-risk-based information gathering and decision making is an ongoing process.
- Effective decisions are made on the basis of recurring analysis and strategic insight.
- Decision-making systems must be informed by data and research and organized so that responsibilities are clear.

Step 3: Take Preparation Seriously

The common CNN image of a corporate executive testifying before a politically charged congressional committee is a C-suite nightmare. Yet in the face of a corporate crisis, the public expects ownership, resolve and action communicated by a compelling corporate executive.

To ensure an executive is at ease communicating in a hostile environment in which information is imperfect and fluid, training is essential. Contrary to most media training models, risk communication training should concentrate on the personality type and specific nature of the individual. Risk communication training is an exercise in teaching persuasion, not confrontation. It should also be an ongoing process that encompasses these elements:

- Thoughtful and comprehensive interviews that allow the trainer to develop a keen understanding of the executive's personality, point of view and natural communications style.
- Questions on controversial issues that do not relate to the executives or the company. This allows the trainer to explore the strengths of the executive and builds skill development

before it gets personal, combative or emotional.

- Slowly, the sessions should escalate both the relevancy and emotion of the training questions to focus increasingly on a challenging corporate issue or event.
- Simulations of events that present increasing discomfort for the executive include representative examples such as an earnings call with hostile questions from analysts, a sabotage interview by an investigative reporter with "smoking gun" information about the safety of new product or a senior managers meeting in which layoffs are being announced.
- Video recording to illustrate the difference between persuasion and confrontation and equip executives with the recognition skills that enable them to identify prompts to dial down emotion and combativeness and ramp up persuasiveness and resolve.

Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation proceedings on Supreme Court nominees provide a useful instruction on how to calibrate persuasion and resolve with emotional intelligence. In response to politically charged and emotionally provocative questions, these jurists respond with calm resolve and a persuasive tone. Executives certainly need not model themselves on Oliver Wendell Holmes, but the very different personalities that have been nominated to the court in the past few years makes it clear that communicating in a risk-laden environment is best played to one's natural strengths.

Simply put, the status quo in crisis management is not sustainable. In a world posing ever-increasing corporate risk, the battle to protect reputation cannot begin too soon. **PRN**

Harlan Loeb is the U.S. director of Edelman's Crisis and Issues Management group, and is professor of Litigation and the Court of Public Opinion at Northwestern University Law School.

Climate Change: How to Prepare for the Emerging Front in Crisis Communications

By Robbin S. Goodman

Mad Men, the hit AMC series about a 1960s ad agency, evokes a workplace culture where outrageous sexism—behavior which even hinted at today would unleash a firestorm of litigation—is standard operating procedure.

In contrasting then and now, the show's writers invite reflection about our profession and the real world. Public relations crises often occur when what was tolerable "then" suddenly becomes unacceptable "now," such as the use of corporate jets by the auto industry, or distributing fat bonus checks to investment bankers.

The next crisis to blindsides companies in this respect may well concern the environment. This is an issue where public opinion has rapidly evolved and where the outcome is still uncertain. Consider that in the past five years:

- Climate change has moved from a disputed hypothesis to a generally accepted fact.
- Al Gore has received the Nobel Prize for educating the world on global warming, top universities have established degrees in global environmental politics and environmental activism has emerged as a coordinated and sophisticated global movement.
- More than 60% of Americans say it is "extremely" or "very" important that Congress take action to address the environment (CNN), and more than 80% have made lifestyle changes to help protect the environment (Gallup).

In short, management needs to ensure that its crisis planning (and its environmental policies)

reflects these volatile conditions. What should be done? Here are some good starting points:

- **Understand two facts of crisis planning:**

1. The court of public opinion is not a court of law; when crisis strikes, often a company is presumed to be guilty.
2. Communications mistakes in the first 12 hours of a crisis are usually irredeemable.



More than 60% of Americans say it is "extremely" or "very" important that Congress take action to address the environment, and more than 80% have made lifestyle changes to help protect the environment.

These two facts explain why planning is so important. Most organizations can anticipate the most likely crises. Given this, basic decisions about the structure of decision making, preliminary messages and external spokespersons can and should be predetermined.

- **Understand your company's risk exposure:**

Some industries are clearly more threatened by environmental crisis than others. But nobody should discount secondary risks. For example, have you evaluated your entire value chain? How could you be damaged by the environmental practices of a key vendor or client? What about the state of your green office practices or your efforts to reduce your overall carbon footprint? Do you know how your key audiences are changing their standards of acceptable practice in

this regard? In short, go to the next level in assessing how you might be at risk.

- **Practice the crisis:** Crises do not respect corporate organizational lines—a toxic discharge could undermine a company’s marketing strategies, its stock price, its supplier relations and its human resource management. This is why, for many companies, scenario planning is an important tool. These kinds of exercises are virtual war games that force management to view and respond to a likely crisis in its full dimensions and to work together with representatives from every constituency.
- **Plan for the worst case:** Professional baseball players swing weighted bats before they hit so that the real bat feels lighter at the plate. Similarly, make sure that your crisis planning includes some heavy lifting exercises. What’s realistically the worst thing that could happen and how would you respond?
- **Go to school:** Study the issues that have confronted other companies in your industry and evaluate which are relevant to you, what their response was, what worked, what didn’t and why. This intelligence can be an invaluable addition to your planning.
- **Forewarned is forearmed:** Companies targeted by environmental activists are often discussed in the blogosphere well in advance of attacks and long before the mainstream media becomes involved. Your company should have a mechanism in place to monitor what’s being said about it—as well as key competitors in your industry—online, and a policy about when and how to respond.
- **Rehearse:** Subject your spokespeople to a rigorous round of mock interviews. Hire

a media trainer or a former journalist to pose questions and challenge the answers. Chances are that your spokesperson will never be asked the types of tough questions that will be posed during such sessions; however, he or she will be thoroughly prepared.

- **Be accessible and err on the side of caution:** During a crisis, especially when companies feel under siege, there is a temptation to hunker down. This is usually a mistake. Management needs to project an image of accessibility during crisis. That doesn’t mean, of course, that communication should be loose or unscripted. In crisis, caution is usually the prerequisite for credibility. If there is any doubt about a fact or development, demonstrate both candor and determination: “We don’t yet know, but we are working hard to find out.” Ultimately, good-faith observers will respect caution; they will find it hard to forgive hyperbole or undelivered promises.
- **Crisis as opportunity:** If a crisis is short-lived and management has presented credible remedies, take the offensive to use media opportunities to strengthen your reputation (for example, your company’s environmental track record as well as involvement in various socially responsible causes). Chances are that media coverage will be fair and balanced.

Having a plan in place (and one that is continuously reviewed and updated) will assist greatly in preparing for such an eventuality and serve to hasten the recovery of your corporate reputation.

PRN

Robbin S. Goodman is an EVP and partner at Makovsky + Co.

Ethics and Integrity in Crisis Communications: Finding Your Organization's Ideal Balance

By Peter Morrissey

The words of the 19th century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer have never been more relevant than in the digital age, whether in peacetime or in crisis—it makes little difference: “Do harm to no one...but rather help all people as far as lies in your power.”

The conflict arises when working on behalf of a client. The client's interests need to be protected; this is particularly true when the client's business comes under threat from an unforeseen set of events or circumstances, placing the brand at risk. The client wants you, as their crisis management and communications counsel, to help them through a crisis, to lower their risk or, at a minimum, to manage their risk. The lawyers, who may likely be working with you on your client's behalf during a crisis, have a clear mandate to ensure their client is not operating afoul of the law and, if they are, their mission adjusts to preparing a good defense for these actions. Behavior that has a negative impact on the public comes with consequences.

Both the lawyer and the public relations counsel share a common cause—to minimize the impact of the event on our client's interests. A client's reputation may be the most valuable asset on or off the balance sheet, and it must be preserved through every possible, legal and ethical means. So, where is the line drawn?

Lawyers may employ every possible means to advocate for their client, while public relations crisis counsel must always consider the third party in the room—society at large. In the classes I teach on conflict resolution and crisis management at Boston University College of Communication, I urge our students to think of themselves as the conscience of the corporation.

Their role involves broad thinking beyond the confines of their client's four walls. The concept of the triple bottom line must be ever present in their thinking—always consider the impact of corporate decision making on people, profits and the environment.



Ethical behavior in a crisis needs to be at all levels of the organization.

In my lifetime, this is new thinking. Most corporations shared the common view that their job above all was to generate a fair return for their shareholders. This thinking is now old thinking. The world has changed. In class, I do introduce the idea that corporations do have a soul. This is not meant in a preachy, spiritual or self-righteous sense but, as future reputation executives, they must think with a higher purpose in mind beyond just profits. Profits can be generated, but once a reputation is compromised, the future of the enterprise is truly in peril.

What differences prevail in a crisis that challenges ethical actions? For one, we have the time constraints. In the past, crisis response was matched to longer news cycles and a public that had minimal sources of information. In the digital age, everyone with a flip phone assumes the role of potential broadcaster. News travels faster today than our means to correct false rumors and innuendo. A big price is paid for any corporation that is not prepared to have their message approved and out on the blogosphere in minutes.

I recently met with a global company from the hotel and hospitality industry. Their goal was to be able to respond to any crisis, anywhere in the

Common-Sense Ethics

Ethics has several meanings. The common-sense meaning is that it pertains to judgments about what is right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous and evil. Another meaning of ethics is that it deals with the abstract ideals of fairness, justice and due process. Some are embodied in law; others transcend the law. These ideals are reflected in several values and rules of moral common sense that people follow in their personal and professional lives:

- **Avoid and prevent harm to others**
- **Respect the rights of others**
- **Do not lie or cheat**
- **Keep promises and contracts**
- **Obey the law**
- **Help those in need**
- **Be fair**
- **Reinforce these imperatives in others**

world within 15 minutes. In some instances, speed can be the enemy of accuracy and thoughtfulness. However, this company arrived at the realization that consumer attention spans and the unrelenting pace of information on the Net made it crucial that their position be known first, before they were placed in a defensive posture. First movers are rewarded in the digital age, by taking the higher ground. Search engines, links and the proliferation of blogs of every stripe make speed a requisite for effective control of the dialogue or, better put—being a participant in a global conversation about you and your company. If you hesitate, the story will be told with or without you.

So, can speed also be the enemy of good? It does not have to be. Ethical behavior is deter-

mined by your actions before and beyond just your words. You must agree in advance about what ideals you represent, what values you have and what code of conduct you will follow. Ethics will serve as your compass and keep you from losing your way.

Ethical behavior in a crisis needs to be at all levels of the organization. While it may appear to be expedient to take short cuts, small mistakes tend to magnify in a crisis and have major reputational repercussions—this is particularly true when you have multiple audiences speaking for the organization. Conventional thinking says that, in a crisis, the organization speaks with one voice. Inconsistencies or contradictions only weaken the message, erode audience trust and should be avoided.

The best defense continues to be a strong offense in a crisis. People of conscience, following what they believe to be right—misguided or not—will blog, chat, tweet their position, constantly. Your job as ethical guardians of your organization is to correct inaccuracies, dispel rumors and be passionate advocates for your client.

Perhaps the best guideline that I can offer for behavior in a crisis I learned many years ago from an Episcopal minister quoting a Catholic nun: “Whenever you say anything—you should always consider, ‘Is what you are saying the truth, necessary and kind?’” Ethical behavior demands a sense of fairness, a desire to be candid and truthful and, just as important, the ability to express empathy to those effected by your actions. In a crisis, the spotlight of the world is upon you, and you will be judged by your actions. **PRN**

Peter Morrissey is an associate professor at Boston University College of Communications, and lectures on the role of reputation management in building brands and organizations. He is also president and CEO of Morrissey & Company, a Boston-based reputation communications and public relations firm.

How to Take a PR Crisis by the Horns

By Ed James

Plan ahead, map out responses, drill home talking points, create disaster contact sheets, etc. We all know how to prepare, yet we're still often caught completely off balance by potential PR disasters: an extremely off-putting video on YouTube, mass consumer dissatisfaction and hysteria stemming from a contest gone wrong or even a poorly worded tweet. In our current environment, who's to tell where and when a crisis will erupt?

Key Tactics

These days, constant vigilance is warranted—but panic is not. In our experiences, we've found that some of the following tactics are effective when dealing with a crisis (avoidance is no longer an option):

- **Own it.** See Letterman vs. Woods. One owned the story, the other...well, didn't. Especially in today's environment, there's no hiding it—bad news is going to rear its ugly head. The options are simple: Be proactive and ensure desired messaging, or be bombarded and succumb to misinformation, innuendo and rumor mongering. Much of this is due to the fact that many of today's information outlets are no longer waiting to print the correct story—they're looking to hit with the first story—and once it's out, it's out. When bad news is inevitable, a proactive approach enables a much better position than one that is reactive.
- **Act quickly, but tread carefully.** As Domino's learned by responding a mere two days after less-than-professional behavior by some of its employees was posted on YouTube that there's no longer ample time for response. While they waited, prepared and remained silent for 48 hours, the video spread

like wildfire and an isolated incident drove consumer consensus about what was going on in Domino's kitchens across the nation. In the age of Internet, response needs to be as close to immediate as possible.



Anything said internally about a potential crisis situation can and probably will get out there.

A positive example of a brand reacting quickly and effectively was Hewlett-Packard's response to an accusation of racism in a YouTube video. The clip claimed that HP's face-tracking software does not recognize black people, and the company issued a timely and, maybe more importantly, honest response—a mea culpa that dampened the impending blazes and stifled the news. With nothing more to report, the story fizzled and the public moved on to the next thing.

To be clear, any information disseminated to any media outlet immediately enters the Google-sphere and is permanently documented. The last thing you want is to be responding to a misstatement made five years ago. So, while a response needs to come quickly, it shouldn't be off-message, incomplete or easy to poke holes in. Be smart. That brings us to the next point:

- **It's the message.** Be simple, consistent and honest. Too often, spokespeople respond one way and, due to either additional information coming out, a poorly worded statement or having too many cooks in the kitchen, they come back to the media at a later time with a different message. This only serves to extend the negative story and makes the initial response look dishonest. Furthermore, it questions the general integrity of the brand and/or person. It's better to respond once

and truthfully. The public is too savvy and acutely aware of when someone is not being entirely up front. In addition, a company representative who doesn't return calls or offers up "no comment" is basically saying we messed up and really don't have anything good to say (and, quite frankly, isn't doing their job). Do comment.

To this point, anything said internally about a potential crisis situation can and probably will get out there. The entire team—everyone from the key spokespeople to the receptionist—is a potential source. The flow of information needs to be tightly and firmly managed.

- **No news is dead news.** These days there's simply no such thing as hiding behind a slow news day. Sarah Palin announced she was quitting as Alaska governor the Friday before July 4 and Tiger Woods crashed into a tree over Thanksgiving weekend—both typical

"dump bad news" days. But do you know anyone that wasn't fully up on the story within the day—if not the hour? Again, it's in your best interest to just get it out there.

- **Keep your enemies closer.** You shouldn't avoid journalists who are critical of your brand. Not allowing access only allows for additional animosity and potential false reporting.

Take the Pain

The bottom line is that news today is put under a much harsher spotlight than even as recently as two years ago. While intense news cycles tend to burn out quickly. It's often best to take the Band-Aid removal approach—one quick rip, deal with the pain and move on. **PRN**

Ed James is the president of Cornerstone Public Relations.

The Severity Scale: Distinguishing a True Crisis From a Simmering Problem

By PR News Editors

Every corporate communications professional has a personal view of what constitutes a crisis. In truth, the vast majority of their definitions are perfectly acceptable when considering extreme situations such as transportation incidents involving casualties or criminal activity resulting in executives sporting handcuffs.

Such incidents typically trigger activation of a specialized communications and operational response teams as well as the implementation of a (hopefully) crisis management plan and a period of high-pressure, high-speed media relations activity. In other words, they're pretty hard to miss.

With such scenarios in mind, most assume, like Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart on the issue of pornography: "I know it when I see it."

The reality is that it's not that simple. With epic disasters as your sole guide, you might just miss that crisis artfully disguised as a routine nuisance or low-intensity problem. Equally dangerous, you might ignore or misdiagnose a seemingly trivial issue and end up converting it into your own personal epic.

As a general rule, effectively dealing with tough situations requires the ability to field a symmetrical response. Minor, localized issues require one level of response and those with devastating, corporate-wide impact require another. Critically important to getting it right is the recognition that the severity scale is not confined to just two choices, normal and crisis. There are many degrees of severity requiring varied levels of attention and action.

Beware of the Nail

Arbitrarily labeling anything beyond the norm of a "crisis" beggars disaster. It breeds a harmful mentality dictating that every atypical incident must be addressed with full crisis response resources. As the old saying goes, when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail. But not every bad word said about a company is a crisis, nor is every bad story cause to adopt a defensive posture.



Not every hiccup will have a lasting impact on share price, reputation or on an organization's ability to do business.

While defining the continuum from problem to crisis is in many ways an evolving effort, there are some standard signs to which communicators can point. It is important to understand the ways a problem can become a crisis if left unaddressed or how an overreaction can prove crippling. And finally, there are ongoing steps communicators can take to evaluate the potency of an issue.

Recognizing Problems for What They Are

Every organization hits speed bumps that cause concern among customers, employees or stockholders. But not every hiccup will have a lasting impact on share price, reputation or on the organization's ability to do business. More

How to Distinguish A Problem From a Crisis

Answering these questions may help you determine if you have a crisis on your hands:

1. Will this temporarily distract us from doing business, or severely impede us for a prolonged period of time?
2. Can the issue be solved through educating constituents on the facts?
3. Has the media uncovered similar issues before? If so, to what extent?
4. How will our customers, employees and investors react to the news?
5. How many people need to be involved in correcting the issue?
6. Do we have the internal capabilities and resources to address the situation?
7. Is there a true legal element involved?
8. Can I end the issue amicably? If not, can I end it quickly?

often than not, such issues will be inconvenient communications challenges and troubling in the short term, but evince little or no lasting damage.

Some examples of communications problems include:

- Less-than-flattering media coverage that, while discomfiting, has little impact on the business or the perceptions and confidence of its core constituencies;
- A handful of upset customers or shareholders opining via message boards or blogs with minimal social influence; and
- Media leaks concerning executive transitions or product developments impacting little more than the announcement timeline.

While situations such as these can be unpleasant, they typically do not require the full-scale response a capable crisis communications team can muster. Experience shows us that heavy-handed reaction to negative media attention often spurs additional negative coverage.

Retractions, corrections, letters-to-the editor and threats often do little more than draw additional attention to a situation and make the company appear defensive. News releases, press conferences and CEO statements can give the impression that the problem is spreading and the corporation is in danger. Regardless of whether or not your CEO or client demands that you “fix it now,” taking your lumps on a particular issue or quietly correcting the record is often the wisest course.

Creating Your Own Crises

Problems, in general, become crises for one of two reasons: A simmering issue is either ignored or undetected until it reaches full boil; or an overreaction to an otherwise relatively innocuous issue sparks, rather than mitigates, a full-blown crisis.

Hewlett-Packard provides a salient example of how overreaction to a problem can turn into a crisis. In 2006, board-level media leaks mutated into an illicit and illegal “pretexting” spy scandal. In order to stem the leaks, the company launched an internal investigation bent on exposing those responsible. But the investigation went too far, as HP’s sleuths illegally obtained phone records of board directors and journalists.

As you would expect, when that story broke, it was exponentially more damaging than the leaky board was in the first place. A media frenzy ensued. In an e-mail obtained by *The American Lawyer* (and eventually turned over to the U.S. Congress), former HP board member Tom Perkins said he resigned from the board because he

thought “the secret spying (which involved a roomful of electronic gear) was a huge overreaction.” The end result was a major management shake-up at HP.

The Evaluation Test

Of course, it’s easier to discern a problem from a crisis postmortem. While PR executives don’t need oracle-like prescience, they do need a process by which they can spot a latent problem before it becomes the reason they don’t sleep for days.

The following are steps communications professionals should take regularly to maintain a watchful eye on their organization’s reputation:

- Talk to organizational leaders to see if the issue at hand is tied to a major corporate initiative or clients. This includes heads of varying business functions, C-suite executives and general counsel. If they are concerned, maybe you should be, too.
- Ask colleagues across all units and functions what they are hearing from clients, customers

or other stakeholders about a given issue.

- Determine if the issue has come up before in your organization, and if it has, what the result was, how it was handled and so on.
- Estimate how long the issue will likely persist. If it’s a day or two, it’s more likely a problem. If it’s longer, you might have a crisis. This will depend on the players involved and how many people or functions at the organization are in the mix.
- Analyze the media. Figure out what media narratives will surround the issue. See how the media characterizes the players in previous similar circumstances: Who were the good guys and bad guys?

To be a credible, trusted counselor to whomever you support, it will be necessary to approach issues with a critical eye—are they problems or crises? A sober evaluation is needed before providing a clear recommendation on strategy and tactics. **PRN**

After the Dust Settles: How a Crisis Postmortem Can Reanimate an Organization

By PR News Editors

With all the talk about how companies act during a particular crisis, what happens after the fact? How diligent are organizations in analyzing their crisis efforts and measuring the effects of a crisis? According to one crisis expert, not as diligent as one might think.

"Organizations want to put a crisis behind them, and many of them stick their heads in the sand after the fact," says Bill Dalbec, senior VP of APCO Insight, a group within APCO Worldwide.

"It's not about 'how could we have communicated better' during the crisis," says Dalbec. Serious post-crisis reflections should be about making needed changes in the organization that will prevent something like it from happening in the future, he says.

Harlan Loeb, U.S. director of Edelman's Issues & Crisis group, agrees with Dalbec's post-crisis goal—it's an opportunity for change. "Companies that do a crisis postmortem have a great opportunity to say, 'We've reached the nadir and we need to do a complete reset,'" says Loeb (see his article in this chapter).

Risky Business

To help with a reset, says Loeb, organizations should explore an area in which many still don't tread: risk management. An organization's reputation—one metric that top leaders look at closely—is tightly tied to risk management principles. "Competitive, operational or technical issues, which are key factors in risk management, all can affect reputation," says Loeb. "And you can't commoditize risk management. It has to be strategically embedded everywhere in an organization."

Taking Measures

While organizations need to seize opportunities post-crisis, there has to be some quantifiable data that can help assess the damage done. Dalbec says that a couple of measures are key: reputational metrics, financial metrics and how long it takes an organization to return to the same financial levels as before.



"Whenever there's an incident, we do an after-action. It's a process that involves all areas of the company."

—Cynthia Martinez, manager of corporate communications, Royal Caribbean

Dalbec puts a great focus on the reputational aspect with his clients. "How much has your brand equity taken a hit?" he asks. "Brand equity is your currency, and you have to spend some of it to get it back." Thus, a key post-crisis strategy in Dalbec's arsenal is to amass qualitative data by talking to key stakeholders.

It's a strategy that the American Red Cross used shortly after its Liberty Fund crisis just after 9/11. After the terrorist attacks, the organization had collected nearly \$600 million in donations, which the public thought would go to people affected by the attacks. A plan to steer more than \$200 million dollars of the fund toward preventing future attacks and for improving the Red Cross' readiness set off a public firestorm.

"So, afterwards the Red Cross spoke to donors and found out that the public had no idea how the Red Cross collected funds after large-scale disasters," says Dalbec. The result? The organization

A Crisis 'Pre-Mortem' Could Help Prevent a Postmortem

If your company has suffered a crisis, a postmortem is an essential part of the recovery process. But according to Mark Layton, global enterprise risk services leader at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, this same exercise, conducted before an adverse event, can be more valuable. "It's imperative that the key executives periodically get together to discuss risk and strategy," says Layton. Here are three of Deloitte's risk intelligence principles:

1. There is a common definition of risk that is used consistently throughout the organization.
2. A common risk framework, supported by appropriate standards, is used throughout the organization to manage risks.
3. Key roles, responsibilities and authority relating to risk management are clearly defined and delineated within the organization.

established Donor Direct, a program in which donors can stipulate where their money is spent.

Details, Details

The gold standard of a rigorous post-crisis analysis, says Loeb, is the military model of risk analysis. "You see this process within highly regarded militaries around the world," he says. "Even in conflicts that aren't prosecuted well, there is always a postmortem, a detailed look at what happened from every stakeholder's perspective."

This military mind-set is utilized by Royal Caribbean Cruises, says Cynthia Martinez, manager of corporate communications at Royal Caribbean. "We have many people here that were in the military or the government," says Martinez. "Whenever there's an incident, we do an 'after-action.'" It's a process that involves all areas of the company.

An after-action was launched in the wake of Royal Caribbean's Haiti crisis, which began when the cruise line decided, post-earthquake, to continue docking its ships in Labadee, a port 100 miles away from Port-au-Prince. The company was widely criticized for the decision. (See Martinez's full story on Royal Caribbean's crisis management strategy in Chapter 6.)

"We start off with a situational overview to make sure everyone is on the same page," says Martinez. "Then we identify three things that worked during the crisis, and three things that didn't work."

One positive from the Haiti incident, continues Martinez, was that the communication with passengers worked well. One negative: An initial decision was made to make a big push in explaining to the public why ships were going to Labadee.

Later, it was decided to let the story play itself out. "In the after-action, we concluded that the outreach should have continued," says Martinez.

Ultimately, performing a postmortem on a crisis helps an organization on a number of fronts, says Loeb, including:

- Helps discover which departments aren't communicating with each other
- Uncovers executives who might not be media-trained effectively
- For global companies, cultural differences may be uncovered. "Toyota is a good example of a cultural breakdown," says Loeb.
- Encourages creative thinking. "People have come up with really good things postmortem," says Loeb.

And public relations is key in the postmortem process: "If you look at strategy at one end and execution on the other, the gap between them is almost always communication," says Loeb. **PRN**

Crisis Trend Report: Fewer Fires, But Plenty Of Sparks for Media Coverage

By the Institute for Crisis Management

The overall number of business crises were down significantly in 2009, and more in line with the years 2000 and 2004, but that did not mean it was a less tumultuous year, according to the Institute for Crisis Management's annual analysis. The year began with the beheading of a Chinese coed on the Virginia Tech Campus, days after she arrived in this country to begin classes, and just two years after the mass slayings on the same campus.

That was followed with big bank failures, a 32% increase in the number of bankruptcies in the United States, major commercial airliner crashes, the failure of 140 American banks as a result of loan defaults, bad management and the recession and recalls of drugs, cars, baby strollers and peanut butter.

The decrease in the number of crises reported (see chart below) did not mean the media was paying less attention. In fact, the media covered some of those "big" economic crisis stories in

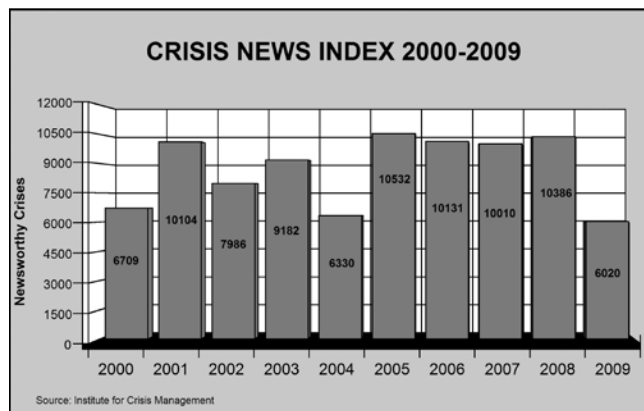
greater detail than ever. And the impact of the Internet and social media cannot be discounted. Stories move quickly on the Internet, forcing mainstream media to pay attention to issues and report on them when they might not have before.

The decrease in the number of crises reported did not mean the media was paying less attention.

The economic crisis, with all its subsequent stories—Madoff, Goldman Sachs, AIG, Lehman Brothers, big and small bank failures, upheaval in top management, outlandish multimillion dollar bonuses to heads of failing companies and debate over what role the federal government and taxpayers should play—dominated the front pages of newspapers, not only in the U.S. but around the world, and filled hours of cable news every day.

Nearly 1.5 million consumers and businesses filed bankruptcy petitions in 2009, the largest number of filings in seven years. But for all the bad news, there was a little good news for lawyers. Many law firms had to hire additional staff to handle the glut of filings.

Of course, we know the background. The first hint of a looming massive economic crisis began brewing in the subprime market in late 2006, but the real bad news began to make headlines in the third and fourth quarters of 2007. And the multifaceted economic crisis spread to almost every corner of the world and every type of for-profit and not-for-profit organization in 2008 and roared on into 2009. Even *Reader's Digest* filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.



The Institute for Crisis Management measured significantly fewer crises in 2009 than in the previous four years.

ICM's Definition Of a Business Crisis

Any problem or disruption that triggers negative stakeholder reactions that could impact the organization's financial strength and ability to do what it does.

The economic crisis did not erupt suddenly and unexpectedly. It had been smoldering for years, and signs of impending disaster had been unrecognized or ignored by top executives and their boards.

The 2009 data shows the number of smoldering crises were up significantly, and there were fewer sudden crises, but the average over the past 10 years still shows that two-thirds of all crises are the smoldering type, and most could have been spotted and prevented. Damage could have been minimized for those that could not have been prevented.

CEOs were bailing or getting the boot in record numbers in 2008, and some big names in big financial institutions and the automobile industry

were shown the door in 2009, including the CEOs of General Motors and auto lender GMAC.

Nearly 4.3 million Americans lost jobs in 2009, including a number of CEOs, and some whose companies took federal bailout funds.

Just more than half of all crises are caused by someone (or several someones) in management (see chart below), and that number was up in 2009 over 2008 and 2007.

The CEOs of the top two meat producers in the U.S. resigned in 2009, and the chairman of India's Satyam Computer Services quit in the wake of a management fraud.

The FBI confirmed it conducted more than 530 investigations of corporate fraud as a result of the financial meltdown, including 38 cases involving some of the biggest names in corporate finance.

Defects and Recalls Double

The percentage of defects and recalls rose from 4% of all crises in 2008 to 8% of all crises in 2009.

One hundred and twenty-five food products ranging from ice cream to candy to pet food and even some Asian foods were contaminated with salmonella, and it came from one source—peanut butter paste from the Peanut Corp. of America. As news coverage intensified, a criminal probe was launched. The owner, Stewart Parnell, went into seclusion and the company padlocked its doors and filed for bankruptcy. Nine people died and at least 500 people became ill after eating the contaminated foods.

Victims of the contaminated peanut butter paste included Kellogg, NutriSystem, PetSmart and Keebler, among 66 other food companies that used PCA paste.

Kroger recalled hamburger, mayonnaise and chicken wings among other items. Fisher-Price recalled lead-tainted toys, and other companies recalled everything from strollers to cribs,



Executives and managers were responsible for more than half of all crises, on average, while employees are credited with having caused 30% and outside forces triggering the remaining 19%, on average, during the past 10 years. Managers and outside forces caused more crises in 2009 than in the preceding two years.

bassinets, high chairs, baby food, flammable women's robes, Nokia battery chargers, Vicks nasal spray, cat food, Zhu Zhu Pets, some swine flu vaccine, Nestlé cookie dough products, Hydroxycut diet pills, Tylenol arthritis caplets and nasal spray Zicam cold remedy. State Farm Insurance Company even recalled 800,000 promotional teddy bears after reports that a plastic eye came off of one and a child put it in her mouth.

AM2PAT Inc. sold \$7 million worth of bacteria-contaminated Heparin and saline syringes to hospitals, infecting hundreds of patients and killing at least five. The CEO of the company fled the U.S. to his native India and two former employees pleaded guilty for their part in shipping contaminated syringes.

In September, Tylenol recalled more than 20 children's medications. That problem was to rear its ugly head again in April 2010. Throughout 2009 General Motors and Ford recalled cars, trucks and SUVs for various fixes, but Toyota garnered the most headlines. In January 2009, the Japanese manufacturer recalled 1.35 million cars for seat belt and exhaust system problems. But by November, Toyota had to recall another 3.8 million vehicles for floor mat and sticking gas

pedals. That story was to get even worse in the early months of 2010.

Those were the issues that got worldwide negative attention for Toyota, but hardly the only crises the world's largest automaker faced in that 12-month period.

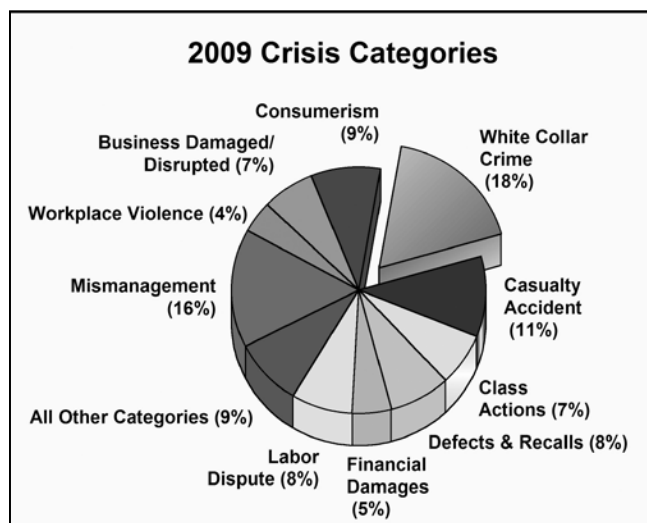
The international car company lost money for the first time in 59 years, and critics began to hammer away at the company's "quality" image. And plaintiff's attorneys began filing lawsuits that did not get much media coverage outside of California, but certainly distracted company management.

Class-action lawsuits went after Toyota, alleging the company covered up evidence that some of its cars were particularly deadly in roll-over crashes. Auto industry writers were calling on Toyota to "come clean" and comparing it to Ford and the infamous Pinto design flaw that exposed the gas tank to lawsuits and still more lawsuits. Still uniquely American, lawsuits exacerbate many organizations' crises.

In 2009, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops reported the U.S. Roman Catholic Church has paid more than \$2.6 billion in settlements and related costs from sex abuse lawsuits since 1950.

Another big name, Eli Lilly, was accused of pay and promotional discrimination against African-Americans, and the plaintiffs sought class-action status at midyear. More than 500 female engineers and managers at the Rolls-Royce jet engine plant in Indianapolis sought class-action status in a sex bias lawsuit against the company. A former Miss West Virginia won a \$7.2 million verdict against nine individuals and Internet sites that, she claimed, tried to sell pornographic videos they wrongfully claimed included her.

Lawsuits come in all shapes and sizes, and most organizations facing legal action need a planned crisis response. A Pizza Hut franchisee in north Mississippi was hit with a \$1.1 million suit at



While there was no overwhelmingly dominant area of crises in 2009, White Collar Crime (18%) and Mismanagement (16%) were the top areas.

midyear, filed by 15 members of a local church. They all got sick after eating at the restaurant.

Not all big settlements result from lawsuits. Some of the biggest cash outlays come as settlements to federal criminal and civil investigations. Eli Lilly agreed to pay \$1 billion in a case tied to its anti-psychotic drug Zyprexa.

The company agreed to plead guilty to one charge, although it would not admit to additional allegations in a related civil investigation. Eli Lilly was accused of marketing the drug to patients for treatment of illnesses the drug was not approved for.

Sudden Crises

A smoldering crisis is a problem that starts out small; someone within the organization should recognize the potential for trouble and fix it before it becomes a public issue. A sudden crisis is just that—out of the blue. While smoldering crises continued to account for the majority of business and organizational issues, 2009 had its share of big headline sudden crises.

The death toll in an Indonesian earthquake topped 700, while a strong quake in central Italy killed 207 and left more than a thousand injured. There were other major quakes with fewer casualties in other parts of the world, but still major disruptions to business, schools and people.

Back-to-back typhoons killed more than 600 and disrupted life in the Philippines in September and October. Nearly 200 died after a “monster” wave swept away villages and people in Samoa and typhoons wreaked havoc on Taiwan and China. Another 200 died when a cyclone swept across eastern India and Bangladesh.

BP was still making news in 2009 from a refinery explosion that killed 15 in 2005. The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration ordered a record \$87 million fine against BP for

ICM’s Top 10 Most Crisis-Prone Businesses in 2009

1. Banking
2. Security Brokers
3. Aircraft Industry
4. Investment Companies
5. Petroleum Industry
6. Pharmaceutical Cos.
7. Automobile Manufacturing
8. Insurance Industry
9. Software
10. Food service

(Ranked by percentage of database)

Note: All categories were in the top 10 crisis-prone businesses for 2008.

failing to correct safety hazards at its Texas City, Texas, refinery. A six-month inspection found the company had hundreds of violations of an earlier agreement resulting from the 2005 blast. (And, of course, BP continued to make news in 2010.)

To further prove the point that a crisis can cause harm for a long time, a fire and explosion in a hazardous waste facility in Apex, N.C., in 2006 made more news in July 2009, when a federal judge fined EQ Industries \$7.8 million for the harm the disaster caused to residents and businesses in the small community. The company had already lost its operating permit.

Coal mine tragedies will take a significant place in the 2010 Annual ICM Crisis Report, but there were major mine disasters in 2009, also; 74 Chinese miners died in a gas explosion in coal mine early in the year, then another 87 died in November coal mine blast in Northern China.

Meanwhile, in the U.S., a record low 34 miners died in separate smaller incidents.

The workplace was just as dangerous above ground; 64 workers in a hydroelectric plant in Russia either drowned or were crushed in an explosion that also disrupted electric power to several towns and major factories.

Bangladesh's biggest shopping mall was hit by fire, killing seven and injuring at least 50 more.

More crises struck a U.S. steel plant; construction sites; a wood furniture factory; the Slim Jim snack factory in Garner, N.C., where three people died; and a bakery where a worker was electrocuted.

Top 10 Crisis-Prone Industries

All 10 of the most crisis-prone industries have been on the list off and on for years (see ranking on previous page). There were no surprises.

Banking captured the most negative news coverage in 2008 and again in 2009, while security brokers moved up a notch from third to second in the same time span.

The aircraft industry moved up from ninth to third and investment companies came in ahead of petroleum companies, which dropped one spot from the year before.

The food and restaurant sector dropped from second place in 2008 to 10th in 2009.

Meanwhile, there were a few repeats on the top 10 most crisis-prone business list, but most of the 2009 top negative news generators were new to the list, and all of the newbies were in finance, software and food service. **PRN**

This article was provided by the Institute for Crisis Management, which offers crisis training, research and certification.

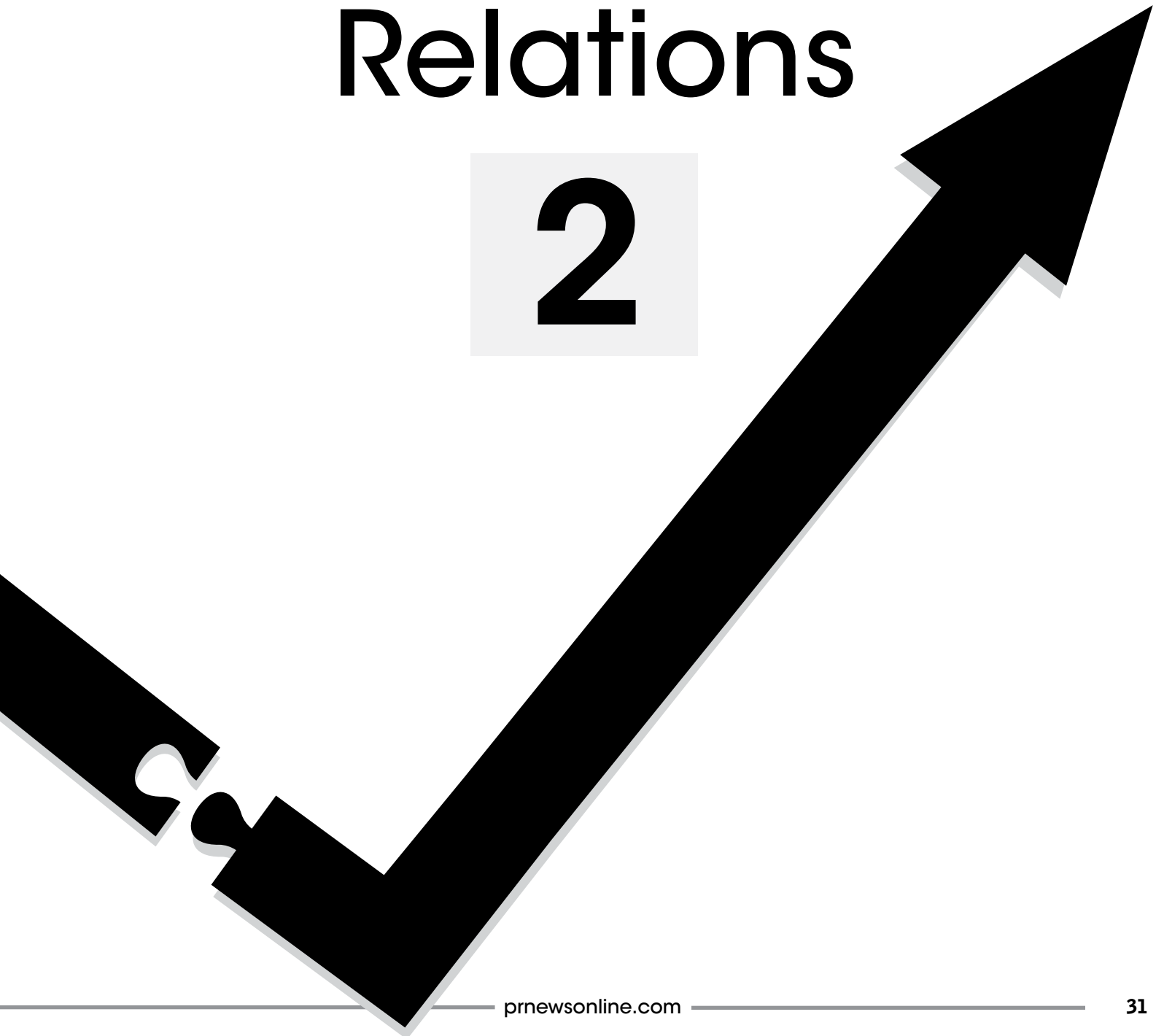


“Information and message control is key: Keep people in the loop to the extent that you can, but be selective about who you disseminate information to.”

—James Christodoulou, President and CEO,
Industrial Shipping and Enterprises Corp.

Media Relations

2



Crisis Message Training for Leaders: Can the Touchy-Feely Stuff, Stick to Practical Basics

By Naomi Decter

When President George H.W. Bush blurted out “Message: I care” during the 1992 presidential primary campaign, and when BP board chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg earnestly announced outside the White House in June 2010 that “we care about the small people,” anyone who has ever practiced crisis communications knew exactly how those two unfortunate phrases entered the brain and then moved to the lip.

Here’s what happened: message training gone haywire. During training it was drilled into their heads over and over that one of their objectives was to convince John Q. Public that caring about John Q. Public was what got them going every morning. In other words, “Message: I care.”

Facing down a crowd of hostile reporters, after what must have been a very uncomfortable sit-down with President Obama, Svanberg’s brain scanned all the millions of words that had been thrown at him during training and came up with the off-kilter, condescending and clearly insincere “small people” nugget. In the case of Mr. Bush, it’s been reported that someone actually provided him with a message reminder in the form of an index card bearing the offending phrase; and he simply spoke it word for word.

Of course, both must have had message training. Even back in the dark days before Twitter, Facebook and the iPhone, you didn’t catch too many politicians out on the campaign trail without backup from their focus groups, joke writers and message experts. And nowadays, company leadership is hardly allowed out the front door of headquarters without some kind of training.

I don’t pretend to be a campaign expert, though I like to think that I wouldn’t have handed my

candidate such a silly piece of paper. But I have had considerable experience helping companies communicate during and after a crisis and can offer some wisdom about how to minimize the risk. I say minimize because there is absolutely no way to guarantee against an embarrassing brain-to-lip glitch. You just can’t anticipate, much less prevent, every trick the human mind will play on its owner in the heat of the moment.



No matter how brave you are, or how easily top executives become like putty in your hands, your training is not going to be helpful if it isn’t based on good messages.

Nevertheless, a company in crisis has no choice but to take that risk. Someone has to speak publicly, and in the case of a serious crisis like BP’s, that someone has to be someone at the very top.

Here are a few tips on how to make this process as painless and effective as possible.

Be Prepared

It’s a personal pet peeve how much time (and money) company spokespeople, including top management, waste getting trained for crises (mostly inspired by 9/11) that just aren’t likely to happen—or, even if they did, are not likely to damage the company’s reputation. Elaborate crisis plans have been written, message maps have been created and exercises have been carried out based on this type of scenario. The CFO is captured by the Colombian drug cartel;

top management is held hostage by terrorists in a hotel conference room at the annual meeting; Martians invade and take over the bodies of the entire legal department. (OK. I made that last one up, but not the first two.)

Better to spend the serious time on less far-fetched scenarios, such as the possibility that somewhere, someday, when they least expect it, a major oil company might face the awfulness of a drilling accident that would spew millions of barrels of oil into a body of water, bringing down the wrath of the people who live nearby and of their elected officials. By serious time I mean regular, required, undramatic sessions during the calm before or between the storms. By creating less far-fetched scenarios I mean taking a clear-eyed, brutally honest look at company policies, products and/or activities that could lead to harm, death and/or shame. Which leads directly to the next point.

Be Brave

Let's face it—the people who run companies are scary. They are also always very busy, usually highly self-confident and frequently impatient with direct challenges. These are positive qualities for being a successful business leader, but they don't make for the most trainable subject. Add to that the fact that being under assault from all sides during a crisis usually makes a CEO quite annoyed, if not royally peeved, and you've got almost a perfect storm for a training nightmare. All of this means that someone involved in the training is going to have to be able to speak frankly to those very powerful, self-confident, scary, angry people and push them hard—to hear ideas they'd rather not hear and to recognize training as important work that they should take the time out of their busy schedule to attend to.

But no matter how brave you are, or how easily they become like putty in your hands, your training is not going to be helpful if it isn't based on good messages. So...

Be Smart

Of course, you can't communicate your way out of a major crisis. But at the very least do no harm. The words you provide must be carefully thought out (thus the need for non-last-minute thinking before there's a crisis). And they must be few; throwing too many words out there increases the risk that some of them will come back to bite you. And, please, don't be ridiculous, as in BP's "small people." How nice. When's the wedding?

The small people aren't stupid. We know perfectly well that it is not the job of the chairman of a major corporation to love and care for us. We don't even want them to. But we do want them to take seriously their responsibility to keep their products/business activities from hurting us whenever possible—and to do something about it when they do hurt us. So, when they start telling us about how much they care, instead of the concrete steps they're taking to address the problem, it only makes us madder.

Whatever happened to that old stand-by crisis response?: 1. accept responsibility; 2. apologize; 3. explain how you're going to fix the problem.

Time to get back to that sensible, practical advice, ban the word "care" from the corporate vocabulary—and leave the touchy-feely stuff to our life coaches. **PRN**

Naomi Decter is senior vice president at Beckerman Public Relations. She has more than 10 years of experience in corporate crisis and litigation communications.

Error-Proof Executive Speech: Curing Leadership Lip Dislocation During a Crisis

By James Lukaszewski

It is called lip dislocation. Even the most talented leaders suffer from this problem, especially when the situation is emergent, urgent and victims are being created.

The interesting thing about this personal problem is that when you examine the lip dislocation of a variety of important people, a pattern emerges that is preventable.

Here's a sample problem: Massey Energy chairman and CEO Don Blankenship said in *The Wall Street Journal*, "I've been here for 28 years and we know we have the best of safety programs and the best of safety procedures." Then Blankenship (in whose Upper Big Branch coal mine in West Virginia 29 miners perished on April 5, 2010) moved into the pattern so frequently seen when important people are in the heat and glare of public exposure: Their lip dislocation begins, caused by the failure to engage the brain before speaking. Here are the symptoms:

- **Denial:** Refuse to accept the fact that something bad has happened, and that there may be victims or other direct effects that require prompt public acknowledgement.
- **Victim Confusion:** Irritable reaction to reporters, angry neighbors and victims' families when they call asking for help, information, explanation or apology. "Hey! We're victims, too," is the wrong response.
- **Testosterosis:** Hit back, rather than deal with the problem. Refuse to give in and refuse to respect those who have a difference of opinion.
- **Arrogance:** The opposite of empathy. Reluctance to apologize, express concern or

to take appropriate responsibility because, "If we do that, we'll be liable," or "We'll look like sissies," or "We'll set a precedent."

If rebuilding public and victim trust and confidence, and reducing the potential for continuous adverse media coverage, are the goals, intentional communication is the optimal strategy.

- **Search for the Guilty:** Shift blame anywhere you can while digging into the organization, looking for traitors, turncoats, troublemakers or those who push back.

However, intentional communication (putting the brain in gear) can modify and mediate even the most devastating circumstances.

If rebuilding public and victim trust and confidence, and reducing the potential for continuous adverse media coverage, are the goals, intentional communication is the optimal strategy:

1. Candor

- Truth with an attitude
- Disclose, announce early
- Explain reasoning and reasons, immediately
- Discuss options, alternatives being considered

2. Truthfulness

- Truth = 15% facts and data, 85% emotion and perspective
- Point of reference always matters more than facts

- Unconditional honesty, from the start

3. Apology

- Verbalized or written statement of personal regret, remorse and sorrow
- Acknowledge personal responsibility for having injured, insulted, failed or wronged another
- Humbly ask for forgiveness in exchange for making amends and more appropriate future behavior

4. Responsiveness

- Answer every question; avoid judging the questioner
- Every concern or question, regardless of the source, is legitimate and must be addressed
- Avoid taking any question personally

5. Empathy

- Actions that speak louder than words
- Actions illustrate concern, sensitivity and compassion
- Behave as though it was happening to you

or someone you care about

- Let actions speak for themselves

6. Transparency

- Your behavior, your attitude, your plans, even your strategic discussions must be unimpeachable, positive and sensible
- Families should be comfortable reading about your actions, decisions and discussions on the front page of tomorrow's newspaper or blog
- No secrets (gaffes and stupid stuff always come out)

7. Clarification and Correction

- Relentlessly correct and clarify the record
- Prompt, positive, constructive elaboration of the facts preempts critics, calms and empowers employees and supporters

Keep these steps in mind the next time your leader comes down with dreaded lip dislocation.

PRN

Crisis manager James E. Lukaszewski is CEO and chairman of The Lukaszewski Group.

CASE STUDY

PR Helps Solve Zoo Budget Impasse While Curbing Outcry Over Animal ‘Sacrifices’

By PR News Editors

On July 11, 2009, a war between government and a private nonprofit organization hit Boston, setting off fireworks that might have rivaled those in the Battle of Bunker Hill. The governor of Massachusetts, Deval Patrick, announced that state funding of Zoo New England (ZNE), the private corporation that operates Franklin Park Zoo in Boston and Stone Zoo in Stoneham, Mass., would be drastically reduced—from \$6.5 million to \$2.5 million.

Depending on state funding for 60% of its operating budget (as is the case for most U.S. zoos), ZNE’s CEO, John Linehan, knew this was an unsustainable cut. In a public statement that repeated a letter sent earlier to legislative leaders, Linehan said that the budget cuts might cause the closure of both zoos, and stated that 20% of the displaced animals probably could not be located to other zoos, “requiring either destroying them or the care of the animals in perpetuity.”

The next day, July 12, the *Boston Globe* ran a front-page second day story repeating the budget cuts and the zoo’s position:

“Franklin Park Zoo would have to lay off most of its 165 employees in addition to finding homes for more the 1,000 of its animals if it were to close. If zoo officials fail to find places to send the animals, they said state authorities might have to decide whether to euthanize as many as 20% of them, a prospect that disturbed many visitors yesterday.”

It was also disturbing to animal lovers across the country. National media outlets quickly picked up the story, from TV shows like *The Today Show*,

Inside Edition and *Entertainment Tonight*; national print media including *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*; and all Massachusetts outlets both print and electronic—including a huge dose of talk radio. This created a public relations disaster for an institution dependent on both tourism and state funding. The situation soon worsened when Gov. Patrick accused ZNE of using scare tactics.

“We were caught unprepared in what became a firestorm.”
—John Linehan, CEO, Zoo N.E.

As the crisis grew in intensity, Zoo New England struggled to get a communications grip. “We were caught unprepared in what became a firestorm,” says CEO Linehan.



Budget cut comments by Zoo New England’s CEO generated provocative headlines in Boston’s major newspapers for days.

Photo courtesy Boston Herald

Tips for Editorial Board Meetings

Boston-based PR agency Rasky Baerlein's meeting with the *Boston Globe's* editorial board over client Zoo New England's budget cuts resulted in neutral to positive editorial coverage that helped sway the legislature. Here are some tips from Justine Griffin, SVP at Rasky Baerlein, on how to prepare for and what to expect at an editorial board meeting:

- **Make your request for the meeting early.** "The worst is when a major outlet editorializes against you on an issue without even talking to you," says Griffin.
- **Any number of board members will attend the meeting, sometimes joined by reporters and/or columnists who have been covering the subject.** "On the client side, no entourages," says Griffin.
- **Let the client talk.** "Editorial boards don't want to hear from what they consider to be the hired guns," says Griffin. "Therefore, when we bring a client in, we do the setup and then we shut up."
- **Meeting formats vary.** "Sometimes boards let you make a presentation, and sometimes they jump right to Q&A," says Griffin. "Expect the meeting to last an hour, and all conversation will be on the record."

Four days out from the start of the crisis, in an interview with the *Globe*, Linehan recognized that some of his initial comments were unfortunate. "It was never our intention to make this sensationalized," he told the newspaper. But he also maintained his assertion that some animals would have to be euthanized.

That was probably not what the public, and the governor, wanted to hear.

Five days after the crisis began, on the advice of Zoo New England's board, Linehan brought in Rasky Baerlein Strategic Communications (RBSC) to manage media and government relations. RBSC had worked briefly for Zoo New England in the early 2000s, "mostly for happy news," says Justine Griffin, senior VP at Rasky and one of the leaders in the crisis effort. "By the time we were hired, the controversy had been on front page of both the *Globe* and the [Boston] *Herald* for several days in a row," says Griffin. "As much as Zoo New England tried to undo what it said, people weren't letting up on them."

Rasky and Zoo New England quickly put their collective heads together and mapped out the following specific objectives:

- Quell the media and political firestorm;
- Protect ZNE's reputation and brand;
- Repair ZNE's relationships with the governor and the legislature; and, perhaps most importantly
- Restore the state funding cut by the governor.

"We told Zoo New England that it had to put the mistakes behind them and move forward," says Griffin.

Dousing the Fire

It was clear that ZNE had become paralyzed in the crisis. "They had media inquiries they hadn't responded to in days," says Griffin. So RSBC created a holding statement that was sent to all media outlets, and distributed customized statements to zoo donors and employees.

Through a July 19 Sunday article by *Boston Globe* writer Matt Viser, RSBC started to change the tone of conversation from Zoo New England having to kill animals to overcoming financial woes. Then, on July 20, the apology came. In an interview on Boston's WCVB-TV, Linehan backed off on his prior statements: "At the time I was just trying to lay out

all the possible scenarios. I think the governor spoke loud and clear on this. There will not be any euthanizing.”

Joe Baerlein, president of RSBC, puts Linehan’s public dialogue in perspective. “John Linehan knows animals as well as any zoo leader in country,” says Baerlein. “He knew that you couldn’t just send animals to other zoos, because they have no room.” Linehan also knew, added Baerlein, that providing care and feeding for any displaced animals would cost much more than those legislative budget cuts. These were two points that RSBC looked to get across—both to the press and to state legislators.

Budget-cut comments by Zoo New England’s CEO generated provocative headlines in Boston’s major newspapers for days.

“We began to make the case for what the cuts would do, and why the zoo merits state funding,” says Griffin. “If you close a zoo, it’s not like a museum. You can’t just turn off the lights and go away.”

To let that messaging out, RSBC worked with Mass. Sen. Richard Tisei on an op-ed piece that ran July 22 in the *Globe*. His take: Closing zoos would be a costly mistake.

Then, on July 25, a piece of good news occurred that helped change the tone of conversation: A baby giraffe was born at the Franklin Park Zoo. “It’s a rare event, and it really served as the platform for why zoos matter,” says Griffin. Of course, there was the suggestion of selling naming rights for the new giraffe as a way to close the budget

gap—a suggestion not acted upon.

Inside Politics

While RBSC’s media team was helping to change the public perception of Zoo New England, its government relations unit was working the state legislative halls to get some of those millions back into zoo coffers.

The message to legislators was twofold, says Baerlein. “If funding went below a certain level, the zoos would have to close,” he says. “And if the zoos did close, the Commonwealth would be hurt even more financially.” With public affairs making up close to 50% of RBSC’s business, its government relations team leveraged strong political relationships to get the word out, says Baerlein.

The result: \$2 million was restored right away, and subsequent funding was added. Not as much as ZNE hoped for, but enough to keep the two zoos open. The firestorm over the comments was quelled, and the CEO’s reputation repaired. The zoo’s core supporters were reassured and broader audiences were educated on the zoo, its value and its challenges.

Yet Linehan knows there’s much work to be done. “Right now we’re in a stable position—we’ve got some exciting projects that we’re working on,” he says.

Linehan has nothing but good things to say about RBSC’s work on the crisis. “They brought sanity back into a situation that verged on insanity,” he says. **PRN**

Restoring a Small Town's Name With the Media in the Face of a Violent Crime Spree

By Elizabeth L. Boineau

Gang violence and bullets in the night could have easily ruined the image of Walterboro, a sleepy little town in the low country of South Carolina, an otherwise placid place that boasted turn-of-the-century homes, oaks lined with Spanish moss gently draping the wide streets, a bevy of antique stores and the home of the S.C. Artisans Center. The problem was thought to be the culmination of neighborhood gangs and infighting, which hit a new low when two adults and a 20-month-old girl were killed in a drive-by shooting inside the city limits in November of 2009.

This tragedy brought to a head the increased incidence of crime the area was witnessing, some of it inside and some of it outside city limits. Several more shootings followed in the area, resulting in the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) sending in reinforcements and the state grand jury launching an investigation. Rumor and gossip fueled the problem, as did no formal communication with media and no crisis communications management in place.

Interviews were constantly sought by the area media, and as town officials increasingly felt they were being misrepresented in virtually every story, they began shutting out media, who were then left to fend for themselves, eventually making matters worse in what almost became a standoff. Next, the large daily paper in nearby Charleston, S.C., ran a formidable investigative front page story delving into the matter, leaving the mayor feeling that the full story had not been told. Community leadership was increasingly agitated with what they felt was no formal effort to rein in the media's handling of the issue, and perception was quickly becoming reality as tourist numbers and real estate queries started

dropping off, and the town became the brunt of barroom jokes.

Eventually, the opinion leaders began to pull rank and insisted it was time for formal counsel to help get the city's name out of the ditch. They supported the hiring of a PR firm, and one was ultimately selected from Charleston in March, 2010. We were fortunate to be that firm, and plunged into the assignment by handling a television on-the-spot interview that arose during our own final interview for the assignment. Some speedy message development and message training, sitting in on the taping, re-taking sound bites and providing the reporter with information with which to tell the story led to positive coverage, whereby the mayor projected "confidence and reassurance" that the city was in fact on top of the problem.

There was no formal effort to rein in the media's handling of the crime issue, and perception was quickly becoming reality as tourism and real estate queries started dropping off.

In fact, they had adopted the subsequently named (job one) 10 point plan at a February, 2009 council meeting, but had never labeled it nor put anything in writing for media or otherwise to communicate what action was being taken to reverse course on the problem.

Through our proposal to take this on, we outlined our approach, and we followed it pretty closely, considering that the time (and budget) to develop a formal plan (past our recommendations) was not going to come easily. I do believe that today's economy, in addition to moving at

How Prepared Are You for a Crisis?

From years of training and practice, here are some questions that are necessary for any organization to ask to ride out a crisis and come out, reputation intact, on the other side:

- Is there a written plan for crisis communications in your organization?
- Do you have an established phone tree for emergencies?
- Is there a roster of phone and email contacts (home, mobile) for all members of the organization, which is both current and updated routinely?
- Is it clear who is charged with talking to the media?
- Do all employees know how to react if the media calls?
- Are there written materials to supply media regarding background, company leadership and key facts?
- Are talking points prepared when a specific crisis occurs to thoughtfully consider and

prepare comments before responding to the media?

- Are the appointed spokesperson(s) trained to speak with media?
- Are third-party spokespersons available to speak on your behalf?
- Are there materials prepared for their review prior to media interviews?
- Do employees know how to get information on what is going on?
- Do all key staff members have a copy of the crisis communications plan and protocol—electronic and written?

Review these questions and you'll hopefully be better prepared to weather the crises that will inevitably come your way. Shoring up your company's reputation year-round and doing at least an annual review of your crisis communications plan will help with damage control. And at all times, remember to keep it simple, seek harmony and scan for opportunity.

mach speed, means that sometimes we simply put the plan into our approach to the assignment (and hope that extra effort, born of taking the time to understand their plight, and applying our knowledge) helps us land the account. Since activities by phase are suggested in detail as well, once agreed to, we plant those into an action plan for routine conference calls and or meetings, typically weekly and not less than biweekly.

To offer additional insight into this approach, here are some of our goals in the initial phase of our work:

- Develop a unified, positive and consistent message and image to create greater awareness and appeal for the city of Walterboro as a safe, desirable travel destination and also a great community for living

- Develop core message and supporting messages for primary talking points, as well as basic media materials to accurately convey and positively portray the Walterboro story.
- Create a higher profile for Walterboro and its year-round offerings through a more systematic and targeted outreach to local and regional media; inform them about relevant news updates and angles, events and milestones that are news and/or feature-worthy. Sustain awareness and interest in Walterboro activities, events, progress and maintenance of a positive image as an inviting, safe place to be.

The two pages of activities by phase then became our Excel spreadsheet tactical action plan for all moving parts and parties. This helped to solidify exactly what had to happen when and who was responsible.

Where did we start our assignment? We plunged into evaluating the coverage to date; compiled the media database; developed key messages and talking points, supported by proof points; and wrote the backgrounder, bios on the mayor and town administrator, FAQs and tough internal FAQs. We also began work on an op-ed to be authored by the mayor, with a primary objective of having that run in the daily paper in Charleston, the nearest large town where media had been coming from to cover each and every incident, and in some cases mislabeling the scene of the crime.

In addition to labeling and packaging the 10 points that had been adopted in late winter, and succinctly summarizing that for media, we also knew that job two was to start to remove the label that the media had affixed to all crime occurring in the area. Crime occurring in many small boroughs and hamlets outside the city but inside Colleton County were being identified as Walterboro in articles, newscasts and datelines. We were determined to help the media better identify the crime incidents by their precise locale, and to not hang the entire crime label on the city's crest.

We set a date for media training and broke into two groups—the first comprised of the mayor, town administrator, police chief and deputy, as well as the tourism director. The second group was comprised of town council members. Once media training had occurred and was deemed successful, we initiated our contact with media, which started with personal phone calls to the daily editorial page manager, and the managing news editor. I appealed to the former to review and accept our op-ed, and to the latter I requested enhanced awareness of where these crimes were actually occurring, and asked for their help in better telling the story, and recommended our team as a contact and source for information. It's worth noting that the media had heretofore been going mostly to the police force and to "contacts" in the area, and now and again to town hall. However, they were not always

met with cooperation and information, truly the result of frustration on the town's part that led them to hunker down and to try and shut out the media, in essence. It's clear, however, that is both impossible and not advisable.

Tapping the media to tell our side of the story was what was needed, and to that end, we offered the op-ed bylined by the mayor to the *Daily* only, initially, and agreed to hold on other media outreach until they ran the piece. That accomplished, we moved on with a personal appeal (email) to the media on our list, all of whom had covered the crime in the area to ask their help in more accurately identifying the location of the crime, and to help in not sensationalizing the information either.

We shared the 10-point plan (as the backgrounder, with an intro) and the FAQs, as well as the op-ed. The reception was very solid, as personal follow-up calls were made to engage the assignment editors, primarily, in helping us sort out fact from exaggeration.

In addition to the daily paper doing a cover story not long after the op-ed about the town turning its image around, the local ABC affiliate also did an interview with the mayor and me about the effort to turn around the image of the city, which had been badly tarnished.

Along the way, and as things settled down and the coverage became more fair, we were able to go out with some releases about events and activities the town had planned, like the Antiques, History and Arts Festival, which had several place-ments and was a huge success.

Still a work in process, yes, but we've gotten a bit closer to looking like a collective well-oiled media machine that not only survives, but in fact, may even thrive in spite of a crisis. **PRN**

Elizabeth L. Boineau is founder and president of E. Boineau & Company, a Charleston, S.C.-based strategic marketing communications and public relations firm.

Don't Wait: Plan Your Leadership Strategy For Your Next Crisis—Which May Occur Today

By John R. Brooks

If you work in a company or organization, you probably have experienced some kind of crisis. Such disruptions come from all sorts of places, often the result of human action or inaction. Either way, your role as the communication professional is to find out what's happening, advise senior leaders of possible plans of action, implement your plan and evaluate your efforts. It's also a great self-teaching moment in your career.

There are two important things I've learned in dealing with crises. First, don't wait. Get after the crisis quickly. In the 24/7 world of news and social media, the bad news about your organization or a response to bad news should be reported first by you and no one else. If a crisis happens on a weekend, weeknight, early morning or during the work day, you must go to work on the crisis and your response right away. You don't want someone outside your organization to fill the information void with their version of the facts. You'll have a hard time catching up or correcting misinformation later.

Second, remember that your organization members and constituents are the most important audiences for your messages. News organizations are important secondary audiences, but it's your stakeholders that want to hear from you most. Speak to them first.

What Will Definitely Happen

Some things are always going to happen in a crisis. Bad or potentially bad news shared with more than one person at the same time will most likely be reported by someone to outsiders and news organizations. In my current role,

bad news reported to a leadership group or a congregation frequently results in a phone call or email to others and news organizations, followed by a phone call or email to a bishop or church leader for comment. If you're working with people who must disclose bad news, prepare them for this possibility. Advise them as to how to respond when it does happen.



Expect that parties affected by the organization's crisis will tell their stories to others, including the press, regardless of what you ask of them.

Confidential documents shared with others by email are almost always forwarded to outsiders and sometimes posted on the Web. Be careful about what you share via email or other electronic means. Before you hit "send," consider the effects if any such document appeared in print or on the Web.

We also know that crisis stories, regardless of how reporters and bloggers learn about them, will result in a phone call to someone, perhaps you, for comment. Be prepared with a brief media statement. Typically such statements include a short summary of the problem, how you are responding to it, an emphasis on safety and security and concern for all those affected by the crisis.

Finally, expect that parties affected by the organization's crisis will tell their stories to others including the press, regardless of what you ask of them. For example, if you ask those affected to keep information confidential, just know this probably will not happen.

Seven Questions to Ask Yourself in a Crisis

- 1. Are you reachable at all times, including weekends and evenings?** Be sure your office phone message includes your cell phone number.
- 2. Do you know the reporters in your area who write about your organization?** It helps to know them, especially when there's a crisis.
- 3. Have you determined your spokesperson?** Know who this person is in advance. You don't want to be assigning roles in the midst of a crisis.
- 4. Have you set up Google alerts with your organization's name and/or names of key leaders?** This is a great way to get timely updates on the news you need to know.
- 5. Have you created a Google Profile for yourself?** Your profile, with contact information, will show up at the bottom of page one on any search for your name. Go to "Google Profile" for more information about how to create a profile.
- 6. Have you established Facebook and Twitter accounts?** You'll need the search functions to monitor your crisis in the social media world.
- 7. Do you have computer access away from the office?** Be sure you have access to a computer when at home, on weekends and on vacation. Be sure you can access your Web site from a remote location. You'll never know when you'll need it.

Basic Principles of Crisis Communication

What are some important steps to take when responding to a crisis? Some are obvious; some aren't. Here are some key things to keep in mind:

- **Distribute your response/comment/story through multiple channels:** Post on your Web site; post links on your organization's

Facebook and Twitter accounts; send to news distribution services such as Business Wire or PRNewswire; email key reporters and constituents; and to respond to constituents' phone calls, provide printed copies to office staff for use when answering questions.

- **Transparency matters:** Tell as much information as you can, but guard what should be kept private, such as personnel information.
- **Have a crisis management team:** Never try to develop and execute a crisis communication plan by yourself. It's best to have small team already designated, with about four standing members, who will work with you. In my organization, we have standing rule that any member of our four-member crisis management team may call a meeting should the need arise. We review the situation and discuss how we will respond. It's also important to be honest with each other in developing your response. Ask the tough questions that need to be asked. Bring in resource people, such as an attorney, to consult with you if needed.
- **Learn to recognize potential controversy:** If your organization's actions are likely to upset some people, know that you will have some work to do to resolve issues. This is particularly true with bad behavior by employees, or pocketbook issues such as staff reductions, lost wages or pension and benefit cuts.
- **Use a single spokesperson:** You want your response to be as uniform as possible. Determine who will speak for your organization and provide that person with talking points. Tip: Don't ask an attorney to be your spokesperson. You want a key leader in your organization to speak, often with the advice of an attorney.
- **Never speculate:** Tell what you know are facts. Decline to answer "What if" questions,

and say you don't want to speculate. Speculation may get you in trouble later.

- **Monitor broadcast media, newspapers, email, Web and social media channels for reports:** I rely on Google or other searches, and I have them set up so that I get results for my organization several times a day. I check email often, and use searches to check the Web. Tip: If you're a public information officer, and you don't want to post information on Facebook or Twitter, maintain accounts for each and use the search function to find out what people are saying in cyberspace on a particular subject. I usually don't post information in these social media channels, but I use the search functions to find comments on specific things, especially when there's a organizational crisis that will gain public attention.
- **Be prepared to correct inaccurate information:** Sometimes information reported by news organizations is wrong. Ask that incorrect information be corrected if there's a critical error that changes the facts.
- **Don't lie or cover up, and don't let anybody else do it:** This is a key part of transparency. Tell the truth, always. Never say, "No comment."

Write a Plan

It helps to have a working plan on paper. In my experience, if you can show your supervisors a written response plan for responding to a crisis, it helps them have confidence in your ability to succeed. Here's a short-form plan template

for different elements of a plan to respond to a workplace incident, for example:

- **Goals:** Name your ideals—"Provide and maintain a safe workplace for all."
- **Objectives:** Determine what you want to accomplish and when—"Provide timely information and the company's response to the incident to news organizations by 4 p.m. today."
- **Strategies:** Name the methods you will employ—"Company email system; phone calls to selected news organizations; company Web site; post information on company Facebook and Twitter accounts."
- **Tactics:** Spell out the specific activities you plan—"Phone local radio stations by noon today and speak with news directors and senior managers."

Adjust your plan as conditions regarding the crisis change.

Finally, evaluate. Meet with your team after the event and review everything you did. Write a summary of your post-evaluation and note specific items that need improvements. Put your statements, plan, copies of news reports and the written summary in your files for use in responding to the next crisis. **PRN**

John R. Brooks, APR, is associate director of Communication Services of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Chicago, and director of the ELCA News Service. Among his communication responsibilities, John works with church leaders to plan responses to crisis situations and teaches others how to respond.

CASE STUDY

Credit Card Payments Company Handles Financial Scare With Media Transparency

By PR News Editors

In the late fall of 2008, Heartland Payment Systems discovered what perhaps all financial transaction companies fear most: Its system that contained the information on more than 600 million credit card holders had been hacked. Heartland, based in Princeton, N.J., works with about 175,000 small merchants and processes about 100 million transactions a month. The breach, analysts said, had the potential to be one of the costliest of all time, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in losses.

You might think that Heartland, keenly aware of the hundreds of IT security breaches that occur every year, would have a crisis plan in place to address just such an occurrence. But, says Heartland CMO Nancy Gross, the company didn't have such a plan ready. "Honestly, we always felt we were one step ahead of everyone else in security, and we didn't think it would happen to us," says Gross. But to its credit, the company did mobilize quickly, and one of the first things it did was hire Levick Strategic Communications, which specializes in crisis response.



Heartland Payment Systems hacked
Payments processor said breach did not involve merchant, cardholder data



updated 1/20/2009 6:19:30 PM ET

PRINCETON, N.J. — Payments processor Heartland Payment Systems Inc. said Tuesday its system used to process Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover Card transactions was breached last year, but asserted that merchant and customer data were not affected.

Robert H.B. Baldwin Jr., president and CFO, said the company found evidence of an intrusion last week and immediately notified federal law enforcement officials as well as Visa and MasterCard.

Heartland, based in Princeton, N.J., said the breach did not involve merchant data, cardholders' Social Security numbers, unencrypted personal identification numbers, addresses or telephone numbers. And the company said none of its check management or Canadian or payroll systems or the recently acquired Network Services and Chockstone processing platforms were affected.

Upon announcing that its credit card processing system had been breached, Heartland Payment Systems faced a media onslaught.

Seeing the Light

Levick is experienced with security breach crises, says Jason Maloni, senior VP at the Washington, D.C.-based agency. In Heartland's case, the Levick team was determined not to duplicate the methods of other companies hit with similar crises in the past. "Announcements of the breaches came weeks, even months, after they happened," says Maloni. "We felt we needed to be far more expedient—to reassure people, and in short order."

"It would have been easy for Heartland to shut up and hide behind a lot of law firms, but it had the courage to do the opposite."

—Jason Maloni, senior VP, Levick Strategic Communications

Huddling with the Heartland executive team, Levick suggested a strategy that it has used successfully in numerous crisis situations—the "run to the light" plan—which means full disclosure and transparency. Heartland's chairman and CEO Bob Carr was receptive to that. Out of that meeting came two main objectives:

1. Heartland had to cement the perception that it was going above and beyond what was expected in the wake of a record-breaking data loss by demonstrating a level of responsibility and accountability previously unseen in similar data breaches.
2. Once audiences were satisfied that the crisis had been contained, the objective was for

Heartland to seize this “teachable moment” and build a lasting leadership position against identity theft.

To Heartland’s Gross, January 2009 was a whirlwind. “We needed to figure out how we would deal with employees, Wall Street, the media and customers,” she says.

Upon announcing that its credit card processing system had been breached, Heartland Payment Systems faced a media onslaught.

Objective No. 1

For Levick, says Maloni, job one was preparing for the onslaught Heartland would face once the news was announced. In the hours before the Jan. 20 press release announcement of the breach, the Levick team media trained CEO Carr and president and CFO Robert Baldwin Jr. Their main message: “We had to calm fears by identifying what was not included in the data breach,” says Maloni. The incident only involved card numbers, expiration dates and, in a minute number of cases, card names—and no PIN numbers. Hence, the risk to cardholders and merchants, while disturbing, was not catastrophic.

Media Push

After that announcement, which came as the markets opened after the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, Baldwin and Carr did 30 one-on-one interviews with reporters from major newspapers, newswires and trades. That week, a sizable Heartland team spoke by phone with 150,000 merchants.

Other outreach included:

- Contacted influential bloggers in the financial realm. Heartland had not previously engaged this increasingly important audience. “We talked to 12 to 15 key bloggers who followed the retail and security spaces,” says Patrick Kerley, senior digital strategist

at Levick. “We worked with them for about eight months, and they were a great avenue toward the end when we were starting to communicating proactive security steps.”

- Created a Web site, 2008breach.com, which was stocked with FAQs and fact sheets about the breach. That site, and a blogger, would be key in gaining credibility early in the crisis. “People were suspicious of how long Heartland had actually known about the breach,” says Kerley. “A blogger then wrote that he found out that the Web site had been registered in the last 10 hours. So we were clearly sniffed up and down and found to be credible.”
- Outreach to financial trade media such as American Banker, and with key industry analysts from Forrester Research, Gartner Group and others. Avivah Litan, a well-known analyst at Gartner, later became a Heartland champion. (See sidebar for more on analysts.)
- Extensive internal communications. “We’re big on full disclosure,” says Gross. “We explained to everyone what happened, we outlined our game plan and empowered them with information that they could show to customers.”

Objective No. 2

Response to the outreach efforts was mainly positive. There were some skeptical bloggers to deal with, but eventually even they were won over. It was time to address the second objective, positioning Heartland as a leader in industry data security efforts.

After discovery of the breach, CEO Carr ordered a new encryption program accelerated so that merchants could begin a trial run in the third quarter of 2009. The timing was perfect.

Heartland also formed a security group, the Payments Processor Information Sharing Council.

Analyst Education: Swaying a Highly Targeted Audience

A public company's ability to communicate its story in a compelling, succinct and readily understandable way to industry analysts is intrinsically valuable, but it's a skill that is often elusive, says Jason Maloni, senior VP at Levick Strategic Communications. Here are some tips from Maloni on how to "educate analysts."

- **Carefully target key analysts and portfolio managers** that will be most interested in your organization.
- **Develop a presentation** that sets it apart from its peers and highlights its investment appeal. In crisis matters, identify issue experts or even specialists among analysts to help tell your story.
- **Enlist top executives** to engage the analysts directly in a transparent manner.
- **Encourage the media** to contact a company's star analyst for third-party positive commentary, which supports both media and analyst credibility.

At its first meeting, Carr did something no CEO had done before: As a symbolic gesture, he distributed electronic copies of the malware, a move that enabled Levick to brand Carr and Heartland as industry leaders.

Resource Drain

Levick's engagement with Heartland ended in the summer of 2009. The effort had been intense, says Maloni, with a team of six averaging 100 hours per month in the first three months.

For Heartland, Gross says communications was mainly her responsibility.

"I had a very green staff at the time—especially in PR," which caused her to put in long hours.

Lessons learned? Here are some from Heartland's Gross:

- Be prepared. "At first we were more reactive than proactive because we didn't have a team pulled together," she says.
- Have a war room. "For a crisis of this size, having 800 numbers and a dedicated staff manning phones is key," says Gross. "I even had my cell phone listed as a number to call."
- Figure out how you can make a difference in a bad situation. "This was the key for us," says Gross. "Our ultimate position was going to be one of strength."

Maloni feels that one challenge was not met—effectively reaching shareholders (see graphic above for details). But overall, he feels good about the engagement, and gives CEO Bob Carr kudos for "running to the light."

"It would have been easy for Heartland to shut up and hide behind a lot of law firms," says Maloni. "But it had the courage to do the opposite." **PRN**

CASE STUDY

Message Overboard: PR Comes to the Rescue in Stand-Off With Somali Pirates

By PR News Editors

On Nov. 29, 2008, the tanker ship MV Biscaglia was hijacked by Somali pirates using AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades while sailing through the Gulf of Aden. From the start, the situation was tense—and life-threatening. Three crew members, hired as onboard security, managed to escape the vessel during its capture by jumping overboard—they were rescued by helicopter. But 28 other crew members (25 Indians and 3 Bangladeshis) remained onboard.

Halfway around the world, in Stamford, Conn., James Christodoulou, president and CEO of Industrial Shipping Enterprises Corp. (ISEC), the ship's owner, received the jolting news. "Did we have a crisis plan in place for this type of situation? Yes and no," says Christodoulou. "In some ways it's like being a parent: You have a good plan on what to do about your kids, but it's never quite that simple."

To its credit, ISEC did prepare ships and crew in advance when sailing through dangerous waters, reviewing defensive maneuvers and security protocols. The company also gave MV Biscaglia crew members the chance to opt out of the voyage before the ship sailed.



Somali pirates forcibly boarded the MV Biscaglia in November 2008 and took 28 hostages, creating a communications challenge of epic proportions for the team at Cubitt Jacobs & Prosek. Photo courtesy of Cubitt Jacobs & Prosek Communications

But once the event began to unfold, it was drama almost beyond comprehension. "I can tell you we grossly underestimated the intensity, energy and emotion involved with this situation," says Christodoulou. "When we think of piracy, we think of looking for treasure and Johnny Depp, but in reality it's a hostage situation—a human crisis."

"One of our biggest concerns was errant leaks or misrepresentations to the media."

**—Tom Rozycki,
SVP, Cubitt Jacobs & Prosek**

To deal with the human element, one of the first steps Christodoulou took was to call a good friend, Tom Rozycki, SVP at Cubitt Jacobs & Prosek Communications, based in New York. CJP is experienced in maritime communications efforts and Rozycki and his team would put all of this experience and more to work during the crisis.

Why turn to PR? There were several stakeholders that needed addressing, says Christodoulou: the crew, their families, the media, governments and maritime unions. "Gaining their trust, communicating with them, getting control of emotions and getting focused and aligned would be a major undertaking, and this is where Tom and CJP came in." Ultimately, the agency would manage all external communications—both strategic and tactical—for ISEC on the hijacking.

The Mission

With the main objective of a safe and speedy release of the 28 crew members, the agency set to work laying a communications foundation

around the crisis. A key concern was the families, says Rozycki.

"We needed to ensure that the families of the captives would assist in the rescue effort by cooperating with the crisis communications team," says Rozycki. He goes on to explain that any wavering by the families would give the hijackers extra bargaining chips in the negotiations. "Contrary to popular belief, the Somalis have a business model and an intelligence network," says Rozycki. "If families are angry, if they feel that they're not being paid attention to, that can be added leverage for the hijackers."

Trust and Transparency

Rozycki and Christodoulou agreed that the best way to mitigate any frustration on the part of family members was through continuous transparency and the knowledge that ISEC would not rest until the crew was back safe and sound. But that was easier said than done, given the language barriers and time-zone differences

In fact, the first few days were extremely trying, says Rozycki. After an initial debriefing from the management team, the first order of business was to immediately open the lines of communications with the executive team, the hostage counselors, corporate internal and external legal counsel and the vessel's external technical manager. "These lines of communication were not established to create complete transparency into the crisis to external audiences," says Rozycki. "Rather it was imperative that the team understand the full scope of the crisis to help determine what needed to be disseminated and what needed to be held back."

With the lines of communication open, the crisis communications team worked quickly to determine the key audiences that would need to be addressed and managed throughout the crisis. The team quickly identified that this situation did not simply affect the 28 men on

the ship—it also affected 28 families and the 28 communities where they lived.

Message & Media

Controlling the message would be paramount in assuring the safe and timely release of the hostages. Often in long-cycle crises, the playing field does not change dramatically on a day-to-day basis, says Rozycki. In fact, during the Biscaglia crisis, there were often stretches of five to seven days where there was nothing to report. In the absence of any "real news," the media reached out to other constituencies for details and comment.

"One of our biggest concerns was errant leaks or misrepresentations to the media," says Rozycki.

Executive Lessons Learned From a Hostage Crisis

James Christodoulou, president and CEO of Industrial Shipping and Enterprises Corp., was at the center of communications around obtaining the safe release of 28 hostages held by Somali pirates on one of his company's ships. Christodoulou, who hopes to never experience an event like that again, has advice for controlling information during a crisis—information he believes can be adapted to other situations.

- "Know your objective, and focus everything that you do on it. It sounds basic, but throughout this crisis I constantly referred to it during all communications."
- "Be honest, up front and transparent in all of your communications, particularly if lives are on the line."
- "Make sure that people understand exactly what you're telling them, so there can be no misunderstandings."
- "Information and message control is key: Keep people in the loop to the extent that you can, but be selective about who you disseminate information to."

Communicating with Key Stakeholders During a Crisis

Responding to a ship hijacking by Somali pirates, Tom Rozycki, SVP of Cubitt Jacobs & Prosek, had an intense two-month experience interacting with families of hostages and other stakeholders. Here are some tips learned from that experience:

1. Demand and establish a seat at the table with your client.

Establish early on that you will treat all information as confidential, but that full access will ensure a better chance of communications success.

2. Quickly identify the key audiences. Crisis communications is as much about “who” you are talking to as “what” you are saying.

3. Assume your plan is always stale.

Especially with lives in the balance, crisis plans can turn on a dime. Keep the team focused on the best possible outcome, but plan for the unexpected.

4. There is no substitute for a face-to-face meeting. High-pressured situations require hand-holding. Getting in front of stakeholders to reinforce your dedication and build trust is essential to maintaining goodwill and recruiting them as advocates.

5. Establish multiple—but appropriate—conduits. Information is the best weapon in a crisis situation. Sharing all you can, when you can, will empower the parties involved and build goodwill toward a successful resolution.

6. Constantly re-manage expectations.

Admitting that you do not have all the answers, but updating stakeholders as you progress, will not only win converts, but remind audiences that you are fully invested in the process.

Any information not sanctioned by the company might have derailed the ongoing discussions with the pirates. The hostage negotiation experts enlisted by the company had made it very

clear that media pressure was a tried-and-true tactic employed by the pirates to maximize their position, he says.

Protecting against leaks and working within the other key stakeholder groups—families, seafarers union, governments, hostage negotiators—the team evoked the same unified messages.

Family Outreach

A key goal was to constantly remind the families that they were part of the process and path to their family members’ safe return. Their feedback, concerns and criticisms would help to shape the way that the communications program evolved over the duration of the crisis, says Rozycki.

As the drama played out, and a month went by without resolution, the team began to worry about the families of the hostages. At that point, communications were constant between ISEC and the families. Outreach included:

- Daily contact from the ship’s technical manager in Mumbai, India, in their native languages providing whatever information was available.
- A weekly letter penned by Christodoulou that was hand delivered to the families, providing them with assurance that he was working around the clock on the issue with his team.
- A special email address for the families to reach the company. This also served as two-way communication for breaking news.
- A special U.S.-based phone number for the families to directly reach the company.

While no families had broken ranks and offered comment to the media on their own, the crisis team was fearful that it might soon happen. “Time wears down on people,” Rozycki says. So the decision was made for Christodoulou to fly to Mumbai and meet directly with the families.

"The families were getting exasperated—they wanted their loved ones back," says Christodoulou. "They had to see the CEO in from of them, look them in the eye and feel a trust and confidence that we were doing everything we could."

Once in India, Christodoulou met with the families for over five hours, answering their questions, calming their fears and further opening the lines of communications.

For both Rozycki and Christodoulou, the meeting was the turning point in the entire ordeal. And it was successful. "James' ability to meet with the families bought us the time that we needed," says Rozycki.

Nearing the End

As the 50-day mark approached, and contrary to the team's initial assessment, Rozycki actually felt a sense of heightened resolve among the families. A sense of team spirit had developed between the crisis team and the families—and they became the biggest cheerleaders.

On Jan. 24, 2009 the crisis was over. ISEC paid a ransom to the Somalis for the release of the hostages, a sum that has not been revealed. "For those guys [the pirates] it's a business, and they understand marginal profit," says Christodoulou. "So they weren't maximizing profit by dragging it out."

The ultimate objective was reached, though not as speedily as they had hoped. The one regret during the ordeal? A simple statement that Christodoulou had made in his first letter to the families: the average number of days the pirates held their hostages was about 60. "Families put an 'X' on day 60," says Rozycki. "Day 52 came and there was no agreement and they started to get nervous. If we had to do it all over again, we wouldn't put that number out there."

Christodoulou says PR played a critical role in the ultimate outcome, "because we were dealing with human drama and emotion. Communications to maintain support and stay on message was absolutely important." **PRN**



"As PR practitioners, we all certainly understand that employees are our best ambassadors for managing crises."

—Chase Kelley, Spokeswoman and
Director of PR, Vectren

Internal Communications

3



Controlling Internal Information by Classifying Influencers Within Your Organization

By Emily Kumler

During a crisis, managing information internally is as essential as controlling information externally. In fact, it's possible that the dissemination of inaccurate or damaging information internally can have far more dangerous, long-term consequences than the original crisis.

All too often, senior management concentrates on the external crisis and neglects the internal one. Take the example of a hypothetical oil company—we'll call Oil of America—responsible for creating a massive spill that destroyed wildlife and threatened economic ruin on an entire region. The obvious crisis for the company is the spill and the direct impact it has on the people and animals involved, but the secondary and potentially more destructive catastrophe involves the employees of the company. If Oil of America is going to get through this crisis it needs its workforce prepared, confident and dedicated to pull it into the future.

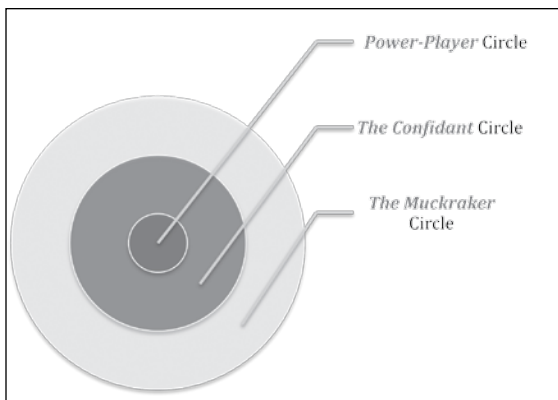
The dissemination of inaccurate intelligence within the organization breeds panic. Fear unravels momentum—it distracts from the essential work that must get done and will stop

any progress dead in its tracks. If Oil of America does not educate and inform the key communicators within its organization there is little chance it will pull through. When employees are left to speculate on the future of the company, productivity decreases. During crisis, organizations need employees focused on the task at hand, not distracted by a rumor. Yet, human nature dictates that during times of panic instincts kick in and individuals move from a sense of caring about their associations to a self-preservation mode.

Managers often won't acknowledge their subordinates need to know details of what is happening because the intelligence is associated with the prestige that comes with the senior position.

Anyone who's watched an episode of *Mad Men* knows the secretaries are privy to information way above their pay grade, so when middle management wants to know what's going on they don't ask each other or their bosses, they run directly to the chattiest administrative assistant. Typically, the information the assistants have is inaccurate because it's simply wrong or because they only have bits of data they've strung together in a narrative.

Managers often won't acknowledge their subordinates need to know details of what is happening because the intelligence is associated with the prestige that comes with the senior position. This can be a disastrous mistake. Information that is shared in the right way with the right people makes everyone more productive and less fearful. Think of parents who wait to argue until their child has gone to bed,



The Power Player circle may be the most influential, but everyone from the confidants' (those privy to influential news) to the muckrakers (those active in spreading general news) shape the flow of corporate communication.

Circle Interview Questions

Questions to ask during circle interviews—vary some of the language depending upon which circle you're asking.

1. What was the last difficult situation you found yourself in here at the company?
2. Who were the people most influential in deciding how to handle that situation?
3. What were the aspects of the decision you agreed with and what were decisions you disagreed with?
4. How did you explain these actions to your subordinates?
5. Who do you trust to get advice from in these situations?
6. What about them makes you feel you can trust them?
7. Do you think other executives also trust these individuals?
8. Within the core group of executives who do you trust/not trust most?
9. Is there anyone you consider to be a gossip in the office?
10. Who in the office do you consider the most reliable source for information?
11. What makes them reliable?
12. If you were to name three people you trust the most with private information, who would they be? Now name three people you go to most frequently for information.

A neutrals guideline:

Explain in the introduction that you are working to determine the best way to share information within the company during stressful times. It is your goal to try to help the chain of information so that more employees get more accurate information. It is essential to explain that any information shared within the confines of the interview will remain confidential. Likewise, the interviewer should not write down individual names, they should be assigned random numbers.

all the while the kid is picking up social cues that something is wrong. The child knows mom and dad aren't getting along, but is equally aware that they're trying to hide any animosity from him. He then strings together a story that may be far worse than reality, causing undo stress compounded by potentially misguided decisions about how to fix the problem.

There are more opportunities for coworkers to eavesdrop on each other than most colleagues realize. Humans are incredibly socially aware, picking up on personal interactions and making conclusions from whatever limited data they have available to them.

It's safe to say that no one wants to put out a daily newspaper to educate the workforce on the dealings of the upper management. Likewise, not all information should be public. The key to successfully managing the flow of internal information revolves around ensuring the influencers have accurate intelligence to share, that they feel in the loop and that the rest of the workforce receives correct information from sources they trust.

Adapting a concentric circles model developed by Harvard Professor Lawrence Susskind to help solve public disputes through consensus building, we can develop a model to identify who the influencers are within your organization. This method works best if handled by an outside, neutral party, although someone within the organization could be tasked with this duty if they were able to remain neutral and keep information confidential.

The innermost circle represents the obvious choices, those people sitting at the table when big decisions are made. Once the power players are identified each one should be individually interviewed. It is important that the information gathered from the interviews is kept private, and that the interviewee is aware of the confidentiality. (See sidebar for questions to ask.)

The interviewer is able to track the flow of information within the organization by listening to

whom the power players tend to trust outside of their circle. After the individuals who make up the Power Player circle are interviewed the neutral should have a list of names that came up more than others. These individuals will make up circle number two, the Confidants, which will be larger than the power player circle.

The Muckrakers work as valuable foot soldiers in the war on controlling information if they're handled properly.



The Confidants

The Confidants play a special role in the dissemination of information. Psychologically, they are likely aware of their privileged position as a trusted ally of someone in the Power Player circle. They may choose to be loyal to that person, or they may use the insider access with a power-player to gain respect and loyalty from peers and subordinates.

The Power Player

Ironically, the Confidant circle often has a more complete view of the crisis than the Power Player circle. Consider that during the Power Player interviews Bob, Steve, Cindy and Frank independently acknowledged that they don't confide in each other, but they all mentioned they trust and share information with Alice, who is not a Power Player. The interviewer now knows that Alice possesses information from four sources on the same sensitive topic, which puts her in a very powerful position.

Alice's privileged vantage point as a trusted source of four members of the Power Player circle means she knows how Steve interprets the crisis and she may know that Cindy and Frank have a very different interpretation. If Alice shares this information with anyone it could create friction within the Power Player circle as well as the rest of the company. Any co-worker Alice talks

to about this schism will know there are going to be factions within the upper management of the organization; they'll predict who will win out, they'll take sides, which can quickly lead to people feeling let down while others feel vindicated. As the outside crisis comes to a close the inside crisis is gaining momentum if not handled properly.

The Muckraker

While the interviewer makes the rounds interviewing various employees, people within the company will be whispering about this process. People who have not been interviewed will start to ask questions. "What's going on with all these interviews?" "What does this process have to do with how information is treated within our company?" "Why hasn't anyone talked to me?" The third and final circle should consist of the individuals who might not have come up during the interviews with the first two circles—though they often are named—but have directly expressed an interest in the process.

These people who want information, and not including them in the process could unravel future implementation, as they are likely the talkers in the office. Their involvement in the exercise will give the end-plan legitimacy. This group will include the more fearful personality types, those who spend a portion of every day speculating to those who will listen. We'll call the third group the Muckrakers because they thrive on information and enjoy disseminating it. They dig for information, and people in the company trust them to supply the "off-the-record" account of what's really going on. Given that they aren't usually getting intelligence from the Power Players, they are likely to have inaccurate information that poses the biggest threat to the company.

The Muckrakers work as valuable foot soldiers in the war on controlling information if they're handled properly. Research suggests if a

Muckraker is given privileged information and told they're being trusted to share that information in a controlled way, they're far more likely to obey than if they learned the information in a more sneaky, second-hand way. This element of human nature is palpable in most people's lives.

Consider that you heard second-hand that a friend of yours accepted a new job and is moving, you were told that not many people know, so you should keep it quiet. Chances are you're far more likely not to tell any other friends the news if you'd learned it directly from your friend and she asked you to please keep it confidential, as opposed to learning the news from a third party. The brain tends to justify that the spreading of this news may increase your social status among peers; it almost immediately justifies sharing the news because you're closer to the friend than the third party is and therefore a lot of people must already know, or you're offended this third party knew before you and so forth. News at the office works the same way, only there's even less loyalty and even more self-motivation.

The Muckrakers already have an established network of employees who come to them for news. Armed with accurate information and direct protocols on what's to be shared and what's not to be shared, the Muckraker can now feel in control, in power and informed.

They are less likely to blab, and if they do they're sharing accurate information. This new line of defense immediately reduces the risk of disenfranchised employees and removes some of the panic the Muckrakers are great at spreading.

Once these three groups—the Power Players, the Confidants and the Muckrakers—are identified and interviewed, the neutral will have a shorter list of who really operates the communication within the organization. Using this condensed list the company should set about a chain of communication command involving these individuals.

PRN

Emily Kumler, trained by Harvard Law Schools Program on Negotiation, is currently working as a consultant for Boston-based business looking to make their workforces more efficient through fostering stronger internal and partner relationships.

How Communications Professionals Can Remain Aligned With Internal Audiences

By Thomas J. Rozycki Jr.

When a crisis hits, time is of the essence. Decisions must be made at an uncomfortable pace as delays can not only hinder resolution, but allow rumor and innuendo to flourish among external audiences. This is further complicated by the sheer number of people recruited to serve as experts during a crisis. While expert counsel is extremely important during a crisis, all parties must remain aligned and focused on one clear goal: solving the crisis as quickly and completely as possible.

Of course, as crisis counselors know, this is much easier said than done. At times, the management of information and the delegation of responsibility can seem more daunting than the actual crisis itself. For communications experts, this can be especially frustrating, as the internal solutions that are being debated and executed then need to be communicated to outside constituencies. So how can communications professionals ensure that they are not only part of the inner circle of decision makers, but also providing valuable and respected counsel throughout the process? In the following sections, we will explore several areas for consideration that can lead to successful crisis communications.

Advocate for a Central Authority

No one ever wants to face a crisis situation. However, when one does arise, the public and the media often clamor for a central figure, a “face” of the crisis, that they look to for updates and information. When external audiences have a singular point of contact, it establishes a bridge to eventual resolution and a conduit for information. This is equally true of the internal effort.

The moment a crisis begins, it is extremely beneficial to advocate for a sole crisis manager who is responsible for the overall resolution effort. Depending on the type of incident, this could be a communications professional, a senior operations manager or even a C-suite executive. However, it must be clearly stated that this single person is the ultimate arbiter for decisions, and will be the central point of delegation. This person is not expected to micromanage the entire process. In fact, it is to their detriment to try and do so. However, in order to eliminate logjams and ensure smooth information flow, all parties must know that they ultimately report to this one person.



By limiting the number of participants in the decision-making process, we were able to make better decisions faster.

For communications professionals, this greatly streamlines the time to market of information and prevents unnecessary hold-ups in communicating in a timely and complete manner. Over the course of the crisis, it will also ensure that the communications component is taken seriously and valued as much as the legal and operational components.

Limit the Number of Players

In a crisis situation, it is logical to want to deploy all available resources to correct the problem. In an effort to broadcast to external audiences that everything that can be done is being done to mitigate the situation, it can be tempting to employ an all-hands-on-deck mentality. However,

this can have a catastrophic affect on the internal communications process.

In a recent crisis situation, we were required to participate on a conference call with the executive management team, communications team, operational experts, outside legal counsel and the external crisis support team. All told, there were approximately 45 people on the call. While each call participant was theoretically aligned with regard to the desired outcome, each party brought to the call a unique point of view and a separate agenda. After 10 minutes, the call degenerated into a series of side conversations and over-talking that served no real purpose and wasted valuable time.

On that call, the communications team recommended that the central authority, in this case the CEO, hold a separate daily briefing call with one representative from each of the internal teams involved in the process. Each representative would be empowered to make decisions on behalf of his or her group, and would be responsible for reporting back to the larger group. This new call, with a total of seven participants, became a more manageable and productive platform for discussion, and actually served as a rallying point for dealing with the crisis. By limiting the number of participants in the decision-making process, we were able to make better decisions faster.

Know Your Role

In a crisis situation, others may try and subjugate the communications role. This is usually driven by the fear that any public release of information could have legal implications or paint the company in an even worse light. However, recent history has clearly indicated, specifically in the cases of BP's oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and Apple's Antennagate, that the court of public opinion is swift and decisive. Therefore, the argument can easily be made that the communications role is pivotal to the successful

conclusion of any crisis. What's more, empowering the communications team to manage external audiences, providing them with timely and accurate information, and respecting the need to update that information, ensures that the legal and operational teams can focus on resolution. As a result, it is important that crisis communicators establish their leadership role early on in the process.

Respect Others' Expertise

Earning the respect and trust of the other experts involved is critical to communications success. While you may be well versed in the company's operations or financials, there are often layers of complexity to the legal and operational facets of the crisis that are well outside of the communications function. As such, it is imperative that you know when you sit back and listen. This accomplishes two distinct but equally important goals.

First, the other experts, who may wrongfully assume that communications professionals are a hindrance to the process for a variety of reasons, are actually team players, interested in solving the problem and being part of the solution. In another crisis that we recently worked on, we overheard the tactical expert exclaim, "...and I hope that you are not bringing in the PR hacks to mess things up!" Moments later, we entered the room, and silently took our seats, without being introduced. For the better part of the next hour, we listened intently, took notes and only once identified by the team leader did we assert our presence. After that meeting, the tactical expert took us aside and complemented us on our deference and professionalism, and apologized for remarks we may have heard earlier in the evening.

Additionally, by taking a step back and listening once in a while, you might actually learn something. During that same crisis, we were privy to a phone call between the CEO and outside legal counsel which completely nullified

a critical portion of the plan that we were going to present. Our participation in that call, and our sincere desire to collaborate with the other experts involved, allowed us to quickly modify the program and meet our clients expectations. What's more, when we presented our ideas, we were very vocal about how the advice of the legal team had shaped our perspective, earning their respect and support. Over the course of the crisis, we found the lawyers to be our biggest advocates (and even defenders) as we collectively sought resolution.

Be Knowledgeable and Prepared Before You Enter the Conversation

Preparation is critical to communications success in a crisis situation. Hopefully, the crisis you are facing is one that you have prepared for in the past, and you have a playbook that you can go to in order to get the ball rolling. Often, however, a crisis is an unanticipated event that transcends any previous experience. In these instances, you need to get smart—fast.

Pride has no place in a crisis, and the decisions of the larger group should never be personal.

With limited time to prepare, how can you ensure that you will gain the trust and support of the other experts in the room? The best way is to be knowledgeable about the situation at hand, but honest about your limitations. Come to the table with a willingness to engage, but do not present yourself as an expert in areas which you are not. Share recommendations with conviction, but always be prepared to defend a course of action with evidence or examples of how it has worked in the past.

Most importantly, spend as little time as possible reciting your resume and qualifications and as much time as possible providing recommendations that you can implement quickly and

completely. Too often, communications professionals feel that they need to justify their inclusion by stating their credentials. In our experience, the best way to make a great first impression is to be knowledgeable on the specific crisis at hand, provide a list of immediate deliverables that are truly actionable, and provide future action items with hard and fast timeline. Do not promise what you cannot deliver, and never miss a deadline. By meeting expectations that you carefully set, you can ensure a more prominent role in the resolution.

Pick Battles Carefully, Acquiesce Gracefully

Invariably, you will not agree with all of the decisions that are being made. And, there will be times when your counsel will be questioned. This is perfectly natural, and we would argue, imperative to the successful resolution of any crisis. If everyone in the room agrees all the time, it is a clear indication that no one is standing their ground. Making the best decision often dictates that someone, hopefully in the minority, will not agree.

The key to reaching the best consensus for the good of the group is to pick your battles carefully. If you feel strongly about an issue, it is your duty to voice your opinion, even if it is the dissenting one. However, it is more important to have a cohesive course of action than to build factions on non-essential issues. Be sure to examine your motivations. Are they personal, or for the good of the larger group? Make sure that you understand the counterpoint before drawing a line in the sand. You must be certain that your course of action is the right one before you challenge the majority.

In the same way, if you offer a suggestion, and it is not accepted by the group, withdraw it gracefully. Pride has no place in a crisis, and these decisions of the larger group should never be personal. As stated at the outset, the only concern of the crisis

team is the successful resolution of the issue at hand. Once a decision has been made, focus on the outcomes of that decision, and prepare for the next challenge. In this way you solidify yourself as a team player and asset to the group.

Conclusion

For communications professionals, crisis situations create a number of challenges. Perhaps the most crucial is earning a seat at the decision makers' table. However, by being as knowledgeable as possible, respecting the larger group, knowing

when to be assertive and when to keep quiet, you can not only play a pivotal role in the resolution, but earn the respect of the team in the process. Your ability to influence the situation at hand will be measured not only by the communications outputs, but by the level of counsel that you are ultimately able to provide. **PRN**

Thomas J. Rozycki Jr. is senior vice president at CJP Communications in their New York City office. His crisis communications expertise has included employee data theft, Internet security breaches and Somali piracy (see chapter 2).

Five Steps to Managing a Crisis Internally Through Your Company's Intranet

By Kate Rezucha

When a crisis hits, be it a public health crisis such as the H1N1 flu outbreak, a natural disaster like a hurricane or earthquake or a media/brand crisis, your employees will be thinking of little else. Productivity might suffer, but as the employer or internal communicator, your responsibility is to help assuage fears and keep people calm.

If you have a credible intranet, your employees will hopefully be familiar with it as a dynamic and up-to-the minute source of official company-wide information. They should also be able to trust what they read on the intranet as being factual and accurate. Thus, establishing a crisis communications page (or section) as quickly as possible after the crisis is first announced is crucial. By doing so you can eliminate the time employees spend web surfing in search of the latest news. They trust it when they hear it from you.

You don't need to represent yourself as an expert on the topic at hand. All you need to do is provide a one-stop shop for credible, accurate resources, and frequent updates as they become available. Employees will be more comfortable if they know that you're doing everything possible to stay on top of the situation, and that you'll report to them—via the intranet—as soon as news breaks. In addition, keep in mind that anything you write or say may find its way outside the company. So you want to be sure, always, that you get your facts straight.

To do this, early on you need to identify the most credible and reliable resources on the topic. And then you borrow.

A note on tone: It's important to hit the right tone. You don't want to overreact, but you do want

to genuinely validate employees' concerns.

Transparency is the best policy. Assure employees that you are concerned, but that your response is measured and well-considered. If you remain calm, they will as well. Just don't be so calm as to appear blasé.



If you have a credible intranet, your employees will hopefully be familiar with it as a dynamic and up-to-the minute source of official company-wide information.

Provided all employees are safe and systems are functioning, here are the steps to take as a crisis hits. We've used a flu outbreak as the example, but the guidelines are appropriate for most crises.

Step 1. Team Meeting (Immediately)

As soon as possible, have your crisis management team meet to draft the initial company-wide communication. If you don't have a crisis management team in place, you might include the heads of human resources, communications, and operations, as well as the disaster recovery manager, if you have one.

The team should bring all online resources available and make a determination as to which are the most credible, so that you can share them with employees.

This is a good time to create a dedicated email address for associates at all levels to contact the team with concerns, questions, or reports. For example, FluConcerns@YourCompany.com.

Creating an FAQ Section for Your Intranet During a Crisis

During the H1N1 scare, employees were interested in the following:

- What is this crisis? How did it occur?
- Why has an emergency been declared?
- How is the company prepared to address the situation?
 - > If you have a Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plan, reference it here.
- Does the company have a policy to cope with this situation?
 - > If you have a policy in the Employee Handbook—such as a Communicable Disease Policy—reference it here.
- Is business travel discouraged? For how long?
- What about my family? What happens if schools close?
 - > Your primary concern is always the well-being of your employees. However, be sure to work with an attorney on issues pertaining to leaves, etc.
- What are symptoms to watch for?
 - > If I have symptoms, what should I do?
 - > Answer from both a public (CDC) and a work perspective. What are you asking employees to do in this event?
- Under what circumstances can I work from home?
- How can I stay healthy?
 - > Reference your company Wellness page. If you do not have one, see if your health insurance provider offers one that you can link to.
- What are we doing at work to protect ourselves?
 - > The crisis management team should have a list of actions being taken on site, such as providing hand sanitizer to employees. List these here.
- What if I need emotional support?
 - > Some people respond poorly to crisis. This is the perfect opportunity to promote your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and your EAP provider may even have a site dedicated to this issue.

Step 2. Respond (Within first 2 hours)

The initial communication should come from the CEO or highest-ranking officer. Let associates know that senior management is doing everything possible to research and stay apprised of the situation and that reports to employees will be frequent. It's important to get this information out promptly. If you don't have all the info at your fingertips, share what you do have and let employees know when they can next expect to hear from you with more. Announce the dedicated email address and that the intranet page is forthcoming.

Once the initial company-wide email is sent, try to put all future updates on the intranet, rather than emailing. Too many emails will wind up serving more as a distraction than as an informative or reassuring communication. Employees should feel safe in continuing to work, checking back from time to time when it suits them, rather than having their work repeatedly interrupted with new reports.

Step 3. Build the Intranet Page (Within first 6-8 hours)

Create a Crisis HQ section (such as "Flu HQ") on the intranet. This can reside under Human

Resources, but should be easily accessible from the homepage. If you are lucky enough to have a creative team, have them come up with a graphic icon or button you can put on the homepage. If not, see if you can borrow one from your resources—for example, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) has lots of graphic images on their Web site for sharing.

Start by posting the initial email text. This may seem redundant, but employees should know that this is the place where all communications on this topic can be found.

Post a sidebar-type section with links to web resources on the topic.

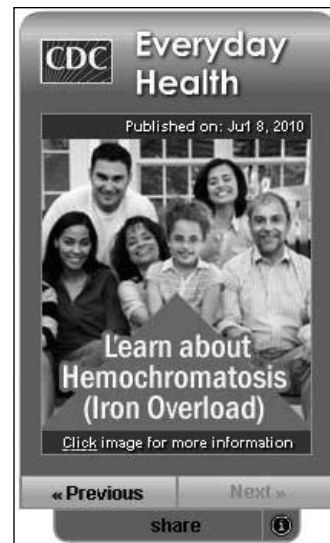
Step 4. Create an FAQ Section (Within first 6-8 hours)

Again, you don't have to be an expert since there are resources out there from which you are intended to borrow. Remember that if you claim something as fact that hasn't been verified by a credible agency, your employees may later call you to task. Also remember to be realistic about the concerns—no one likes to be told, "Don't panic." It only makes them panic more. Your FAQs can be developed from existing information, but should also reflect decisions currently being made by management (see sidebar). Try to keep the number of questions down to about 10. Once this has been reviewed by your team, post it on the intranet.

A note on formatting: It reads best to have your questions in bold and your answers not. Be sure to date it (as you may need to update it later). Cite references and add links. Make it clean and simple.

Step 5. Create Bulletins (Days and weeks following)

Whenever there's a change in the status — either from a community level (such as the CDC) or from a work (policy) level, post a new bulletin. Be



CDC's Everyday Health Widget presents employee health information in a visually rich format.

sure to date these, as well as indicate on or near your homepage icon that a new bulletin has been posted. If the bulletin is urgent (for example, if there is going to be an office closure), it's a good idea to send out a company-wide email with a headline, brief summary, and a link to the full bulletin. Otherwise, resist the urge to oversaturate inboxes as this may diminish your credibility and heighten paranoia.

If an alert level is provided by the government, it should be included in your bulletin. To avoid panic, however, make sure to communicate what each level means.

A note on widgets: Many agencies, such as the CDC, provide widgets that you can borrow to post on your site. The agency provides the HTML code making them easy to post, and they're a good way to provide regular updates on the situation, or even daily tips. Long after the flu scare, we still keep our CDC Everyday Health widget on our intranet home page. It's a fun, visually dynamic way to engage our readers. **PRN**

Kate Rezucha is associate communications and engagement manager for San Francisco Bay Area-based Esurance, where she manages the company intranet and internal corporate communications.

How to Train Your Company's CEO to Communicate Quickly, and Coolly, in a Crisis

By Joan Gladstone

You're ready for a crisis, but is your CEO? The best crisis plans and PR advice fail when top executives wait too long to communicate. In this article, I'll explore a key reason why, and how you can use this insight to motivate executives to act.

In 16 years of crisis communications counseling, I've come to understand a seldom-discussed yet highly significant aspect of crisis management—the challenge of dealing with human nature during times of extreme stress.

I've witnessed how personality traits intensify and become barriers to thoughtful action in a brewing or full-blown crisis. Even if you've worked with your top management team for years, their behavior in a crisis might surprise you.

Decisive executives may make risky, spur-of-the moment decisions just to show they are in charge. Emotional executives may become volatile, angry and make irrational decisions when they feel threatened. Consensus-driven executives may deliberate too long and risk taking no action at all, as the following example illustrates.

I worked with a national real estate company facing a major lawsuit that could damage its reputation and cripple its business. The senior vice president typically liked to hear many different points of view before making decisions. While this is an admirable business practice during normal times, it can undermine swift response during a crisis.

The SVP invited more and more people to join our conference calls. As the date of the lawsuit's announcement loomed, as many as 20 staff

and consultants vigorously debated what to do. Meanwhile, PR activities came to a standstill.

Finally, the lead attorney and I figured out how to break the logjam. We drafted a series of news releases: what we would say if we decided to settled all the allegations, settle some of the allegations or fight the case in court. Once the SVP could see the potential scenarios in black and white, he gave us the green light to complete our PR strategy in time to tell our side of the story.



Decisive executives may make risky, spur-of-the moment decisions just to show they are in charge.

Here are five steps you can take to motivate executives to act in a crisis.

1. Develop Your Crisis Radar

Most business crises stem from internal issues that go public, such as lawsuits, disgruntled employees, and recalls. These issues usually provide enough time to develop proactive crisis intervention plans. Best case, these plans may avert the crisis altogether.

You can provide valuable strategic counsel to executives by keeping potential threats on your radar and sharing your insights with top management. Here are a few ways:

- Expand the scope of your news and social media monitoring efforts by reviewing articles and posts about issues impacting competitors and your industry.

10 Common Mistakes That Undermine CEO Confidence in a Crisis

1. A sky is falling attitude, or tendency to exaggerate the impact of a brewing issue or crisis. Be realistic and substantiate your concerns.
2. Saying "I think we ought to..." Back up your recommendations with research or a well thought-through rationale.
3. Reluctance to speak up in meetings. The time for you to advocate your position may not come again.
4. Overemphasizing media strategies. While the media is important, the organization must also communicate with employees, board members, investors and other stakeholders.
5. Hasty preparation of the CEO or other spokespeople for media interviews and press conferences. Take the time to develop a detailed Q&A and do a mock interview so the spokesperson can demonstrate he or she knows the information inside and out.
6. Pushing the CEO to do a YouTube video or other video with insufficient rehearsal. Video is unforgiving; practice key messages and fine tune body language.
7. A fatalistic "it's out of our control" mentality. Show that you won't give up finding ways to help manage the issue.
8. No sense of urgency. Cancel vacations and non-work activities until the worst is over.
9. Lack of prioritization. Delegate all other projects or put them on hold. Focus 110% on the crisis.
10. Inadvertently revealing confidential information. Scrupulously guard sensitive information and review the "to" list and the content of all emails before hitting the send button.

- Sign up for RSS feeds from watchdog and industry association Web sites.

- Join the industry association's public relations, marketing, or public affairs committee to gain first-hand knowledge of trends and issues.

Once you have this valuable information, create monthly alerts to top management summarizing the highlights and offering pertinent recommendations.

2. Forge Relationships with Advisers

How well do you know the people that CEOs turn to when dealing with tough issues? The top five advisors who usually form the core crisis team are the general counsel, chief operating officer and

heads of marketing/communications, human resources and risk management.

If you don't already know them well, arrange a time to meet. The CEO's advisers will become your champions when they see your commitment to tracking and being prepared for potential public relations threats. Ask if they would like to receive your alerts on a regular basis (they will.) When an issue or crisis hits, run your key strategies by them to gain support before proposing ideas to the rest of the management team.

3. Ask Questions to Neutralize Tension

One of my toughest projects was advising a CEO who was famous for losing his temper. The CEO was a self-made man who built a banking empire through innovative thinking and guts. Everyone respected him, yet most feared him. When his company faced a government investigation, his frustration at not being in control and facing public embarrassment mounted. He roared at his management team in meetings until few had the courage to speak.

I discovered a way to calm the CEO and lead productive discussions. Rather than offering suggestions and risking being shot down in flames, I asked neutral questions: "What outcome do you want to achieve?" "How do you suggest we achieve this outcome?" "What would you like our employees to know about the situation?"

Listen intently to the answers and repeat them. "So I understand that our course of action is to do A, B, C. Did I recap this correctly?" Once executives see that you truly understand their point of view, they will settle down and be more receptive to your recommendations. You can then say, "I would like to offer another recommendation to replace C, because if we did C, we might generate employee concerns about..."

4. Make the PR Process Transparent

The tougher the decision, the greater the executives' desire for hard facts. Yet in the first critical hours and days of a crisis, too many executives delay response because they are waiting for more information. Meanwhile, news crews, bloggers and employee rumor mills are operating at warp speed.

As a public relations professional, you are in an excellent position to forecast how the media, employees and other constituents may react to the crisis. The problem is that executives may view PR instincts as too touchy-feely or mysterious. Be transparent. When you participate in a crisis team meeting, don't say "I think..." Say, "I think...

because." People will listen when you substantiate how you reached your conclusions.

There are several other elements you can prepare before meetings to help lend more certainty to an uncertain time:

- Prepare a matrix listing potential courses of action, who will be affected by each, and the expected outcome.
- Draft interim statements to issue to the media, social media outlets, employees and other stakeholders to demonstrate responsiveness as you are gathering more information.
- Anticipate tough media questions and write concise, compelling answers.



During a crisis that impacts the public's health and safety, it is the top executive's responsibility to be out in front while you work behind the scenes.

The CEO of a California-based public technology company called me to say that a reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* was flying in from New York in three days to interview him. The reporter was zealously pursuing a small start-up's accusations of patent infringement by my client. The CEO was understandably nervous about the reporter's visit and the very real potential for damage to the company's reputation and sales.

First I created a profile of the reporter and synopsis of his recent articles. Putting myself in the reporter's shoes, I wrote more than 50 tough questions and shared them with the CEO. Together with the company's attorney, we prepared concise answers to every one of the questions. The reporter hammered the CEO for nearly two hours.

After the reporter left, the CEO smiled. We predicted more than 90% of the questions, enabling the CEO to remain calm and confident

during the interview and resulting in a balanced, accurate article.

5. Become a Strong Advocate

During a crisis that impacts the public's health and safety, it is the top executive's responsibility to be out in front while you work behind the scenes. However, there are times when *you* are the best spokesperson. There is no better way to gain the CEO's enduring trust than to be willing to step forward and be the company's advocate during a crisis.

A year after I completed a crisis communications plan for a major restaurant company, its risk manager called. A customer claimed he found a foreign object in his food. The company immediately launched an internal investigation and found no evidence of any tampering by its staff. Everything pointed to a hoax by the customer, however we had no proof that he planted the item.

A few weeks later, the customer's attorney filed a lawsuit against the company, sparking a media frenzy. We decided that we would not dignify the customer's claim by having the CEO or other member of the management team go on TV or conduct print interviews. Instead, I served as the quoted spokesperson. Reader and blogger comments were on our side, and the story died down within a week.

By anticipating how decision makers are likely to deal with crises and using these techniques, you will strengthen your position as valued asset to the management team and be viewed as a trusted, strategic counselor long after the crisis is over. **PRN**

Joan Gladstone, APR, Fellow PRSA, is president and CEO of Gladstone International, a crisis communications firm located in Laguna Beach, CA. She also serves as assistant professor of public relations and advertising at Chapman University in Orange, Calif.

The Selection, Instruction and (Let's Not Forget) Feeding of a Crisis Response Team

By Susan Diekman

It's day three of a major crisis. You've eaten nothing but pizza since the crisis began, since no one can leave the office and it's the only thing that can be ordered in. You had three hours of sleep last night and you can't remember exactly how you got home. You've been trying to find some backup support, but everyone is uncharacteristically unavailable. This is about the time most people realize their crisis plan is missing a key element—a plan to care for the crisis response team. Crisis plans are only as effective as the people who implement them. While it's important to carefully select your crisis team, it's also important to establish a plan to keep them emotionally and physically cared for during a crisis.

Selection of a crisis team, on the surface, seems straightforward. You just identify leaders in key business function areas. But in addition to ensuring the crisis team possesses the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively manage through a crisis, I encourage you to also think about the personality and temperament of the people on your team. Do they have the perspective, judgment and stamina to perform well under pressure?

Consider having your team take a personality or strengths assessment test as part of your crisis planning. Tools such as Myers Briggs, Strengths Finder and DISC can help your team understand individual and team strengths and help you select crisis team members.

When I select individuals to serve on a crisis team, I look for individuals who:

- Think strategically, and can sort through vast amounts of information to identify what is most important;

- Work well, and maybe even thrive, under pressure and can deliver quality work on tight deadlines;
- Create structure and process when none exists;
- Stay focused on the goals and the to-do's and not get distracted;
- Understand the role others play and work collaboratively in a team;
- Go with the flow and change direction quickly, if needed;
- Work at an intense pace for hours and sometimes days, and;
- Possess a calm demeanor.

Consider having your team take a personality or strengths assessment test as part of your crisis planning.

A calm demeanor is especially important. Crisis plans are implemented in highly charged emotional environments. Fear, panic and anger can immobilize or derail the focus of entire crisis teams at a time when reasoned, coordinated effort is most needed. One of the most important roles that leaders and crisis team members can play is to bring calm, reason and a long-term view to the situation.

I recently worked with Educational Credit Management Corporation (ECMC) to manage crisis communications regarding a data breach impacting 3.3 million student loan borrowers. ECMC started out with a highly effective and

Crisis Team Care Manager's To-Do List

Before the crisis:

- Develop a list of crisis team members, including their contact information. Make sure each person on the team has a backup person designated.
- Create overnight kits and store them at the crisis response center location.
- Identify local restaurants and caterers that can provide healthy meals during a crisis.
- Identify a hotel where crisis team members can stay and work with hotel management to set up a plan.
- Create a crisis staffing plan and schedule for rotation.
- Brief each crisis team members on how you will support them during a crisis and what resources are available to them.
- Create a template for tracking and reporting daily crisis activity.

During the crisis:

- Stock the crisis response center with healthy snacks.
- Order regular meals for the crisis team.
- Finalize arrangements for lodging with the hotel.
- Manage the staffing plan to make sure no one is working excessively long hours without rest.
- Monitor the behavior of crisis team members and encourage those who are exhibiting fatigue or stress to take a break.
- Create hourly or twice daily debriefs with team members to gather information for the activity report.

strategic crisis team. But I think their positive outcome was largely the result of their shared values and culture of respect, collaboration and mutual support. At the onset of the crisis, Richard Boyle, ECMC CEO, called the team together. He reminded them that first and foremost their collective goal was to protect borrowers. He told the team that the work would be difficult, the hours long and each person would likely have to sacrifice a lot personally. He predicted that some would even falter under the pressure. When that happens, he said, the entire team must come to their aide. And support each other they did, and that made all the difference.

Until you have served on a crisis team, you really can't imagine the emotional and physical toll it can take. BP CEO Tony Hayward has come under criticism for saying publicly, "I'd like my life back." While that statement made PR professionals everywhere cringe, those of us who have lived through a crisis have some appreciation for that all-too human feeling that comes after days of unending pressure.

So how can you ensure that the emotional and physical needs of the crisis team are being met so they can continue to be productive? One simple way is to ensure every team member has at least one person to back them up, and that there is a schedule for staff rotation. For small companies that do not have enough staff to provide backup support, contracting with a public relations agency is a good option.

In addition, one person on the crisis team should be assigned to care for the emotional and physical needs of the team. The team care manager is responsible for making sure team members take breaks every few hours, eat healthy, regular meals and take time off to sleep. The care manager should also serve as the recorder of proceedings throughout the day. Since each crisis team member is likely focused on a specific role, it is important that someone

look at the effort holistically and monitor and record activities.

Team care managers should also be responsible for ordering meals. Maintaining healthy eating can help minimize team fatigue and maintain mental acuity. I recommend having healthy snacks available throughout the day and providing the team with low-fat meals. Stressfocus.com lists a number of foods that can actually reduce stress, including fresh fruits and vegetables, soups, yogurt, skimmed milk and fish. Surprisingly, caffeine has been shown to be beneficial to people undergoing sustained stress. *The Journal of Psychopharmacology* reported in April 2002 that moderate, sustained caffeine can also improve mental ability under sustained stress.

Team care managers should also make sure team members get enough sleep. Sleep deprivation puts a crisis team at risk. It can impair decision making and reduce accuracy and productivity. One of my clients addressed this in their crisis plan by arranging response team accommodations at a nearby hotel in the event of a crisis situation. In addition, the client keeps overnight kits on hand, each containing a toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo and other personal items for crisis team members who can't get home. This is smart thinking for two reasons: It isn't safe for crisis team members to drive home when they are sleep deprived; and keeping crisis team members close to the response center ensures they're available if needed suddenly.

So are you prepared for a crisis? Does your plan include criteria for the selection of your crisis



Maintaining healthy eating can help minimize team fatigue and maintain mental acuity.

team? Have you identified a person to care for the team? Even if you have taken all those steps, the only way to be sure you have the right plan and team in place is to conduct a test—a crisis drill. While you can never really create the emotional environment of a crisis in a drill, you can come close. Going through a drill will point out weaknesses in your plan and help you identify individuals who may not be suited to serve on the team.

Many people who have gone through drills have come to the conclusion that crisis work is not a good fit for them—and that's OK. While the response team is managing through a crisis plan, there still must be team members tending to the day-to-day business.

Crisis planning is a form of insurance that protects a company's brand and reputation. Make sure you put enough focus and attention on the people who will be executing the plan. Carefully selecting the team, and making sure they are supported physically and emotionally during a crisis give you the best chance of achieving a positive outcome. **PRN**

Susan Diekman is an account director at Weber Shandwick's Minneapolis office. She has provided crisis management counsel in more than 25 crisis situations. Most recently, she provided crisis counsel to ECMC, which experienced a 3.3 million record data breach, impacting people in 50 states.

All Hands on Deck: Employees as Brand Ambassadors in a Sudden Utilities Crisis

By Chase Kelley

As a provider of electricity to more than 140,000 customers in southwestern Indiana and natural gas to nearly 1 million customers in Indiana and Ohio, Vectren's public relations crises always seem to relate to power outages. Electric outages spurred by mother nature are very common and even gas outages, which are much more rare, can quickly become an issue if it's the dead of winter and homes are left unheated.

As PR practitioners, we all certainly understand that employees are our best ambassadors for managing crises. It was during a devastating ice storm in our electric service territory that knocked out 75,000 of our 140,000 customers in January 2009 when we realized just how powerful our employees could be in helping our company weather a PR storm. Keep in mind that as an electric provider, everyone is our customer—so when an employee runs into a local friend, neighbor or relative, he/she is crossing paths with a Vectren customer.

Critical to our success in setting expectations with customers were frequent updates via mass email to employees. Whether on the job or at the grocery store, our employees quickly became unofficial spokespersons in providing real-time status updates to concerned friends and/or family members who found themselves without power while temperatures remained below freezing.

Keys to These Updates Included:

- **Increased frequency:** A daily update regarding the number of customers restored was simply not enough. Employee updates regarding information provided to the media

were timed whereby they were triggered prior to TV news cycles, i.e., a 5 a.m. update, a mid-morning update, a 4:30 p.m. update and a 9:30 p.m. update. These messages were then echoed on our company intranet.

As PR practitioners, we all certainly understand that employees are our best ambassadors for managing crises.

- **Inclusion of meaty stats:** The purpose of this data was to demonstrate the dramatic impact the storm had on our infrastructure and the volume of work with which our employees and contractors were faced. Examples include:
 - ▶ The total field restoration team is logging roughly 16,000 hours daily, exclusive of office personnel, and it has been relatively safe given 16 hour shifts and taxing weather conditions.
 - ▶ Crews have replaced more than 135 poles and 80 transformers and have made repairs to hundreds more.
 - ▶ Nearly 1,000 people are helping with the storm restoration process, including Vectren employees and contractors.

In the same vein of having employees educate customers, we created an Ice Storm Fact Sheet employees could mail or hand deliver to customers that listed downed power line safety, generator usage tips, thawing food safety tips, etc. However, the critical piece of the handout was an explanation of the electric meter set on

a customer's home and what customers should do if it was damaged. Essentially, our employees became experts in the meter and service line equipment. In this manner, our non-field employees could not only understand why some customers may experience a delay in power restoration but they could also set expectations with neighbors or friends who may have experienced damage to their meter sets and that it was the customer's responsibility to engage an electrician to initiate the repairs.

Another key tactic we used were uplifting messages and appearances from senior staff. Given dozens of employees, more so those that typically operate in an office/corporate environment, were called upon to help with duties such as calling customers, walking door-to-door in hard hit neighborhoods and protecting the public from downed power lines, we felt it important to keep moral at high levels during the process.

While some don't hear from senior management via a thank you message until the situation is resolved, we triggered periodic voice mail and/or emails that demonstrated gratitude during the very initial hours of the storm and called for more volunteers. Furthermore, many members of senior staff were directly involved the restoration efforts mentioned above in demonstrating the need for all hands on deck.

Two days into the restoration process, the company made a \$100,000 gift to the local American Red Cross that was providing shelter to many of our customers. To further engage employees, we offered another \$25,000 to match any employee donations. Closing out the eight-day event and as a way to thank employees, we released a special publication of our company newsletter dedicated solely to the ice storm events. The material includes photos of employees at work and/or volunteering with the American Red Cross, employee stories of Good Samaritan-type work and an overwhelming list of testimonials and thank you messages from appreciative customers.

It is certainly high-pressure, challenging situations like these that bring employees together and allow utilities to truly demonstrate their commitment to their customers and greater communities. It was literally our employees via their tireless efforts who were the solution to this massive outage. Thus, open, real-time communication was a necessity in ensuring they were equipped to meet customer needs just as much as words of encouragement and gratitude were needed to ensure their work was not going unnoticed. **PRN**

Chase Kelley is spokeswoman and director of PR at Vectren, a utility company.



“Help [your company] expand its ecosystem of influencers who are on your side. The more advocates who can join in the conversation, the better chance you have to shape the conversation.”

—*Carl Folta, Executive Vice President of Corporate Communications, Viacom*

Reputation Management

4



Comments and Actions May Be Forever, But Messages Can Still Be Controlled

By Cari Brunelle

It takes just one fall from grace to bring down an entire company. You don't have to look any further than headlines about Toyota or Tiger Woods to see how true this really is. The success of nearly every business depends largely on its reputation, and today the stakes are higher than ever before. The viral nature of the media means that what you do can be communicated across the globe in a matter of seconds.

And while you can take control of the messages, it's very difficult to do so without sufficient planning in advance of any crisis occurring. Even in today's scandal-obsessed media environment, many companies do not prepare for media crises. If you find yourself in the midst of a media crisis, there are several critical steps that you can take to mitigate bad press and protect your reputation.

Get All of the Facts

As a crisis communications consultant for your company or your client, you can't offer strategic counsel if you don't know the whole story, especially the most potentially damaging details. Look no further than John Edwards for an example of how the worst information eventually surfaces. And you certainly cannot prepare for the worst if you don't know what it is. This is one of the most important steps in preparing for a crisis, but it's one in which many CEOs fail right from the start. Ignoring the worst and putting your head in the sand will not make the problem go away.

► **Pull In the Right People.** It's imperative to involve the right people within your organization before and during a crisis. For example, if the crisis involves a legal matter in which your company is or may become involved, notify your general counsel as early as possible. Or, in some cases, it may be necessary to brief human

resources. For all potential crisis issues, be sure your internal and external PR teams are briefed as soon as possible.

Look no further than John Edwards for an example of how the worst information eventually surfaces.

Develop a Strategy

Once you have assessed the situation, it's time to strategize. First, select a single spokesperson and ensure that no one else speaks with the media. Consider how your choice of spokesperson will affect your message. Then decide if your situation warrants a press release or simply a media statement, and if your spokesperson will do multiple interviews or if you will only issue a statement. In today's media environment, responding via social media may in some cases be more appropriate than responding through traditional channels.

As you approach these critical decisions, consider first the outcome that you want. Then play out all of the different media approaches and decide which is most likely to achieve your desired outcome. Sometimes it is beneficial to first offer an exclusive to one media outlet. Consider choosing a reporter you trust to tell your story fairly and accurately. With this approach you often have a better chance of having your story told with all the facts and in a more balanced manner.

Sync Internal and External Messaging

PR professionals are often so focused on external communications that they forget the importance of their internal audiences. Ensure that all of your internal communications (written and verbal)

Top 10 Tips for Dealing With Reporters

- 1. Don't put your head in the sand.**
Pretending a negative issue isn't there won't make it go away.
- 2. Screen your calls.**
Never take a call from a reporter cold. Have someone find out the important information for you first.
- 3. Anticipate questions; develop messages.**
Be ready for all potential questions from reporters and develop two or three key messages.
- 4. Stick to your guns.**
Once you have developed key messages, stick to them. If you have to, take reporters back to your main points and say, "But what's really important is..."
- 5. Be ready to educate.**
Don't hesitate to set the record straight. Offer background information when necessary.
- 6. Don't use "no comment" and "off the record."**
Explain why you can't elaborate instead. And never tell a reporter something you aren't willing to see in print.
- 7. Repeat it, repeat it.**
It's the best way to ensure your message is included.
- 8. Avoid excessive stats, numbers and technical jargon.**
Use language for the layperson. Don't risk being misunderstood.
- 9. Don't lie or dress up statements.**
Start with the truth; honesty and candor preserve image and reputation best. Reporters aren't so easily fooled.
- 10. Let the interview go when you are finished.**
Despite being well prepared, you will always wish you had said something differently. Learn from it, but let it go.

include the same messaging as your external messaging. In addition, as most companies span multiple cities and often countries, it is important that you carefully time your internal and external announcements, considering all time zones. You don't want your employees to read about an important company change in their morning newspaper before they have been able to check their email. So be prepared to announce your news to the media soon after it is communicated internally.

► **Media Train Your Spokesperson.** As with any key announcement, don't forget to prepare your spokesperson for interviews by developing key messages and a question and answer document that addresses all possible reporter questions, especially the ones you hope they never ask. A crisis situation is one of the most important times for your spokesperson to be on message and to be ready for anything.

► **Implement and Stick to Your Plan.** Once you have taken the time to develop an internal and external communication plan, you must stick to it throughout the crisis. Remember, you can control the story, despite the media. Do not allow media inquiries, leaks or rumors to dictate your timing.

Preparing for a potential crisis requires a well-thought-out game plan. Without it, your company's well-being is at risk with lasting consequences. The days of news dying with the next news cycle are long over. With today's fast-paced news, social media and search engines, your comments and actions live on forever. So make sure the messages that live on are the ones you want. **PRN**

Cari Brunelle is VP, public reputation services, at Jaffe PR, a PR firm for the legal industry. She has media trained law firm management and corporate CEOs during numerous high-profile situations.

Image Repair Strategies: Lessons Learned From Politicians' Public Apologies

By Dionne C. Clemons

Public figures' effective or ineffective execution of an apology sustains an intense level of interest by the media, by scholars of varying disciplines and by the public at large. This interest stems from the barrage of apologies publicly expressed regularly—it seems—as a result of yet another corporate crisis, verbal gaffe, public misstep or political scandal.

Both public relations practitioners and scholars alike continue to dissect the use of the public apology as an effective strategy convey sincerity, restore one's image and regain the public's trust.

When public relations practitioners counsel clients on how to best address a crisis, we employ a form of rhetorical discourse known as "apologia," where an apologist delivers a speech of self-defense against an incident that has transpired. As a result of more than three decades of research, damage control expert and political communication scholar William L. Benoit developed a theory of image repair that falls under the classification of apologia to explain a public figure's need to preserve their image.

Benoit states that image repair apologia is needed when an offensive act has occurred, and when an individual or organization has been accused of being responsible for that act. His Image Repair Theory offers five general defense strategies—denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification—as broad typologies to aid in understanding the use of apologia.

Denial and evasion of responsibility are used to reject or reduce responsibility for the act in question. The apologist may simply deny that

the act did not occur or blame someone or something else for the occurrence of the act. When the apologist evades responsibility, it implies that the act was a result of provocation; that there was not enough information or ability; that the act was an accident; or the act was



William L. Benoit found that the use of "bolstering" and "mortification" were the best strategies to use in politicians' efforts to restore their reputation in a crisis.

done with good intentions.

Reducing offensiveness involves bolstering, where the good traits of the apologist are stressed; minimizing, stating that the act is less serious than similar ones; transcendence, where the apologist focuses on more important considerations rather than the act; reducing the credibility of the accuser; and compensation for the victims. Last are corrective actions where the apologist puts forth a plan to resolve the problem, and mortification, where the apologist accepts responsibility, apologizes and asks for forgiveness.

Benoit studied the apologia of politicians such as former U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, and former U.S. Rep. Gary Condit (D). He found that the use of bolstering and mortification were the best strategies to use in politicians' efforts to restore their reputation in a crisis.

My colleague and I applied Benoit's Image Repair Theory and his typology of image repair strategies to each political figure who publicly apologized between 2004 and 2010. We wanted

Lessons From Politicians' Image Repair Apologies

- **Admit your offensive act immediately to the public and tell the entire story.** The majority of political actors' crises stayed on the media's agenda much longer than needed because they failed to or refused to come clean with the whole story when the offense was initially announced/leaked. Nine out of the 11 political actors studied failed to tell the public the entire story the first time that they spoke publicly. It wasn't until new evidence was revealed or more information surrounding the story was leaked to the media that these politicians ultimately came clean.

- **Mortification can be vital to image restoration efforts.** Express sincere remorse mortification, and couple your mortification strategy with a corrective action strategy by having a plan to solve or prevent a recurrence of the problem. Again, nine out of the 11 political actors studied failed to announce their resignation from their post until the media and public opinion forced their hand.

to know if they'd learned any lessons from their predecessors' public apologies by examining what image repair strategies were used most frequently in each politician's apologia discourse. We also wanted to know, of these image repair strategies used, which resulted in the successful repair of these politicians' reputations, if any?

To answer these questions, we analyzed each politician's apology. In our analysis we sought to determine what message options or combination of message options were implored in the actual speech given. Overall, the majority of the politicians' studied evaded their responsibility for the act in question, with most stating that in some way or another, it was caused by some other reason—known as Benoit's provocation strategy.

A recent example of this is Indiana Rep. Mark Souder (R), who announced his resignation May 12, 2010, after announcing a mutual relationship

with one of his part-time staffers. In his resignation speech, Souder said, "It has been all-consuming for me to do this job well, especially in a district with costly, competitive elections every two years. I do not have any sort of 'normal' life—for family, for friends, for church, for community." Others stated that somehow Souder's behavior was an accident.

In June 2009, South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford (R) said in his statement regarding his disappearance from the state and his extramarital affair, "I developed a relationship with a—what started out as a dear, dear friend from Argentina. It began very innocently, as I suspect many of these things do..."

The second most common strategy used among these political actors was the use of differentiation. Nevada Sen. John Ensign (R) stated to the media that his affair was different from former President Bill Clinton's relationship with a White House intern because he didn't lie about it under oath, stating, "I haven't done anything legally wrong."

The third most common strategy used was denial, where three of the political actors studied used simple denial or shifted blame.

Ultimately, all but one political actor used Benoit's recommended mortification strategy, where they each apologized for the offensive act; this was coupled with the use of corrective action, which, for the majority of the actors studied, resulted in resignation and, for two, imprisonment. Idaho Sen. Sen. Larry Craig (R) only apologized for pleading guilty and denied soliciting an undercover policeman in a men's restroom in a Minneapolis airport. Of the 11 politicians studied, Ensign, Louisiana Sen. David Vitter (R) and Sanford maintain their political offices as of this writing. Although Eliot Spitzer (D) resigned from his position as governor of New York after his prostitution ring scandal, he has been hired by CNN for a political roundtable debate show.

Our review of the print, television and Internet media's coverage of each of these politician's apologies revealed that the more time it took for the politician to apologize and take corrective action, the longer the story remained in the news.

In addition, an analysis of public opinion surveys about each politician after making their public apology revealed that the approval rating for every politician studied significantly dropped after his apology was given. These politicians did more harm to their reputation by failing to immediately apologize and take corrective action.

Based on our findings, Benoit's Image Repair Strategies continue to prove useful in understanding how to strategically craft a message that will preserve a client's reputation. **PRN**

Dr. Dionne C. Clemons is an assistant professor of public relations at Towson University. She has more than a decade of private and public sector experience in public affairs and specializes in government public relations, political communication, public affairs and women as leaders in public relations research.

Controlling Brand Image and Perception In the Age of the Instant Image Upload

By Annemarie Marek

The reality of today's crisis news is that well-known corporate brands must increasingly address the immediacy of visual media that can undermine and exert greater influence on perceptions of a brand than any other type of newscasting.

Historically, the written and spoken words of a news reporter shed the greatest insight on a company's intentions. Now, cell phone cameras, handycams, webcams and any other mobile camera device used by any amateur or person on the street can capture startling images that many words cannot—and all have the power to sensationalize and shape an audience's perception of that brand.

More significantly, these images can be quickly posted to YouTube or distributed via social media, from blogs to Facebook, and taken completely out of context, with the effect of undermining any actions of those in leadership positions. The result is that the credibility of those leaders is increasingly doubted and disputed among the general public and key constituents, as the visual "truth" overrides any viable actions that have been taken. This inherent disconnect between the spoken word and the visual reality must be addressed with candor and seriousness

throughout the course of every crisis. Of course, the question is: how?

The most compelling, recent examples demonstrating this disconnect and offering striking examples of the collision between the image and the word involve three well-known, well-established corporate brands: BP, Toyota and Apple. Of the three, the impact of the visual media can be summarized, in my view, as follows:

The only benefit of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, of course, was the media's deflection from Toyota's acceleration crisis.

A Matter of Leadership

BP's former CEO Tony Hayward is the poster child of corporate leadership gone awry: arrogant, disengaged and focused strictly on the impact to one constituent—BP's shareholders. From its culture of deception on safety issues to BP's efforts to control the media's access to the horrific imagery of oil-drenched and lifeless wildlife, Hayward's leadership was completely out of touch with the multiple realities of this disastrous spill.

Company	Name of Crisis	Damage(s)
BP	Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill	Disastrous damage with tragic loss of human lives and environmental devastation; damage to the corporate reputation, leadership and stock value; heavy financial damage to multiple parties
Toyota	Accelerator Problem	Tragic loss of human lives; recoverable damage to the corporate reputation, leadership and stock value; heavy short-term financial impact; safety and quality control issues to address to rebuild brand confidence
Apple	iPhone 4 Reception Problems	Tarnished but not damaged in terms of its reputation; questionable explanation by leadership regarding the fix; little stock impact, unless problems cannot be resolved and lead to a product recall or class-action lawsuits

Of the most ironic images conveyed during this crisis was the vacationing Hayward, who in June 2010 watched his luxury yacht compete in a race off the coast of England. Despite Hayward's explanation that he wanted to spend time with his son on Father's Day, the public outrage generated from Hayward's yachting episode seemed to expedite his removal from overseeing the crisis.

Get on the Ground

How should Hayward have behaved? In the throes of a crisis—no matter what its length or toll on the leadership—Hayward should have thrust himself into the scene, rather than remaining far removed from the massive spill. Hayward should have been seen “on the ground”—front and center with the people of the Gulf Coast cities most affected by the crisis. The media should not have been stonewalled. Advertising messages should not have been focused on just the money side of the response (i.e. we're paying millions in claims). BP's leadership should have focused on the collaborative efforts being made (if any) to enlist the world's experts on this crisis and its ongoing clean-up. Regular reports and visual explanations should have been offered.

Instead, the public's perception of the spill was fed by daily imagery of a massive, uncontrolled leaking pipeline, miles under water, with no apparent remedy in sight. Of course, the financial melee caused by attorneys filing class-action lawsuits and the U.S. government holding hearings to place the blame, while small business owners stood idle in their empty restaurants mourning the loss of their generations-long livelihoods, completed the tragic, circus-like perception of this crisis.

Take the Matter Seriously

The only benefit of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, of course, was the media's deflection from Toyota's acceleration crisis. By recalling 3.8 million floor mats in almost every make and

model, Toyota may have inadvertently exposed its dark side. The visual disconnect between runaway cars with a simple floor mat recall did not register as credible among Toyota's loyal publics, especially given that Toyota had a history of complaints regarding acceleration problems. With 200 serious injuries and 16 deaths attributed to unexplained, high-speed acceleration, Toyota's recall strategy seemed almost laughable. How does one connect a floor mat to an inability to stop a speeding car, while fully engaging the brake?

In an ABC News report, some Toyota owners “were in rebellion and said the floor mats did not explain what caused their cars to suddenly surge up to 100 miles per hour.”

Compounding Toyota's crisis was the coverage of the near bankruptcy filings of Chrysler and GM. To other loyal Toyota car owners, the real culprit of the crisis was the continuous media and political pounding leveled on Toyota at a time when American car manufacturers had failed to compete against them and were losing significant market share. By magnifying the runaway car issue, these domestic manufacturers could trumpet their new cars and capabilities.

Unfortunately, Toyota's leadership was not prepared to handle a crisis of this magnitude, particularly in dealing with the news coverage. The constant replaying of video footage of runaway cars, interviews with Toyota car owners and a reluctant Toyota leadership to do on-camera interviews all contributed to the near-term damage to Toyota's brand.

Admit Responsibility

How should the leadership have responded? In Toyota's case, the company should have been more forthcoming about prior acceleration problems. Of all possible car issues, acceleration issues, tire blowouts and engine fires constitute significant potential to damage a brand's

reputation because they imperil the lives of the drivers and their families.

Moreover, the idea that by swapping out a floor mat and/or securing it better could offset the idea of a runaway car delivers a visual disconnect and, thus, undermines the integrity of the message. When it was subsequently announced by Toyota that the accelerator pedal was the problem, the relationship between the problem and its potential root cause was much more understandable.

However, still lingering is the potentially unresolved acceleration problem, as the National Traffic Safety Administration (NTSA) has received more than 60 complaints from Toyota drivers whose vehicles were recalled and fixed, but are still experiencing sudden, unintended acceleration. False assurances that the problem has been resolved when owners return with the same issue will further erode Toyota's brand, particularly if this issue is life-threatening.

Listen to the Customers

In an ironic twist of fate, the assurances of Steve Jobs that the reception problems of the Apple iPhone 4 require only a software "fix" could have been the undoing of the hottest new globetrotter's toy. Having created one of the most fanatical and loyal customer bases in the world, Apple had to confront the possibility of staging a massive recall if the reception problem is based on how the phone is held, thereby interfering with the wraparound antenna.

So how does a well-respected leader and innovator like Steve Jobs find himself in the midst of making false assurances? Consider the most visual media moment when Jobs, in his trademark black turtleneck and jeans, took the stage at Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference in San Francisco and, in front of an audience of 5,000, then places a video call to Apple's senior VP of industrial design Jony Paul

Ive when the video freezes up. What does Jobs do? He turns to the audience and explains, "Now it never freezes up... did you all turn off your WiFi?" And thus begins the infamous blame game, albeit with an unsuspecting audience.

Of course, there are now two widely reported problems with the iPhone 4: the "death grip" problem which occurs when someone grips the lower left corner of the phone, causing the device to lose its connection, and the signal strength indicator bars inaccurately reflecting the strength (or lack of) of network reception.



In the simplest of contexts, genuine leadership and reputable brand management require honest, forthright disclosure, not narrowly focused financial concerns or arrogant stances.

In both cases, the visual media and ensuing customer complaints could have overwhelmed Jobs, whose comments referred to customers who are "holding it wrong," but who, at the conference, illustrated and bragged about the steel band that frames the iPhone 4, with its integrated antennae and unique engineering design—something that he explains "has never been done before."

When engineering design supersedes reliable performance and customer complaints mount, it is not time for the CEO of any company to tell loyal customers that they don't know how to grasp the phone properly. At the time, news media were buzzing about class-action lawsuits being filed under the media moniker of "Antennagate," suggesting a bizarre cover-up during product design meetings. To further erode consumer confidence, Apple's support forum has dropped the threads to the *Consumer Reports'* article not recommending the iPhone 4.

Again, these highly visible actions of dropping links, grasping phones and standing on a stage

without a video connection create a much more sensational story and brand argument in the consumer's mind, than Steve Jobs does telling us how to hold the phone. Images and words collide to undermine the brand.

Embrace Humanity

In all three cases, these crises involved leadership statements that did not match the visual media and/or belittled the seriousness of the crisis. The truth is customers are people, and people are not massively stupid or easily hoodwinked. They can find common ground (and exercise common complaints) very quickly through today's social media channels of communication.

For BP, the luxury yacht image juxtaposed with flailing, dying pelicans on the seashore and the intransigent posture of CEO Tony Hayward necessitated his removal from his post. For Toyota, the visual image of removing floor mats, albeit by the multimillions, to resolve an unexpected, sudden high-speed acceleration of a vehicle seemed to be completely disconnected from the seriousness

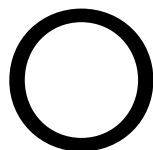
of the issue. For Apple, the fanatical response of its customer base to a newly engineered but, perhaps flawed, new-generation iPhone may have clouded Steve Jobs' understanding that one cannot explain away a flaw by suggesting that customers hold the phone differently and call that a "fix."

In the simplest of contexts, genuine leadership and reputable brand management require honest, forthright disclosure, not narrowly focused financial concerns or arrogant stances about products that have malfunctioned. By focusing on the lives that are affected in the throes of a crisis, getting onto the ground to walk side-by-side with the victims and insisting on a corporate culture of honesty and responsibility, leaders may survive the tumultuous world of the visual media that engulfs them during a crisis. **PRN**

Annemarie Marek, M.A., LEED AP, is the principal of Marek & Company, a Dallas-based brand consulting and public relations firm founded in 1992.

Top Guns: Reputation Management and Refinement Strategies From CorpComm Elite

By PR News Editors



n May 14, 2009, pharmaceutical manufacturing giant Pfizer announced a program that would provide newly unemployed individuals and their families with free medications for up to one year. It's a public relations coup by any standard: The announcement prompted praise from consumers and media alike, and it enhanced Pfizer's reputation as a company that cares enough about its customers' well-being to put the bottom line aside.

But Raymond Kerins, vice president of worldwide communications for Pfizer, is hesitant to celebrate, as he is well aware of how little this effort will impact his company's reputation in the grand scheme of things. He also acknowledges the clear disconnect between doing good work and having a good reputation; the two have proven to be, at times, mutually exclusive.

"We make life-saving medicines," he says. "How could our reputation be so bad?"

It's a question communications executives across all industries are asking with growing frequency and urgency as the number of risks to their corporate reputations proliferates.

It's also a double-edged sword of sorts: True, reputational risks have a way of backing companies into the proverbial corner, but they also introduce a means for communicators to prove their inherent value to senior management.

"The value of GE's communications function has grown dramatically," says Gary Sheffer, executive director of corporate communications and public affairs at GE. "We are a much more strategic function today."

Carl Folta, executive vice president of corporate communications for Viacom, has had a similar experience.

*"We make life-saving medicines," he says.
"How could our reputation be so bad?"
—Raymond Kerins, Vice President,
Worldwide Communications, Pfizer*

"When stuff hits the fan is when we [communications executives] get the most face time," he says. "But we need to be able to separate what is going on around us from what we can actually handle."

Folta's statement gets to the root of what separates those organizations that excel in a crisis-laden business climate from those that barely survive. The heads of communications at corporate giants like MasterCard, Swiss Re and GE—all profoundly vulnerable to modern reputational risks in their own ways—know as well as anyone given their high-risk industries, which makes their best practices for weathering today's storm more valuable than ever.

► **Be aware of the big picture, but focus on the small stuff.** Taking stock of every single global crisis that could potentially destroy you or your business will do more harm than good, as it will distract your focus from the manageable challenges.

"We can't control the global economy," says Mike McDougall, vice president of corporate communications and public affairs for Bausch & Lomb. "Instead [of trying], we need to keep our eye on the ball and speak to the issues we can control."

Granted, control is a tricky word since it seems all but impossible to exert in the modern communications environment, especially for organizational leaders who must answer to institutions much larger than themselves—namely, regulators.

Stephen Dishart, managing director of communications and human resources for Swiss Re, agrees that his greatest challenge is managing the heightened regulatory environment. He also notes that the problems we face today aren't the result of lax regulation, but of the lax enforcement of regulation—an important distinguishing factor. Given this reality, it is essential to develop more collaborative relationships with government regulators, but also to address crises and challenges in the context of your entire universe of stakeholders.

"Our focus is keeping people informed, especially employees and clients," Dishart says. "We also need to maintain perspective, because there are a lot of things that are working. That's what we need to educate stakeholders about."

► **Make credibility and consistency your top priorities.** Without these two things on your side, the road to recovery will be impossible to traverse.

"Always worry about credibility," Folta says. "Once you've lost that, it's difficult to recover."

The credibility crisis stems from a deficit of trust among all stakeholders, and regaining this trust is as critical as it is difficult to accomplish.

"The erosion of trust stems from one simple question: Who should I believe?" McDougall says. "We have a global information network like we've never seen before, which [forces] transparency. But that level of transparency will drive reputation for those who deserve it."

This global information network doesn't only challenge organizations' credibility, but also executives' need to maintain consistency—a need that has increased exponentially with the

emergence of social media, which gives all stakeholders a vehicle for comparing notes.

"Since we are in a highly regulated industry, we have to be very consistent with what we say to all stakeholders," Pfizer's Kerins says. "The challenge is when they start talking back."

► **Talk back to the back-talkers.** Kerins' mention of challenges presented by stakeholders' ability to talk back is central to the current assortment of reputational risks. Kerins himself has begun to incorporate digital channels into Pfizer's communications mix, but he admits it is something he has done tentatively because once the company starts engaging online, it "cannot walk away from the conversation."

Social media certainly presents its fair share of reputational risks, but it also offers immense rewards. "We are finding that online platforms have helped us manage our reputation," says Barbara Pierce, public relations director of worldwide brand marketing and communications for Kodak. "We listen a lot to identify risks and issues before they come up. But it's important to understand what you are seeing when monitoring social media."

Indeed, listening is key, as that is what gives you an intimate understanding of stakeholders' needs and wants. This understanding, in turn, can help shape new opportunities.

"We needed a communications reset at the company," Sheffer says. "We are making an effort to humanize GE."

Their approach: Blogging initiatives, engaging in personal communications with retirees for the first time and even hiring journalists to bring a new perspective to the company's outreach efforts. With regards to the blogging component, the communications team has established specific guidelines for employees to follow.

Then, Sheffer says, “The blog acts as a news channel to give people a window into GE that they wouldn’t otherwise have.”

► **Understand the difference between a means and an end.** Social media is definitely here to stay, but understanding where it fits into your overall communications strategy and business model is essential.

“One mistake some companies make is to regard social media as a strategic objective,” says Harvey Greisman, senior vice president and group executive of worldwide communications

for MasterCard. “I see it as a very important tactic, depending on what your objectives are.”

► **Surrender in the fight for control.** Ultimately, conversations about reputation, social media and the current business environment always return to the issue of control, but by now it’s a moot point.

“There is no control. You have to give it up,” Folta says. “Help [your company] expand its ecosystem of influencers who are on your side. The more advocates who can join in the conversation, the better chance you have to shape the conversation.” **PRN**

Choosing the Outgoing Message: What We Should Have Already Learned From Nixon

By Tracy Williams

Tiger Woods broke the cardinal rule of crisis communications—report your own bad news. Others will be more than happy to do so for you, often get it wrong, keep it going longer and provide no glimpse of the true emotions of the transgressor. If Tiger had told everything, as painful as that would have been, it would have cut the legs off the follow-up stories.

He should have learned from Richard Nixon, who proved forever that “stonewalling”—his own word—failed even the all-powerful president of the United States. Bill Clinton, a Rhodes scholar, didn’t learn either, nor did many otherwise extremely successful public figures. Gary Hart. John Edwards. Eliot Spitzer. Kobe Bryant. Mark Sanford. Each and every one followed up their indiscretion by fumbling their crisis communications. It’s human instinct to want to deny and cover up, to use wish power that the story will fade from headlines. The most difficult persuasion a crisis manager must make is to get the client to face the reality immediately before the story hits page one.

If Nixon had come clean the very day the “plumbers” were arraigned, would Watergate have ever been as big? Would Woodward and Bernstein and the *Washington Post* have become, well, them? I don’t think so. David Letterman learned. He shocked everyone when he reported that he’d had affairs with staffers before there was a story. What did Letterman accomplish that Woods and the rest did not? He didn’t make the problem go away. Real problems never go away.

The same rules apply for businesses. It is critical to be up front and comprehensive with all crisis communications, whether you’re about to

announce a merger, acquisitions, layoffs, lawsuits, product recalls or worse. Advance planning will significantly diminish the perception by the media and other important audiences of cover up and confusion. It’s a reassuring task to



The only achievable goal of crisis management is to reduce the duration and intensity of the pain.

envision unthinkable scenarios and to organize thinking about how best to respond. The checklist below can help guide communications planning for any number of crisis scenarios:

- ▶ Once again, be the first to break your own bad news. Even if the solution is elusive, begin with full disclosure.
- ▶ Confirm facts, so you can communicate openly and honestly and accurately articulate the situation. Your communications counsel must be fully aware of all the facts.
- ▶ Identify all key audiences and develop a strategy for each.
- ▶ Develop concise, factual messages that can be understood quickly by all—internal/employees, media, investors, vendors and outside advisers (accountants, lawyers, public relations and advertising agencies)—to be repeated throughout the company verbally and in all written materials by leadership and crisis team.
- ▶ Be honest and thorough with everyone.
- ▶ Craft more detailed Q&As, customer letters, vendor letters, etc., that provide facts and reassurance they need. Don’t neglect your own employees.

- ▶ Protect your people by empowering them with knowledge. They are an exceptionally viral group of communicators.
- ▶ If there is a solution to the problem, work toward solving it quickly as openly as possible. Quite often, the best you can hope for is to mitigate the immediate damage of the crisis by being open. If you hide something, not only will it be discovered, it will destroy credibility and reputations.
- ▶ Use all of the tools at your disposal, including your corporate Web site, internal sites, public relations wire services and social media.
- ▶ Continue to communicate with all key audiences until the crisis has passed. Consistency is important.
- ▶ Learn from the experience and anticipate the next crisis. Plan for likely and even unlikely scenarios. Know the steps you're going to take before you have to take them.

- ▶ Of course, there are limits to what crisis communications can do. The greatest lesson from the BP oil spill may be to plan for all potential disasters and pair them with real-world solutions. If you've identified a risk but don't know how to fix the problem quickly if something goes wrong, maybe you should back off and figure that out first.

The rules of managing a crisis are unequivocal—in matters of fact, there is no choice. The die is cast. The only achievable goal of crisis management is to reduce the duration and intensity of the pain. Then, set on a course of rebuilding your reputations. Look at Nixon—by the end of his life, he was considered a statesman. Tiger is at least playing golf again. **PRN**

Tracy Olmstead Williams, president and CEO of Olmstead Williams Communications, works with technology, healthcare and cleantech companies, as well as law firms and other professional service firms.

Google Your Reputation: How to Properly Manage and Monitor Your Online Trail

By Elizabeth Lampert & Jonathan R. Fitzgarrauld

What online community boasts more than 400 million users worldwide, whose members comprise more than 160 million groups, spending upwards of 500 billion minutes per month discussing celebrity gossip, the latest products from Apple and, oh yeah—you?

Whether you realize it or not, you are a part of the social media craze that has slithered its way into our homes, relationships and businesses. Your brand (e.g., reputation) is based on loads of information (personal, professional, pictures, etc.) that exists in cyberspace for the world to see, with or without your knowledge. What are you proactively doing to monitor and manage such information?

Trying to control your online reputation is becoming an enormous, time-consuming feat. Before social media exploded on the scene, a vehicle for the rapid dissemination of positive or negative information on people, brands and businesses didn't exist. Watercooler gossip had a limited reach, and negative comments could be easily squashed by confronting the perpetrator.

Today, maintaining privacy has gone beyond our immediate social circles of friends, family, neighbors and professional contacts. Kicked up a huge notch, our reputation also incorporates the perceptions of potentially hundreds of millions of individuals, many of whom we've never met, but whom are active participants of social media. Anyone connected to such sites as Facebook, Linked In, YouTube and Twitter, among others, has the power and ability to potentially affect your career, your relationships, your acceptance into schooling or a social club or new business generation.

Google Yourself

Let's assume someone Googles you or your firm, which results in less-than-positive information. That person's perception of you and your credibility could be significantly impacted—or even destroyed—in an instant. Information could include the rantings of a disgruntled former employee or colleague, a reply to a blog posting, unflattering pictures or even someone with your same name. In any case, your brand is at risk.

Fortunately, the tools used to potentially destroy us can also be employed to positively promote us.

Fortunately, the tools used to potentially destroy us can also be employed to positively promote us. Search engines—like Google, Yahoo and YouTube—are no longer just search engines, they are reputation engines that can be used to monitor information about you, your firm or your clients. The first step in winning any reputation war is to learn what information is available to others. This is most easily done through a Google search.

We can't expect one, single outlet—like Google—to catch everything that's available on the Web. Spend an hour or so a month looking for mentions of you or your firm on various search engine sites to get a more comprehensive view of available information. Set up a Google alert, which is an automatic email update of the latest relevant Google results (Web, news, etc.) based on your topic of choice. Google alerts can be set up to monitor your name, your firm, your clients or a host of topics relevant to your life.

In addition to user-information-generated social media sites, there are sites like Pipl, Spock and ZoomInfo that stockpile information about you gathered from various Web sites. These sites then present the information to the world in a "profile" type format.

Because the information is being assembled automatically, with little to no human oversight, it is not uncommon for such sites to mix information about different people who may share the same name. These sites are particularly troubling for those who have the same name as, say, a porn star, criminal or child molester. Additionally, some sites utilize "bot software," which selectively pulls individual words from social media sites and adds them as "tags" to your online profiles. Taken out of context, some tags can be extremely damaging.

Reputation Remedies

In a flash, your personal reputation is at the mercy of search engines, blogs and social media outlets, none of which have a sterling reputation for accuracy. Identity theft, libel, defamation, mistaken identity and youthful indiscretions are just a few of the things that can come back to bite you when you least expect it.

Sure, there is a legal path to deal with libel, slander and defamation, and those laws worked well in an era of the printing press, but they are as ineffective now against the Internet as copyright laws are in battling music piracy.

There are ways to fight back and hopefully avoid such an occurrence. It all starts with discovering the depth and breadth of your personal Internet footprint. If you become aware of incorrect information, contact the specific site and request to have the information removed or corrected (to find out how, locate the site's privacy policy or contacts page).

There are also companies, like Reputation Defender and M|Buzz, that offer a monitoring

service that crawls social media and directory listings associated with your name. For a small monthly fee, they will email you whenever information—positive or negative—associated with your name is changed or updated.

And don't forget Wikipedia, which studies have shown is more accurate than Encyclopedia Britannica. An incorrect or defamatory entry may exist without your knowledge. If you or your firm has a Wiki page, monitor it regularly for erroneous edits. If you find incorrect information, contact the site's editors and ask for it to be removed.

Do Your Own Background Check

There is a treasure trove of information about you freely available to anyone who knows how to look for it. Do you own property? Have you ever been arrested or divorced? In most states, that information is of public record, and much of it is available online for a fee. When an employer or prospective client does their due diligence (including a background check), all kinds of information—even outdated information—can surface. While you're at it, order your free, annual credit report from the big three credit bureaus.

Become an Active Participant

Every social media outlet is an opportunity for you to promote your brand; it's also an opportunity for others to comment and rant. Careful and regular monitoring of your social media profiles allows you to delete posts that may be pejorative, ensuring an accurate and consistent message.

With hundreds of social media outlets and your limited time, choose one or two that are most relevant to you and become an active participant. Start a blog, comment on other people's blog posts, or become a member of a virtual group.

Having a profile on Linked In where you can connect with professional contacts is a great way

to stay top-of-mind and relevant with those who can affect your bottom line—clients, prospects, and referral sources.

Many people have chosen to use Facebook exclusively for personal connections. That said, it's still critical to monitor and manage your out-of-the-office brand. Avoid posting potentially embarrassing or overly personal information. For optimum control over what people see, become familiar with Facebook's privacy settings and use them to your advantage.

Many companies and virtually every major law firm without their knowledge now have their own Facebook pages. A company may be unaware for days, weeks or months that this information is even out there, and by then a client or prospect could see it.

Social media definitely presents yet one more challenge for companies looking to protect their brand and their image.

Who's Managing Your Brand?

Your success, and the success of your company, is largely based on the strength of your brand. If the brand is strong enough, others will want to be associated with it. If the brand is weak or tainted, others will pass you by.

It's incumbent upon each of us to use the tools and resources available—like social media—to monitor, enhance and promote our brand to those individuals who can benefit the most from it. If you've thought little about the topic, now is the time to act.

In the words of Warren Buffett, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." **PRN**

Elizabeth Lampert is the president of Elizabeth Lampert PR, and is a PR social media strategist. Jonathan R. Fitzgarrald is a personal branding expert and directs the marketing and business development for Greenberg Glusker, a Los Angeles-based real estate and entertainment law firm.

Does Your Reputation Make the Grade?: Testing Your Conduct Code for Cracks

By Gary W. Patterson

BP's recent catastrophes (the Deepwater Horizon explosion and the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill) bring to light the disconnect between theory and practice as it applies to "reputation management." A review of BP's code of conduct, which is published on its Web site, reveals a sad reality about too many notable institutions and high-profile individuals (e.g., the Catholic Church and John Edwards) that fall from grace when their sterling silver reputations become tarnished by egregious or irresponsible action. BP's code of conduct bears repeating because it shows just how far off the mark management was in upholding the company's reputation based on a carefully crafted statement.

"As Tony Hayward, the group chief executive, affirms: 'Our reputation, and therefore our future as a business, depends on each of us, everywhere, every day, taking personal responsibility for the conduct of BP's business.'... All our employees must follow the code of conduct. It clearly defines what we expect of our business and our people, regardless of location and background. Ultimately it is about helping BP people to do the right thing."

Answer the reputation management questions below to see if there's a crack in your company's armor. Honesty and a willingness to change are prerequisites to providing useful answers.

1. Does your executive branch live wholeheartedly by your company's mission statement?

The reason mission statements (aka core values) have become the butt of jokes is because most of them bear no resemblance to the reality of their organizations' cultures. If you expect your

employees to act with integrity, but top management's behavior sends a signal to employees to do as I say, not as I do, then you have a serious problem that needs to be addressed, beginning with reviewing and renewing your commitment to your mission statement.

Despite BP's written code of conduct that states every person at BP must "take responsibility for the conduct of BP's business," BP's top brass has been accused of falsifying reports of the extent of the oil spill damage, violating safety procedures and not taking corrective measures right after the Deepwater Horizon explosion. (It's ironic that the first explosion occurred only a month before the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.)

A company's reputation is only as good as the people whom you hire to guard it day in and day out, in good times and in bad.

2. When was the last time top management asked its shareholders, including employees and board members, for feedback on ways that the company can improve or enhance its reputation?

If you can't remember the last time you canvassed your constituents to assess the company's reputation based on its public performance and media reports, then it's time to turn inward and hire a professional outfit to help you create a survey. Be forewarned: All eyes will be on you to see what you will do with the results, so take the results seriously.

3. Who's in charge of managing your company's reputation?

It's not enough to put your PR department in charge of spinning only positive news. When your company makes a mistake or takes a misstep—as it surely will—the top PR executive needs to be brought in immediately and apprised of the situation as it exists with all the gory details. You have a responsibility to your PR branch to give it the authority to bring bad news to the public swiftly, accurately, and completely.

The classic example of Johnson & Johnson's Tylenol crisis demonstrates the power that was invested in its public relation program in the handling of the cyanide poisoning. How many executives have the courage of J&J's James Burke to turn to the company's code of conduct for guidance? Penned by J&J's founder, Robert Wood Johnson, in 1943, the code says, "Put simply, Our Credo challenges us to put the needs and well-being of the people we serve first." Twenty-eight years later, J&J is a standard bearer in how companies should handle a crisis. In fact, if you don't read any further, my suggestion is to ask your employees to read "The Tylenol Crisis: How Effective Public Relations Saved Johnson & Johnson." There are many lessons to be learned.

4. Is your crisis management strategy relevant?

Industries and markets are changing at lightning speed, giving way to new technological advancements as well as to new and unforeseen risks and changing economic realities worldwide. Take a critical look at your crisis management plan to see where it falls short in addressing worst-case scenarios vis-à-vis the times. Don't be surprised if you discover that your strategy is a throwback to an earlier era.

5. When was the last time you had a Mayday drill to test the effectiveness of your employees' response (from top to bottom) to a general crisis situation?

BP's mishandling of the Deepwater explosion points to the company's convoluted written chain of command that made it impossible for any one person to respond proactively to the crisis as it was unfolding. A *Wall Street Journal* article, "On Doomed Oil Rig, 'Nobody in Charge,'" reported that "written [safety] procedures required multiple people to jointly make decisions about how to respond to 'dangerous' levels of gas—a term that wasn't precisely defined—and some members of the crew were unclear about who had authority to initiate an emergency shutdown of the well." How would your written instructions and chain of command hold up in a fire drill?

6. Do you have the courage to change your business model and mind-set to serve a higher purpose beyond profit, sales, and executive bonuses?

Imagine what kind of company R.J. Reynolds could be today if it made a commitment to producing goods that promoted health instead of capitalizing on a profitable product that takes people's lives. How can your company change for the better, and in so doing, become an industry trailblazer?

A company's reputation is only as good as the people whom you hire to guard it day in and day out, in good times and in bad.

Bonus Question: Is your company's reputation second nature to you and your employees? Do you live your business' code of conduct? As the saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." **PRN**

CASE STUDY

Splash of Environmental Stewardship Recasts A Water Bottle Maker's Tainted Reputation

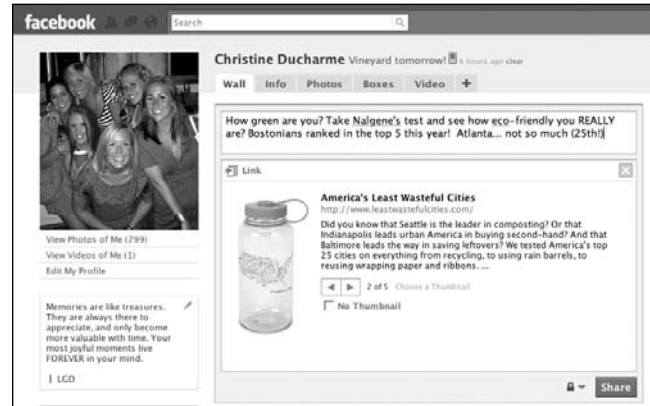
By PR News Editors

Nalgene, a Rochester, New York–based maker of plastic bottles for sports and outdoor enthusiasts, faced a major crisis in 2008, as the company fought negative media coverage surrounding the use of the potential harmful chemical BPA in its products.

Though the company's actions—including the choice to stop making products containing BPA—helped lessen the damage to its reputation, residual effects of the controversy remained, particularly online. “It wasn’t that the chatter that was so negative, it was just inaccurate,” says Len Cercone, founder of Boston-based PR agency Cercone Brown. Nalgene, who has worked with Cercone Brown since 2006, felt it needed to refocus the attention of consumers to its heritage of environmental responsibility.

The company turned to Cercone Brown to plan, develop and implement a fully integrated campaign that would strive to meet three goals, according to Len Cercone:

1. “We wanted to recast Nalgene as the “Badge of Environmental Responsibility,”” says Cercone. The message: “It’s good to make water bottles that can be refilled,” he adds.
2. “We needed to provide a conduit online to capture chatter and direct people somewhere so they could understand where Nalgene fit into the bottled water environment.”



The Nalgene “America’s Least Wasteful Cities” Facebook page served as a major starting point for consumer conversations around their own green habits. Photo courtesy Cercone Brown

3. “Although it wasn’t our main objective, we wanted to make a connection to Nalgene products, and create some ROI,” he says.

The campaign changed the Internet playing field for Nalgene, replacing old stories about the use of BPA in its products with new messaging.

The Idea

To create a viral effect, Cercone Brown set out to create a campaign that would appeal on national and regional levels. Consumers would be driven to a campaign microsite that would immerse visitors in the Nalgene brand.

Because thrift and conservation was on the minds of many Americans in late 2008 and into 2009, Cercone Brown came up with the idea to create a nationwide study that put the spotlight on wasteful behavior in major U.S. cities, while championing Nalgene as an environmental

America's Least Wasteful Cities in 2009



RANK	CITY	WEIGHTED SCORE
1	SAN FRANCISCO, CA	1025.45
2	NEW YORK CITY, NY	1004.01
3	PORTLAND, OR	1001.66
4	SEATTLE, WA	985.03
5	LOS ANGELES, CA	960.46
6	DENVER, CO	943.77
7	MINNEAPOLIS, MN	943.17
8	WASHINGTON, D.C.	941.81
9	BOSTON, MA	941.29
10	PHILADELPHIA, PA	932.59
11	CHICAGO, IL	931.03
12	BALTIMORE, MD	927.26
13	DETROIT, MI	911.59
14	PITTSBURGH, PA	909.42
15	ORLANDO, FL	901.71
16	CLEVELAND, OH	900.77
17	SACRAMENTO, CA	899.78
18	MIAMI, FL	898.49
19	TAMPA, FL	896.01
20	PHOENIX, AZ	887.48
21	ST. LOUIS, MO	883.38
22	HOUSTON, TX	879.16
23	INDIANAPOLIS, IN	872.75
24	DALLAS, TX	860.60
25	ATLANTA, GA	857.51

Messaging On a Bottle: Cercone Brown promoted the results of its America's Least Wasteful Cities campaign (2009 rankings above) while adeptly tying in client Nalgene's products. Source: Cercone Brown

thought leader. The "America's Least Wasteful Cities" campaign was born.

Digital Tactics

Because most of the prior damage to Nalgene's brand was done online through blogs and social media, the campaign would be designed to flood the Internet with content that would achieve messaging objectives, while also supplanting the negative BPA content sitting high

up in the search engine rankings. This would be achieved by using SEO best practices involving

meta titles, mega-tag keywords and meta-descriptions. "A top PR hit used to be on top of the fold," muses Cercone. "Now it's on the top page of Google."

A microsite (www.leastwastefulcities.com) was developed that would serve as a conduit between content pushed out on the Web and a destination where visitors could take their own environmental usage test, learn more about the study, and provide interesting tidbits about peoples' green habits.

Facebook would be the hub of all campaign activities, and Cercone Brown would build on Nalgene's existing Twitter following to create conversations around the study and its findings.

Media Outreach

A national press release timed to coincide with Earth Day would trumpet the results of the study and reveal the 25 Least Wasteful Cities. "Micro-releases" would be sent to those cities to reach local print and broadcast outlets.

In addition, Cercone Brown would try a different tack: sending letters out to the mayors of each city that made the list. "We would identify areas in the study where a city stood out, or lagged behind," says Caroline Budney, Cercone Brown's director of corporate social responsibility. The tactic was part of our overall strategies to work with municipalities and governments to purchase Nalgene's products at a reduced price, she adds.

The Study

The "Nalgene Least Wasteful City Study" ranked 23 waste-focused habits of urban Americans from recycling, to using public transportation, to shutting off lights. Cercone managed and analyzed the online research study, fielded by

Greenfield Online, to develop content for the America's Least Wasteful Cities campaign.

The study questioned 3,750 individuals (approximately 150 respondents from each of the 25 largest cities), gauging behavior on waste, sustainability efforts, shopping habits, transportation and reusing items. The results were weighted to give more credit to behavior that had immediate and significant impact on the planet, such as reducing driving, recycling or reducing the amount of trash.

Campaign Execution

Posting the national press release on PRWeb and on the Nalgene Facebook page in the first week of April, the rankings spread across the U.S. like wildfire, with news featured on the USA Today site homepage, numerous green and news blogs, and in publications such as *Fast Company* and *U.S. News & World Report*.

"We were questioning doing broadcast outreach," says Budney. "But we sent 25 media advisories to broadcast outlets and got 32 hits." Budney adds that the national campaign had a grassroots feel to it, as the Cercone Brown staff split up call lists by city and pitched the story via phone to local outlets, while bloggers, Facebook and Twitter spread the results online. "It really was a good mixture of traditional and digital outreach," she says.

Speaking of digital, as consumers reacted to the news via traditional and social media, conversations were rampant. "Twitter was clearly the center of activity, as original campaign tweets were fueled by tweets of columnists, bloggers and Facebook fans," says Len Cercone. About 500,000 people were reached through Twitter alone.

Throughout the campaign, the message of Nalgene's environmental dedication was linked to product awareness. Visitors to the microsite were prompted to buy a special Nalgene bottle commemorating the Least Wasteful Cities

Delivering Consumers to the Doorstep of E-Commerce

While one of the main objectives of the America's Least Wasteful Cities Campaign on behalf of Nalgene was to garner maximum visibility on the Internet, Len Cercone of PR agency Cercone Brown says that digital PR can't enable that visibility alone. "Direct response PR, which is what we utilized in this campaign, combines traditional media relations, social media marketing and e-commerce tactics," says Cercone. Here are specific steps from Cercone that will drive people online, and toward a sale:

1. "You must have content that people want to share," he says. "That could be a journalist sharing with readers, or consumers wanting to share information with their friends."
2. "Have a call to action. We drew people to the campaign microsite by inviting them to take the Least Wasteful test themselves," says Cercone.
3. "There has to be natural tie-in to e-commerce," he says. "For instance, we offered a special commemorative bottle from Nalgene, that hopefully piqued interest in buying other products."

campaign, with a portion of the proceeds going to the Surfrider Foundation, which protects the world's oceans and beaches. A link to www.filterforgood.com allowed visitors to pledge to reduce bottled water waste and study other ways to go green.

It was just the type of messaging that Nalgene was striving for, says Tiffany Teaford, Nalgene's product manager and new product development lead. "We want to promote an environmentally friendly image, and this campaign has been successful in doing that," says Teaford. "Plus, it gives people pause about their own actions, and allows them to communicate those actions with others."

Refreshing Results

All totaled, Cercone Brown estimates that four million people were touched by the study news in one month, powered by nearly 50 million traditional and online media impressions. Just as important, the campaign changed the Internet playing field for Nalgene, replacing old stories about the use of BPA in its products with new messaging that is based on its key brand objectives.

After weathering a crisis that might have put other companies out of business, Nalgene's Teafor is satisfied with the way consumers are responding to the campaign, and how they seem to have turned their attention towards the environment. "This campaign becomes personal with consumers, and will have a long shelf life."

While Teafor says there will always be some connection between Nalgene and BPA, the campaign's success has helped enable the company to move on and launch newly designed products, two of which are scheduled for release this summer. "The bottom line is that Nalgene has been BPA-free since 2008, and we're looking forward to promoting our "Made in the USA" message and broadening our current line of products," says Teafor.

From a resource standpoint, while not revealing the campaign's budget, Len Cercone estimates

the out-of-pocket cost as \$20,000-\$25,000. Three people from Cercone Brown worked on the campaign, but actual hours worked were hard to estimate. "Like any agency, this campaign wasn't the only thing we were working on," says Cercone. "The people here are tremendously dedicated to the work, no matter what the hours may be."

The Challenges

Any campaign regrets? "I would have liked to have drawn more visitors to the microsite," says Libba Cox, account executive and Cercone Brown's social media lead. "To do that we'd have to have more components such as a mobile app and videos. But we're working within the limitations of the budget."

Len Cercone has no regrets, just a wish list. As the campaign is now in its second year (with San Francisco repeating as the Least Wasteful City), Cercone is hoping to expand the survey next year to a possible 50 cities. "It would be interesting to have the study reach cities with eco-friendly reputations," he says. "How Boulder, Colorado matches up to others on the list, for example. I believe that if we could get retailers to take this campaign on as a cause—promoting responsible consumption—we could reach millions more," says Cercone. **PRN**

Building and Owning a Corporate Reputation

By Laura Kane

Reputation is what people believe you are and what they expect of you. It is an intangible asset such as goodwill, intellectual capital and brand equity that helps drive the value of a corporation. Character, on the other hand, is who you are when no one else is around. Your reputation is linked to your character. Knowing who you are and what consumers want from you helps you build a positive reputation that is rooted in reality.

Companies with strong reputations attract better employees. Their customers are more loyal and frequently willing to pay a premium for their products and services. Financial analysts believe that such companies will deliver better growth and more stable earnings.

Every company must have good products, excellent service and solid financial performance to survive. But knowing what makes your company different and what moves the needle with your target customers and investors is what will give your company a competitive edge and a good reputation.

Building a Reputation Platform

The first step to building a reputation platform is to find out what other people are saying and thinking about your company. Determining what is important to your stakeholders will help your company know which areas your customers need to focus on to promote a positive corporate image.

In order to get a true picture of what others think of the company, you will need to look at a wide variety of sources such as employee behavior; media stories and postings about your company; and information about how your product mix meets your target customer's needs.

As you survey your stakeholders and inventory the external communications, it is extremely likely that you will see that corporate perceptions and wants vary slightly by audience. You will want to keep track of these variations so that you will be able to tailor your corporate messages to each audience.



The first step to building a reputation platform is to find out what other people are saying and thinking about your company.

Below are some questions that will help you understand what people think about and expect from your company:

- What is your company known for?
- Does it differ by business unit? Why?
- What distinguishes your company from the competition?
- Is corporate leadership considered trustworthy?
- Do you believe this is an ethical company?
- Are corporate employees genuine and helpful?
- Why do people purchase the company's products and services?
- What is the main reason people do not buy from your company?
- Which corporate social responsibility activities have the most meaning?
- If you heard something negative about the company, which source would you

most believe to tell you the truth about the situation?

The next step is to focus on who you are as a corporation and what type of company you want to be known as in the future. There are a lot of ways to do this: online employee surveys, one-on-one interviews with senior management and reviewing communications coming from the company.

Some questions to ask are:

- What are your core values?
- Where do you see opportunity to serve your market and the people in it?
- How does the company make decisions?
- Five years from now, what do you want the company to be known for?
- Looking back, what will be the company's greatest triumph from a reputation point of view?
- In order to achieve this triumph, what obstacles must the company overcome?
- Which competitors do you compare yourself to most often?
- What is your greatest corporate asset?

Once you have a clear idea of what the company stands for and what your key stakeholders think and expect from your company, you need to align the findings to create storylines and message points that back up the image you are building. If, for example, it is important to your

stakeholders that you treat employees well, you should enter "Best Places to Work" contests. If you win the awards, you will validate that you are an employer of choice and treat employees well. If you do not win, then you will be able to establish benchmarks against leaders in this area.

Remember that when it comes to reputation, actions speak louder than words. So, once you know what key attributes you need to enhance your reputation, you need to be able to back up the positive image that you want to project.

After you have found what you believe are the top areas that you want to focus on, you need to test these ideas with each of your stakeholders to see if they truly move your audience. While everyone will say on a survey that they believe that recycling is important, it may not be an attribute that moves them to feel better about your company and the goal is to find the message points that will move your audience to take action.

Once you find those areas that are most meaningful to your stakeholders you need to regularly check with your stakeholders to see if you have managed to improve perception and if their ideas about what it is important for you to do as a company have changed.

King Solomon said, "A good name is better than riches." That was nearly 2,500 years ago; clearly the need for a good reputation was as valuable then as it is today. **PRN**

Laura Kane is corporate communications director for Aflac.

High Stakes: Addressing and Reassuring Your Critical Stakeholders During a Crisis

By Mike McDougall

When a crisis rears its head and everyone dives for the issues management plan, all too often the section on selecting key audiences is put aside in the interest of time. “We know the people we need to speak with. Let’s focus on more pressing matters,” is a common refrain. What a mistake! Without agreement as to which stakeholders need to understand and act on the situation, your strategies and tactics—not to mention your company’s reputation—are at risk.

Consider these simple, actionable tips to ensure that you’re giving proper thought to your stakeholders before, during and after a crisis breaks:

1. As part of your planning, create a list of potential stakeholders that may be impacted by a crisis. Since it’s rare that the PR/communications team is all-knowing, involve your peers from other functions within the organization—sales, legal, regulatory, HR, government affairs, R&D and elsewhere.
2. All stakeholders are not equal, especially when time is of the essence. Prioritize your groups based on the likely crisis scenarios detailed in your issues management plan.
3. Go beyond the white board. Commit the list of your stakeholder groups to paper or an electronic file; then take another look an hour or two later. Any gaps will jump off the page.
4. Determine the tolerance of your organization to allow localization or customization of audience-specific messages, and codify this viewpoint. While some stakeholders may benefit from tweaking of standard messages, this may pose potential risks to the company depending on the legal environment.
5. If you intend to customize messages by stakeholder, create a simple messaging grid, pairing each audience with the intended message set. Straightforward documenting will expose any inconsistencies.
6. Identify who “owns” communication for each stakeholder—it may not be the PR team. If such does not occur, certain target groups will fall through the cracks.
7. Determine an escalation path for key stakeholders who may request more information from the organization, or to speak with a more senior member of the team.
8. Identify at least two representatives who can respond to “hot” stakeholder requests—the irate shareholder demanding a call with the CEO, the environmental advocate calling for a cessation of company operations, or the customer who refuses to hang up. These are your designated hitters who can step in front of any situation to provide an authoritative yet calming voice when emotions boil over.
9. After the first phase of your crisis response, review your stakeholders and messages once again. Refine these based on new information or circumstances that may not have been apparent early on.
10. During your crisis postmortem review, analyze and constructively criticize your stakeholder response, so as to build an even more robust plan for future use. **PRN**

Mike McDougall, APR, is vice president, corporate communications & public Affairs, Bausch & Lomb.

After the Deepwater Horizon Catastrophe: What BP and the U.S. Should Do Now

By Larry Furman

The handling of the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe is a textbook study of how not to manage a crisis. The government seemed to have ceded responsibility to BP, which seemed to have acted to protect the Macondo oil field rather than the Gulf of Mexico and the Gulf Coast.

It seems clear that neither BP nor the government were prepared for an event like this. At a minimum, both BP and the government should have had an understanding of the potentially catastrophic ramifications of an accident and, more importantly, an ability to shut off the flow of oil—to minimize the damage—as is the case with rigs operating in the waters of the North Sea.

BP's initial public statements were clearly inaccurate. On May 14, 2010, while BP was emphasizing 5,000 barrels per day reaching the surface, NPR reported scientific analysis suggesting 70,000 barrels per day was gushing from the well. On June 15, 2010, the U. S. government revised its estimate to 35,000 to 60,000 barrels per day. We now know that crude oil gushing from a broken well on the sea floor is like an iceberg—most is below the surface. BP and the government should have been accurate, open, and forthcoming in their statements.

BP answers to stockholders and to the governments of the jurisdictions in which it operates. The U. S. government's regulatory regime should have been stricter and more comprehensive. While BP might not be expected to go beyond what is mandated by law, it can neither be expected to regulate itself nor act in the interest of anyone but shareholders.

Where Do We Go From Here?

President Obama ordered a 6-month moratorium on deepwater drilling. A federal judge ruled that the administration had failed to justify the need for a blanket moratorium, reinforcing for some the image of the government as big, perhaps incompetent and unfocused with different branches operating at cross-purposes from each other.

It seems clear that neither BP nor the government were prepared for an event like this.

Oil is important to the economy at present. However, the planet, the ecosystems of the Gulf of Mexico, the oysters, shrimp, fish, birds, turtles, and dolphins, the cities, towns and bayous from Key West, Fla., to New Orleans to Cancun, Mexico are more important to the present and the future than an oil field, even one containing 1 billion barrels.

Oil was gushing into the Gulf of Mexico and hitting the beaches, marshes, and bayous from Louisiana to Florida, since April 20, 2010. Using the government's current estimate, we are looking at 3.6 to 5 million barrels of oil. The oil must now be cleaned up.

This catastrophic event, coming as it does on the heels of the tragic accident at the Upper Big Branch mine in West Virginia on April 5, 2010, and the Dec. 22, 2008, flood of 1.2 billion gallons of coal ash from the Kingston Steam Plant in Tennessee, underscores the need to shift the paradigm from fossil fuels toward clean, renewable, sustainable energy; to move, as BP used to say, "beyond petroleum [and fossil fuel]."

The government and BP, via BP Solar, should announce at least one new photovoltaic solar module factory and distribution center. This should be developed in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida or Texas. This would stimulate the clean energy industry, help the economy, partially offset the jobs lost and jump-start this paradigm shift to clean, renewable, sustainable energy. A 10 to 50 kilowatt photovoltaic solar energy system should be installed—at cost—on every public school and government building in the region, and the country. This would also

change BP and the government from poster children for corporate irresponsibility and incompetence to partners in 21 century energy; one a model corporate citizen, the other, in Lincoln's words, "Government of the people, by the people and for the people." **PRN**

Larry Furman is owner and founder of Furman Consulting Group LLC, and has over 25 years experience in the technology and financial sectors and the defense and intelligence communities in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Image Patrol: Target Misses Mark, While PG&E Connects With Post-Explosion Relief Fund

By Katie Paine

When the seemingly invincible Target brand was tarnished by a \$150,000 political donation to anti-gay conservative Minnesota gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer, I was stunned. Up until the summer of 2010, Target has managed to avoid all the anti-big box controversy that plagues its rival Wal-Mart by essentially following the classic crisis avoidance rule: don't

do stupid things, and if you do and get caught, do something to make it right. Through corporate donations and policies, Target has cultivated a hip, gay-friendly image, and the donation was inconsistent with that image. Adding fuel to the fire, the donation was the most visible early test of last winter's controversial Supreme Court ruling that allowed corporations to be treated as citizens. While Target quickly saw the error of

Target's Crisis Scorecard

Criteria	Grade	Comments	Advice
Extent of coverage	D	It could have been worse. While the national papers picked up on the story, coverage was relatively short-lived. Most of the viral boycott activity was online. However, the fact that this was the first case of a corporation taking advantage of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision ensured that the crisis got more than the usual level of coverage.	There are no lines between traditional and social media anymore, so assume that whatever is online will appear in traditional media and vice versa, although the intensity may vary by medium.
Effectiveness of spokespeople	D	Target CEO Gregg Steinhafel wrote an apology to employees that was both self-effacing and ultimately ineffectual. He needed to do more than just apologize and then leave the scene.	Apologies alone are no longer sufficient to assuage an angry flash mob. Consumers, employees and now investors expect more than just words when a CEO makes a mistake.
Communication of key messages	C	This is the one area in which Target had some success. Most of the coverage included statements about Target's long-standing support of the LGBT community and history of good works.	The one silver lining in a cloud of controversy may be the length of time in which you have the attention of the press. In this case, Target used it wisely to make sure that reporters had a good understanding of the company's culture.
Management of negative messages	F	While the company's explanation appeared in stories surrounding Steinhafel's apology, it was subsequently lost in coverage of angry consumers. As a result, all the negative messages about the boycott dominated the most recent news.	Just because the CEO has issued an apology doesn't mean that the problem has gone away. Social media and search ensure that a crisis can linger even after the national media has moved on.
Impact on stakeholders	F	Three management firms that collectively hold \$57.5 million of Target stock have asked Target's independent board members to undertake a comprehensive review of Target's political contributions. The stock price is only now recovering from the plunge.	Institutional investors are on Facebook, too, and they are just as easily spooked by a blog post or a Facebook thread as they might be from an article in the <i>Minneapolis Post</i> .
Overall score	D	Target's reputation will no doubt survive, but its brand will be dragged through the mud until after the election unless they take action to counter the objections.	If corporations act like citizens they can expect to be treated to all the same mudslinging and attacks that individual candidates suffer. If you make sizable contributions to candidates, expect sizable repercussions.

its ways and issued an apology, in this case, “we’re sorry” wasn’t enough.

Target customers turned to their social networks to get the word out, with nearly 100,000 people becoming fans of multiple Boycott Target pages on Facebook and some 1.3 million watching the “Target Ain’t People” YouTube video. Protesters demanded that Target either take the money back or donate an equal amount to a progressive candidate. It did neither, and this lack of any action may have tarnished the company’s reputation permanently.

This corporate amnesia of successful crisis mitigation happens so often that I’m actually surprised when a company does something right.

When PG&E not only apologized, but immediately set up a \$100 million victim relief fund after a 30-inch gas pipeline exploded in a suburb of San Francisco, I was amazed. Back in the day, when I was covering the utility for the *San Jose Mercury*, the company was notorious for its “no comment” policy with the media. This time it immediately took to Twitter to get the word out and answer questions, following up its initial crisis mitigation strategy (we’re here, we’re answering questions, we’re concerned and we’re investigating) with the bold action of proactively setting up a “rebuild San Bruno” fund. Just goes to show you that in this topsy-turvy communications world, good guys can be bad, and bad guys can learn from others’ mistakes. **PRN**

PG&E’s Crisis Scorecard

Criteria	Grade	Comments	Advice
Extent of coverage	F	When one of your pipelines sends a plume of fire 1,000 feet into the air that is visible from one of the busiest airports in America, it’s hard to keep a lid on the news. What is most interesting is that many of the details were on Twitter long before they made the local news.	When the news is front-page headlines around the world, there’s not much you can do but keep on top of it, preferably monitoring your Twitter search feed on a minute-by-minute basis.
Effectiveness of spokespeople	A	PG&E spokespeople were out early and often doing damage control and emanating care and concern for victims. The \$100 million victims’ compensation fund backed up their words with solid action.	The closer the link between words and deeds the better. The fact that it was just a matter of days between the explosion and when the fund was set up did a lot to enhance PG&E’s credibility.
Communication of key messages	C	While PG&E was on the scene and expressing concern, after a few days the major message seemed to be that the utility had old and failing gas lines that were badly in need of replacing.	In today’s crises, the truth from everyone’s perspective is just 140 characters away. A corporation can say whatever it wants, but if residents can just as easily say, and prove, the opposite, you end up with mixed messages.
Management of negative messages	C	While it took a few days for the negative messages about PG&E’s deferred maintenance to surface, they will be repeated for months to come as investigations are launched, fingers are pointed and blame assigned.	The shelf life of a negative message is as long as <i>anyone</i> , not just the media, is following the story. So a resident of the area, a competitor and anyone with an agenda can keep the story going these days. Prepare for a long haul in any case.
Impact on stakeholders	D	Given the plunge in the stock price the day after the explosion, shareholders are nervous. My guess is that the stock won’t recover until the blame is apportioned.	The best approach with stockholders is to keep them informed at all times. Remember that they’re just as likely to be on Twitter as your customers.
Overall score	C	Under the circumstances, PG&E is managing the crisis as best as possible. But like BP, a great deal depends on the outcome of investigations and the apportionment of blame.	If nothing else, this particular crisis teaches us to use all and any media available to keep the public and all stakeholders informed.

Image Patrol: Practicing PR in the Unfriendly Skies—Pinnacle Air vs. Air France

By Katie Paine

As someone who flies far more frequently than most, the spate of airline disasters in early 2010, needless to say, captured my attention. Within days of both the Air France disaster and the Colgan Air crash in Buffalo, I was on the same type of aircraft, wondering whether I should have any faith whatsoever in the assertions of airline CEOs. The fact that I am far from the only passenger who is questioning the safety of this mode of transportation has left the entire airline industry with a monumental image crisis.

The good news is that most airlines' PR departments have learned valuable crisis communications lessons from prior disasters. The bad news is that in a crisis, those lessons are often forgotten, prompting careless and impulsive reactions from companies and spokespeople.

Clearly the folks at Pinnacle Air, parent company of Buffalo flight operator Colgan Air, were napping or out for a beer when crisis communications lessons were handed out.

Pinnacle Air's Crisis Scorecard

Criteria	Grade	Comments	Advice
Extent of coverage	F	The crisis was perpetuated by the release of the transcript of cockpit conversations and subsequent calls for new regulations on regional carriers.	When you're in the middle of a crisis, it seems to go on forever, but invariably most do wind down. However, if Congress gets involved, be prepared for a second and third round of nights in your war room.
Effectiveness of spokespeople	C	The CEO pretty much handed the spokesperson's reins over to the company's vice president of safety, Daniel Morgan, as soon as he could.	Using an alternative spokesperson, such as an Air Safety expert, is generally a good idea, but you need to make sure he/she is trained, quotable and available.
Communication of key messages	D	The CEO communicated the compassion message just fine, but the quotes from Morgan were distinctly lacking in reassurance.	You need to have key messages ready, not just on the day of a crisis, but for subsequent follow-up stories, like congressional investigations.
Management of negative messages	F	By not saying much at all, Pinnacle left the communications to Congress and other airline experts, all of whom seemed to think that Pinnacle's screening and training were to blame for the crash.	Just because you say you're not available for comment doesn't mean that comments won't be made. All you're doing is leaving the door open for everyone from your competition to Congress to drive the messages.
Impact on customers	D	Thanks to congressional focus on regional air traffic safety, the news is still full of reports of lax discipline and overtired pilots on regional air carriers. I know I'm now checking to see who is really operating the airplane; if it's Colgan Air, I make other travel arrangements.	Just because your brand is separated from the crisis by multiple layers of ownership doesn't mean that smart consumers in an era of Twitter and blogs won't make the connection.
Overall score	D	It really wasn't as much Pinnacle's poor communications as it was its lax training and screening standards. The biggest damage was probably to the regional air carrier industry's reputation, as more people, including Congress, became aware of the vast difference in safety standards between big and small carriers.	Actions will always shape reputation to a much greater degree than words ever will.

Compared to most airlines, they were amazingly incommunicado after the disaster happened. Other than the initial standard “We are saddened by this tragedy” statements, there was a string of “not available for comments” in subsequent stories and investigations about the missteps that led up to the crash.

This has further led to a full-bore congressional investigation, with numerous senators and congressman calling for further regulations of the regional air carrier industry, especially when unsettling details emerged during a public hearing held in May.

Specifically, the National Transportation Safety Board’s investigation revealed that the captain and co-pilot of the Buffalo-bound plane may have been suffering from fatigue during

the doomed flight, which could explain the fundamental errors they made in the moments leading up to the crash. If that, indeed, was a contributing factor, the investigation revealed that many of Colgan’s pilots could be at risk of flying while fatigued, as 93 of the 137 pilots who work out of Newark airport commute to work by air—sometimes from as far as the West coast.

Meanwhile, Air France has had its share of missteps in the wake of its Flight 447 crash into the Atlantic Ocean, but for the most part the negative coverage has focused more on Airbus, the equipment manufacturer, than on the carrier itself. **PRN**

Katie Paine is the CEO of KDPaine & Partners.

Air France’s Crisis Scorecard

Criteria	Grade	Comments	Advice
Extent of coverage	F	Like the Buffalo crash, the prolonged investigation into the cause of Flight 447’s disappearance is prolonging coverage long past most crises’ lifespan. The mysteriousness of the story has further fueled speculation, media coverage and conspiracy theories.	In these times when citizen journalists and bloggers are frequently seen as the most reliable sources in a crisis, you need to be prepared for every manner of conspiracy theory and speculation. If there’s bad news hidden under a rock in your reputation, someone will find it.
Effectiveness of spokespeople	B	Air France’s spokespeople were visible, available and cooperative, which is the most the media can hope for.	Availability and training really paid off.
Communication of key messages	C	With frequent press briefings and regular updates with traditional media, Air France has done most of the right things to get their messages out. However, in social media they get an F for their relative absence.	A Twitter account goes a long way toward defusing conspiracy theories and keeping friends and family informed.
Management of negative messages	A	Due to the mysterious nature of the crash, much of the negative messaging has been focused on Airbus, the plane’s manufacturer.	If you can get help during the crisis from another organization’s crisis communications team, that’s great; just make sure that you’re all on the same page from day one.
Impact on customers	B	The crash happened at the start of the busy summer vacation season, so while people may have been nervous, thus far there has been little impact either on Air France or any other carrier.	Crisis left unchecked can easily impact your entire industry. Look to industry groups to help defuse the negatives and get your messages out.
Overall score	B	An unfolding ongoing crisis like the Air France 447 crash clearly demonstrates the need for all organizations to have a solid and sophisticated crisis team that is ready to take action at a moment’s notice.	The ultimate lesson is that today’s 24/7 news environment, coupled with social media’s ability to disseminate information in real time, cause crises to last longer and to go in directions you probably never envisioned.



“Our challenge is to evolve from pitching to informing, from control to credibility, from one-off stories to continuing conversations and from influencing elites to engaging a new cadre of influencers.”

—Richard Edelman, President & CEO, Edelman

Issues Management

5



Capitalizing on the New Crisis Timeline: Issues Management in the Social Media Age

By Scott Allison

Stories of irate consumers turning to social media to gang-tackle brands have become so commonplace, and it can only mean one thing: The time to recalibrate crisis management in a digital world is now. Companies must have in place an adroit team that can fight fire with fire to counter damaging information that's spreading virally on blogs, Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels.

Every brand needs to dust off its crisis plan and create a new strategy for crisis management. In a world that is shaped by speed of response, it's critical to monitor what is being said about products, employees, executives and more, creating a new crisis infrastructure and delivering tailored messages to restore and enhance reputation.

In 2009, The Centers for Disease Control flooded social media with nerves-calming messages about the spread of H1N1. Even the U.S. Air Force showed up on Twitter to refute another government agency's report that GPS technology may fail as satellites are not being replaced appropriately.

Among the most notable examples is that of Domino's Pizza's 2009 scandal. The company's crisis team was put to the test when two employees posted clips on YouTube, one of which showed a staffer inserting cheese in his nose and then adding it to a sandwich.

As discussion moved at lightning speed across YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and dozens of other social networking sites, Domino's responded—not just through traditional media, but via the same mediums as its attackers, posting an apology from Domino's USA president Patrick Doyle on

YouTube that included his personal commitment to finding out what happened and pledging to find a solution. Domino's also responded to discussions on Twitter and Facebook. The brand gained support by taking a conversational approach with its customers, listening as much as talking, and responding in a manner that was approachable and transparent.



The CDC flooded social media with nerves-calming messages about the spread of H1N1.

To have the dexterity needed to react to crises in a social media context, consider these tips.

- **Plan ahead.** Given the speed with which crises spread online, preparation is more critical than ever and plans need to be tested early and often. Consider how your brand/company/client could be impacted in a crisis situation, and from which angles, sites and communities. A thorough audit of your space will help you uncover these weaknesses and plan accordingly.
- **Know what your customers think, and use it to your advantage.** In a time when the opinions of so many are so readily available, companies need to use their customers' opinions to their advantage. Engage your customer in good times and bad, and in the end they'll respect you for it. There are numerous tools available with which to measure the tenor and tone of conversations in the social media environment. Companies need to understand who their true brand ambassadors are and create a program to empower them.

- **Leverage the power within.** In the excitement of finding these powerful and influential “fans,” don’t forget to look within your own ranks. Employees should be your No. 1 brand ambassadors. It’s important not only to recognize their efforts to promote the company’s vision, but also to ensure they are aware of the potential pitfalls.

Develop a policy that suits your corporate culture and make sure employees are aware of its opportunities and limitations. Seemingly benign posts from an employee can bubble up to become problems down the line, such as the eager engineer sharing his insights into a pending product launch which hasn’t been formally announced to the public yet.

- **Plan for the worst, whatever that might be.**

Communications and product marketing teams should regularly brainstorm about what potential issues might materialize and then devise a response plan accordingly, ensuring that everyone is briefed on their individual responsibilities.

Speed of response is critical, so even if the initial communiqué is, “We’re aware of this and are investigating it fully and will provide a further update at X time,” at least it shows the public that the organization takes the issue seriously.

While it will not necessarily quell the rumor-mongers, it, at least, provides some breathing room before a more comprehensive response is issued and shows consumers that the company is engaged in finding a solution.

- **Communicate your intentions.** Perhaps the most important step during a crisis is to make

clear the company is taking steps to rectify the problem. Fortunately, today it is easier for companies to provide regular status updates, be it through a blog or a Twitter feed, so the public can see that progress is being made.

- **Pick your platform.** Knowing how you will disperse your message via social media is critical. Social media is not one-size-fits-all, so companies cannot simply set themselves up on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube and then blast out the same message that appears on their press releases. Organizations need to determine what their specific goals are for social media and ensure all elements tie neatly together. Otherwise, the strategy can end up being a series of siloed tactics that don’t contribute to the overall goal.

Remember that time is of the essence. Social media has the potential to move at the bandwidth equivalent of lightning speed. Your crisis plan needs to move just as fast—if not faster—to contain the beast. Paramount to this is monitoring conversations about your company, its products and brands prior to a crisis.

It is critical to understand not just the quantity but the quality of conversations taking place. From brand ambassadors to brand bashers, audiences are waiting to be discovered and engaged.

Being able to marshal these resources in good times and bad puts you ahead of the game and will help you to prepare template statements for a myriad of situations. **PRN**

Scott Allison is founder and CEO of Allison & Partners.

As the Front-Line Responders, Public Sector Organizations Must Be Crisis-Ready

By Barbara S. Gainey

The early days of the so-called “crisis management discipline” seemed to belong to the corporate sector, with attention focused on the gold-standard Johnson & Johnson Tylenol crisis response case and the not-so-positive Exxon Valdez experience. Horrific shootings at Columbine High School and Virginia Tech provided new impetus to crisis planning efforts on school and university campuses around the country. Tragedies such as Sept. 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina added a sense of urgency to organizational planning for crisis events.

The reality of crisis response in the new century is that crises of any magnitude may overlap boundaries, extending beyond a single organizational setting or isolated local event—a foiled Times Square bombing or airline incident sends ripples of concern throughout the international community; a volcanic eruption in Iceland affects air traffic in Europe; a deepwater oil rig calamity off the coast of Louisiana affects tourism in states along the Gulf of Mexico and the broader seafood industry. The competitive nature of a 24/7 news cycle means that any event can catapult from local-interest item to mass media or Internet fodder.

A local story on a Fayette County, Ga., teenager apprehended for shooting a horse with arrows, for example, didn’t stay local, as the story was spread online. For organizations, the potential for a crisis to spread to a national or global audience becomes alarmingly real.

Citizens, the media and the for-profit sector often turn to the public sector for the initial crisis response. When H1N1 surfaced in late spring 2009, public agencies like the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and World Health Organization were front-and-center in initiating a global response to the health pandemic. Hand washing and the proper way to cover a cough became effective key messages to combat the spread of disease.



Citizens, the media and the for-profit sector often turn to the public sector for initial crisis response.

Federal, state and local emergency disaster agencies are looked to for guidance in natural disasters such as tornadoes, floods and hurricanes. Communities turn to public schools and civic centers as emergency shelters. It is essential that public-sector organizations are crisis-ready to provide what is often the initial and, sometimes, the long-term response in crises.

Crisis response best practices are similar, regardless of the type of organization—public, for-profit or nonprofit. First, all organizations should establish some level of signal detection program to help determine potential crises in the months and years ahead. Public-sector organizations, however, because of their charge to protect the lives and community of citizens, often find themselves trying to discern threats and hazards that may emerge in the distant future.

Public sector leaders must exercise creative and intuitive abilities to foresee challenges and to equip organizations to learn from their experiences and the experiences of others. Social scientists and other researchers are warning of social and political threats of increasing

Crisis Planning Resources

Where can your organization go for help with crisis planning? A number of public sector Web sites offer an abundance of resources that can help your organization—and even your family—prepare for crisis events.

- **www.ready.gov:** Despite dissemination efforts, this is an often undiscovered source of information for crisis planning. The site provides resources on emergency kits and plans for use by individuals and families and organizations and communities to prepare for natural or man-made emergencies. National Preparedness Month is in September and is sponsored by the Readiness Campaign in partnership with Citizens Corps and the Ad Council.
- **www.cdc.gov:** Information on health and safety topics can be found at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention user-friendly site. The site has been updated with information on the Gulf oil spill, addressing topics from water quality to coping with a disaster.
- **www.who.int/en/:** Resources related to global health concerns can be found at the World Health Organization (WHO) Web site. Of particular interest may be the WHO Outbreak Communication Guidelines.
- **www.ed.gov:** A number of educational resources can be found at the U.S. Department of Education site, www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/crisisplanning.html. For those who like to explore model plans, visit the Virginia Department of Education Web site. A model school crisis management plan can be found at www.doe.virginia.gov/support/safety_crisis_management/emergency_crisis_management/index

complexity, with threats that transcend national boundaries and have implications for future generations. Leaders who are proactive in looking for these threats will be essential to helping organizations and communities take steps now to redirect or avoid potential crises.

Second, public organizations must have systematic, planned, two-way communication strategies in place for an increasingly diverse constituency. Some federal organizations have learned the value of communicating through traditional and nontraditional channels, leading the way in using a mix of media to reach their audience. Public organizations must be willing to experiment with more interactive Web features to engage publics that speak a multitude of different languages, represent a variety of cultural backgrounds and have interests that span different generations, races, and lifestyles.

Organizations must have clear and current data that identify evolving stakeholder groups so communication strategies can be designed for these audiences before the next crisis strikes.

For example, the use of video and audio could enhance existing Web sites and appeal to a younger demographic. Also, bureaucratic sites that are difficult to navigate should be altered. In a crisis, stakeholder access to information should be simplified and not frustrated by sites that require time-consuming searches and multiple clicks to get to crisis-related, and potentially life-saving, information.

A third area of focus should be to plan key messages strategically. What are the most essential messages—two or three—that constituents should know about your organization in a non-crisis environment? What will your essential messages be in a crisis? You can't tell stakeholders everything. Even if you could, they don't have time and won't remember, even if they are interested.

We are “just-in-time learners,” looking for information only when we need it most. Societal unrest, financial and unemployment stresses and the normal pressures of work and family responsibilities contribute to distract and “disengage” your stakeholders. Organizations must look for ways to reconnect, to build familiarity and, ultimately, trust. Construct messages that are clear and consistent. Again, keep it—your message and your communication channel—simple and direct.

Public sector organizations by their very nature are often required to have crisis or emergency plans in place. It is up to each organization, including the smallest city government or public school district, to make sure these plans are comprehensive, current and cover the threats they are most likely to experience and that can cause the most disruption and damage.

Natural disasters—hurricanes, tornadoes, floods

or earthquakes—and other crises, such as viruses and influenza pandemics, terrorism, technology threats, budget woes, workplace violence, environmental disasters and infrastructural declines are potential realities.

Public and private sector organizations and communities must work together to prepare for existing and as yet unforeseen crises that will confront us in the years ahead. Leaders need to consider regional and global consequences and the ways in which resources and knowledge can be shared to prepare to meet these challenges.

PRN

Barbara S. Gainey, PhD, is associate professor and coordinator of the public relations concentration, Department of Communication, Kennesaw State University. Dr. Gainey's research interests are in the areas of public relations, crisis management (particularly in educational settings), leadership and public engagement.

Rules of Effective Public-Private Partnerships

By PR News Editors

Actions speak louder than words. The old adage is the basis for the “show, don’t tell” approach exalted by so many disciplines: writing, teaching, negotiating, communicating. But transcendentalist writer Ralph Waldo Emerson noted the danger of taking this mentality to the other extreme when he said, “What you’re doing speaks so loud, I can’t hear what you’re saying.”

Indeed, communications executives must perform this tightrope act every day, balancing between the need to demonstrate their brands’ core values through definitive actions, and the need to speak softly enough to hear when audiences “talk back.”

Of course, the need for this balancing act emerged for good reason: The loss of trust in traditional authority figures (CEOs, governments, etc.) empowered everyday people and NGOs, ushering in the rise of activist government. Thus is the nature of today’s communications beast, in which the invisible constructs separating public and private institutions (and internal and external audiences) have been dismantled. In their place are new prerequisites for success—and mere survival—in the modern business world: democratized communications, omnipresent messaging and decentralized networks of engagement.

Richard Edelman, president and CEO of Edelman, hones these prerequisites even further to identify specific tenets that, when observed, facilitate success in an environment where so much depends on companies’ ability to partner with public, community-supported organizations.

- What you actually do is central to the ability to communicate.
- Rethink content and outreach based on how

people think about, talk about and look for the things they need.

- Engaging influencers of all stripes begins by actively listening.
- Digital is social, and it rewards those who engage based on community rules.
- Inform the conversation; be quick and informal, and never deviate from truth and transparency.
- Every company is a media company.
- When people open the door, we must be there.

“PR has an enormous opportunity in a world of expression, where authority is dispersed and where established media brands must share attention with blogs or consumer-generated content.”
—Richard Edelman,
President & CEO, Edelman

“PR has an enormous opportunity in a world of expression, where authority is dispersed, where trust is created through continuous conversation and where established media brands must share attention with blogs or consumer-generated content,” Edelman says. “Our challenge is to evolve from pitching to informing, from control to credibility, from one-off stories to continuing conversations and from influencing elites to engaging a new cadre of influencers.”

It’s a substantial to-do list, but communications executives can begin managing issues through strategic partnerships by considering the following best practices.

► **Become an adviser on policy by partnering with active stakeholders.** All organizations

A Step-by-Step Process For Establishing Partnerships

Identify gaps:

- Analyze your strengths and weaknesses.
- Which of your goals apply in different situations?
- Which of your goals apply in different regions?

Identify which goals you want to accomplish in a specific situation:

- Limit your focus to accomplishing realistic outcomes.
- Determine how you will measure success in each case.

Define the types of organizations needed as partners:

- What kind of organizations will help you fill your gaps?
- Identify specific organizations that can help you in specific cases.

Communicate with your partners about the outcomes you want to achieve through the partnership:

- Recognize and acknowledge that each partner has its own goals.
- Seek to achieve shared risks and benefits.

Source: Len Mafrica, Exec. Director, Publishing Division, Oncology Nursing Society

are part of bigger issues, whether it's climate change, energy preservation, access to healthcare—the list goes on and on.

"This requires a new level of relationship with influencers such as NGOs," Edelman says, advising execs to use research to discern attitudes of new and established influentials. "Influentials are thought-starters, and amplifiers

are those who continue discussions, be they bloggers or mainstream media."

Once attitudes and groups have been identified, the process of engagement around a certain issue begins.

"Involve those with a connection to the company/brand, including employees, shareholders, retirees, customers, suppliers and communities," Edelman says. "Help people come together in a social network with opportunities for consumer-generated content and feedback."

► **Leverage potential partnerships to advance your position around issues, but be aware of the other side's challenges.** Partnerships with NGOs are ideal for elevating awareness of your company's position on a particular issue, but it's important to know the challenges that these potential partners face by teaming up with you. That way, you can anticipate snags and come to the table with solutions.

"We are known for our partnerships with large companies," says Kira Marchenese, director of online communications for the Environmental Defense Fund. "Our philosophy is that, by working with companies like FedEx and Wal-Mart, we can make a lot of change, but we have to do it very carefully."

One of the things that's like kerosene on fire in the social media world is campaigns against big companies, but we can never take advantage of that enthusiasm that people have. Our campaigns would be something like, 'Congratulate Wal-Mart for its new plastic bag policy'—you can see how that wouldn't go very far."

Therefore, execs need to be sensitive to this when considering social media as a good place for this type of partnership. That said, "Even with these challenges, there is this yearning to be part of the [social media] world," Marchenese says. "We've had some modest

success in our membership department. We communicate with our followers through social media channels. We have a really consistent presence, which is important.”

► **Approach partnerships—and the subsequent communications/issues management—transparently, but be sensitive to political agendas.** NGOs are faced with playing political games to meet their end goals; if, as the corporate partner,

you over-communicate any aspect of your strategy, you will do more harm than good.

“In some cases, [complete] transparency isn’t best,” Marchenese says. “It doesn’t help our political strategy to tip our hands.”

In other words, play by another adage that’s well known in the poker world: Know when to hold ‘em, and when to fold ‘em. **PRN**

When Legislators Want Action: Dealing With Political Leaders in the Midst of Public Crisis

By Huw Williams

The 24-hour media cycle and the power of Internet news and social media have resulted in a dramatic new pressure for legislators and political leaders to respond to public crisis on an immediate basis. Congressional and legislative hearings no longer wait for a crisis to be resolved before acting. In today's environment, political hearings are more likely to take place as a crisis unfolds rather than as a retrospective fact finding effort.

This ever increasing timeline of political pressure shortens dramatically the gap between public affairs/media relations efforts and the sometimes harsh realities of legislative hearings or political interventions. This time crunch also means that any legislative hearings or political attention will become part of the news cycle and can very much drive the media agenda.

PR professionals must ensure that the public relations messages are complementary to the political advocacy environment and vice versa. As important, they must manage the public and media perception of legislative hearings as they feed the news cycle. In many recent cases, the legislative hearings define the public story and shape the crisis in a negative way for many corporations.

All of these factors point to a new and increased need for the PR sector to understand the impact of increased political action on a crisis event and to make sure they have the tools in place to manage all aspects of the crisis cycle.

In 2010, oil company BP's role in a massive Gulf of Mexico oil spill left the company in full crisis mode. This is a great example of how public concern and outrage over environmental disaster sparked action at both the legislative

and executive branch. Not only was BP forced to testify before a congressional hearing, but the leadership of BP was also very publicly summoned to the White House to consult with the president and his team. Both these Washington events were fed by the news coverage of the spill. News photos, television video and online posting of the damage in the Gulf were far too powerful for politicians to ignore. Importantly, these political consultations also played a key role in defining future media coverage of the crisis. When the president of the United States says on NBC's *Today* that he is "looking for some ass to kick" the political world truly defined the day's media coverage.



This ever increasing timeline of political pressure shortens dramatically the gap between public affairs/media relations efforts and the sometimes harsh realities of legislative hearings or political interventions.

Guidelines for Managing Political Crisis and Media Storms

► **Be consistent with all aspects of the message.**

All aspects of delivery of message must match the message. One of the worst examples of corporations failing to match their actions with both the public message and the message to legislator was the arrival of the Big Three automaker CEOs in Washington by private jet as a run-up to congressional hearings on the automotive crisis. This may be one of the all-time blunders for failing to match the message with the delivery.

Toyota's Acceleration Crisis

In 2009-2010, Toyota scrambled to confront a public crisis over a rash of sudden acceleration incidents. While the crisis had an important consumer angle, it quickly became a political and regulatory storm that threatened to undo years of effort to prevent a Washington backlash against Toyota's success. The company was quickly under fire from congressional Democrats and the Obama administration for its perceived slow response to the crisis. Toyota quickly faced hearings before both the House energy and commerce investigative subcommittee and the House committee on oversight and government reform.

In this case, the Big Three were all crying poor about legitimately falling auto sales and the cash crunch for their businesses, yet they all flew separate private jets to Washington when even congressmen fly commercial most of the time. The news headline online and on television screamed "Big Three CEOs Flew Private Jets to Plead for Public Funds."

Demonstrating that news headlines feed legislators' questions, it is worth remembering the hardball questioning of congressmen following the media reports. As reported in the *Washington Post*, "There's a delicious irony in seeing private luxury jets flying into Washington, D.C., and people coming off of them with tin cups in their hands," Rep. Gary L. Ackerman (D-NY) advised the executives at the hearings. "It's almost like seeing a guy show up at the soup kitchen in high-hat and tuxedo. . . . I mean, couldn't you all have downgraded to first class or jet-pooled or something to get here?" The Big Three sat silent, which prompted Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) to follow up with increased pressure. "I'm going to ask the three executives here to raise their hand if they flew here commercial," he said. All still at the witness table. "Second," he continued, "I'm going

ask you to raise your hand if you're planning to sell your jet . . . and fly back commercial." More stillness. "Let the record show no hands went up," Sherman concluded.

In the aftermath of the hearing, few people remember the testimony of the CEOs more than they remember the news clips of the private jets on the tarmac with luxury SUVs and the barbs of congressmen playing to the cameras. The key PR point was that the damage to the Big Three message was significant on two fronts. First, legislators tore into the CEOs for the terrible image created and the public was left with an image of wasteful bloated companies taking from the public trough.

Second, the image of CEO being literally chased out of congressional hearing rooms to ABC news questions about corporate jets was stunning. None of which was particularly fair, but all of which could have been avoided if the message matched delivery. It seems so simple that you cannot ask for public bailouts while flying separate private jets to the capital.

I can think of many times in my career where I have had to warn clients about the need to make even physical appearance match the message. On several occasions prior to clients testifying on the Hill, I have had to ask that they pull off the Rolex watch so that their request for improved tax treatment seems less greedy. I have also had to warn clients testifying before legislative hearings not to get a midwinter holiday tan before upcoming hearings. CEOs that are used to town car delivery to business meetings have been advised to walk to the Hill. Not only is the fresh air good and the television shot better, but it avoids any hint of over-privilege.

This can sometimes be very direct and personal advice to give clients and bosses, but experience has shown that while these small factors may seem insignificant, political hearings and the media glare surrounding the hearings can

magnify such inconsistency and quickly become the focus of a legislator's attack.

► **The PR Message Must be Consistent with Political Testimony.**

Going into political hearings, participants must understand that legislators will likely already have reviewed or have access to the media clippings on the crisis and the messages delivered to consumers and the public. A company or group cannot, under any circumstances, try to spin one message on the Hill and another to the public. The information loop is too tight to allow for any gaps between the messages or so called spin. Any inconsistency will be pounced upon by legislators and only undercut credibility. It is far better to take any potential lumps from the message than to try to create two different or inconsistent lines.

► **Ensure that post-hearings and hearings messages match.**

Many organizations take great care to prepare and rehearse their message to government during a crisis. The goal is to ensure government leaders understand the organization's overall message. It is surprising how often corporate leaders pay little or no attention to crafting and rehearsing to face the media post political hearings.

One of the most damaging examples in recent history is the media response of the chairman of BP leaving the White House and a key briefing with President Barack Obama on the Gulf oil spill. BP chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg apologized for the oil spill and tried to convey his concern for those affected by the environmental disaster referring to those hurt by his company's oil spill as "small people." In this case, there's no doubt that the chairman had been meticulously prepared for the presidential briefing. However, a careless ad-lib response to media scrum outside the White House led to a negative media spin and may have done much to undo all the good political work.

The remarks were seen as arrogant and drew widespread ridicule and condemnation in the media and online, and defined the story of the day. Given the fact that Svanberg is Swedish, and English is not his first language, this criticism was probably unfair. Nevertheless, the lack of care in defining more precise media lines was at fault. PR professionals need to remember that senior executives must be prepared for the political appearances and the media aftermath and that the messages must be consistent. Too often witnesses before Congress and other bodies look like deer caught in the headlight when facing post hearing media.

► **Be humble.**

While this is probably good advice for any PR approach, it goes double when facing those on the Hill. Elected politicians may not make as much money as leading CEOs or, in many cases, don't wield as much day-to-day influence, but they do have the undeniable power of being our democratically elected leaders. As a result, it is very wise to demonstrate deference to the political process and its leaders during a public crisis.

This can be tough advice to follow as, often, witnesses before legislative hearings are more knowledgeable than their questioners. It can also be frustrating that legislators do not seem to "get the point." It is critical that witnesses remember that humility and patience are key qualities for delivering to a political audience in a crisis.

► **Don't take the bait.**

Advice to witnesses should also include never taking the bait from politicians' eager to score political points or unnerve a potential witness. The preamble to legislative committee questions can sometimes seem disarming, but oftentimes have a purpose to embarrass other political leaders or parties. Pausing to consider the political nature of the question is critical to the success of a witness's performance before committee.

Equally important is not taking the bait if the legislator's questions come in a very harsh or direct fashion. Witnesses should stand up to legislators and stand up for their point of view but they should never respond in kind.

► **Beware of protestors.**

Leaders facing crisis must be sensitized to the prospect of protestors during political hearings. One of the realities of intense media coverage of legislative hearings during a crisis is the fact that protestors also know the media is there and waiting to define the story. As a result, protest stunts shortly before, during or shortly after hearings are more and more common. Preparing spokespeople to deal with protests and stay on message is important. PR pros must also have contingency plans for protests stealing the story line.

► **Proactively reach legislators before hearings.**

Defining the message and the crisis before legislators do is critical. Too often, groups wait to let media define the issue with political leaders or let political leaders form viewpoints in a vacuum. Contact with key legislative assistants and political staff can be critical in the initial stages of crisis. Reaching out to sector champions on the Hill as early as possible is also critical. These leaders can serve as valuable ambassadors of your message as the crisis develops. They can help influence the political media and their colleagues as the crisis builds.

The single largest mistake I've seen in managing a public crisis is organization reluctance to engage the political world early and often. You can rest assured that if your crisis is in the media or online, legislators know about it and are already starting to think about how they can react to the issues raised. By being proactive you not only help shape the early thinking, you provide an outlet for questions and dialogue which may forestall or eliminate the need for political hearings.

► **Share your testimony online.**

In my experience, the testimony of leaders during a public crisis often represents the best unfiltered work of the organization's communications team and corporate leadership working together. In most cases, text is well prepared and succinctly delivers on the key theme in simple and direct terms. When this is achieved, it is a shame to leave congressional or parliamentary remarks hidden on government Web sites. Organizations should instead consider using the remarks to speak with direct credibility to a wider audience.

Not every testimony before legislators is worthy of public distribution, but in a crisis situation it is more likely that the testimony will be covered by the media in short form that is filtered with the media bias. Therefore it makes more sense to be proactive and share the message directly with the public, consumers, stakeholders and employees. In today's online world it is amazing how often this angle is overlooked.

Web postings, Twitter excerpts, RSS feeds and social media are all relevant routes to sharing testimony. There is also the added bonus that testimony before congress or parliament has enhanced credibility.

► **Leverage grassroots and stakeholder support.**

In the political realm, "all politics is local," as famously characterized by former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill. PR professionals would do well to remember this truth when approaching political leaders. Congressmen and all legislators care more about what the people in their district think and what local media is saying than almost any other concern.

When in crisis mode, this is an important truth to remember and it is very easy to discard in the face of other urgent demands. In the case of the Toyota acceleration crisis, the company was subject to criticism for not leveraging the grassroots support earlier. Later efforts focused

on rallying support from congressional delegations from states where Toyota has a significant presence. Toyota employs more than 35,000 U.S. workers and has major assembly plants in five states—Alabama, Kentucky, Indiana, Texas and West Virginia—and more than 1,400 dealerships across the country. These are important allies in a crisis and should be engaged early.

► **Demonstrate leadership.**

When in crisis, the public in North America demands that organizations speak with a leadership voice. It is expected that leaders will answer media concerns and be the public voice of the organization. Delays in leadership taking responsibility at the political level are even more damaging during crisis.

Cultures can play a role in leadership issues. In the case of Toyota's problems involving brakes and accelerators, Jeff Kingston of the *Wall Street Journal* underlined the Japanese proverb: "If it stinks, put a lid on it." Unfortunately, for Toyota, this was exactly the wrong approach in North America. Toyota, as Kingston wrote, initially

denied, minimized and mitigated the problems it was facing. "President Akio Toyoda, grandson of the founder, was MIA for two weeks and the company has appeared less than forthcoming about critical safety issues, risking the trust of its customers worldwide."

Finally, in response to mounting pressure, Akio Toyoda testified before U.S. lawmakers, specifically referring to the causes of the recall and he, on behalf of the company, took full responsibility for the cleanup.

The move went a long way toward curbing the public relations nightmare that seriously and permanently threatened a brand synonymous with quality and reliability. PR professionals need to ensure leaders step up and are well prepared. **PRN**

Huw Williams is the president of Impact Public Affairs and specializes in government and media relations. He has served as senior adviser to the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada and worked for a prominent American congressman. He authored *A Government Relations Guide For Directors of Non-Profit Organizations*, published by CSAE.

Fighting Fire With Facts in an Early PR Skirmish Over Subprime Lending

By Michael Flagg

When you're a consumer group going up against big, powerful interests, and you've finally managed to get the ear of a lot of prominent reporters, the other guys eventually must fight back.

If you've done your homework, and they can't refute your facts, they'll try and come at you in lots of other ways, especially by trying to cast doubt on your motives—anything, in short, to blunt your attack on them and divert attention.

I know. I was doing public relations at the Center for Responsible Lending back in 2005 when it was inveighing against something called subprime mortgages. The center's experts warned that not only were lenders gouging home buyers by charging exorbitant interest on loans, the lenders didn't even care if borrowers could repay, because they were going to sell the loans to someone else.

What's more—the center was telling anyone who would listen back then—when those home owners defaulted on the loans, it hurt whole neighborhoods, the banks and ultimately the entire economy.

The center, founded with a generous grant from liberal benefactors and former bankers Herb and Marion Sandler, took on other predatory lenders, including payday loan shops, which the center calls “legal loan-sharking.”

Payday lenders make small loans to poor people who, when they can't repay, wind up flipping the loan over—an average nine times, the center says. So, you borrow \$300. You can't pay and you flip the loan nine times for \$50 each time.

Before you know it you've paid more interest—\$450—than what you borrowed originally.



You have to see attacks—especially sloppy ones, where you can prove the allegations are wrong—as opportunities as much as challenges.

And, yes, more than a dozen states have banned these triple-digit-interest loans. So the payday loan industry is anxious that no more states cross that line. And the Center for Responsible Lending, relatively well-funded, with its young, articulate, Ivy League-educated lawyer experts, was a big problem.

In October 2005, a conservative Web site called the Capital Research Center—founded to urge big donors to stop funding what the group saw as left-leaning organizations—did a lengthy report on the Center for Responsible Lending that complained about the North Carolina-based CRL's growing influence with the press and policy makers nationally and in Washington.

The most serious accusation was that insiders at Self-Help—a community lender that makes home loans to poor people and which had started the Center for Responsible Lending—had made \$2.7 million worth of improper loans to themselves.

“One way Self-Help exploits its nonprofit status is by helping its own officials and senior executives,” the Web site said indignantly. “The financial reports of the Self-Help Credit Union reveal that throughout the 1990s Self-Help made loans to its officials and senior executives averaging \$30,000 to \$40,000, a practice permitted by questionable

interests—the main beneficiaries were the top-ranking executives.

“In June 2002, one official received a loan for about \$1.2 million, and tax forms show that in March 2004 another official received a large loan, bringing the total borrowed by only two unnamed Self-Help officials to more than \$2.7 million. Without explanation, those loans disappeared from the Credit Union’s financial report in December 2004.”

It sounded pretty sinister. But, as a respected, multi-Pulitzer-Prize-winning newspaper would find after looking into the charges, it wasn’t true.

By this point in 2005, three years into its existence, the center was getting great press and had established itself as a trusted, knowledgeable

resource on lending legislation for reporters from the nation’s best and biggest newspapers, including *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Now the reprisals had started. About the same time that fall, Patrick McHenry, a conservative Republican congressman from North Carolina, published an op-ed piece accusing the Center for Responsible Lending of pushing for tighter regulation of the mortgage business in order to help its own lending business, Self-Help.

None of these people could dispute the center’s well-researched, proven facts and studies, so they went after its motives.

The Capital Research Center started shopping an op-ed incorporating its accusations of malfea-

Defend Attacks Against Your Organization With Solid Facts

At the risk of sounding like Pollyanna, I think too many PR people see attacks on their organizations simply as problems. They need to start thinking of them as opportunities.

Most PR people, when their organization is attacked, want to issue a press release with the organization’s side and then hope the whole thing goes away. “Don’t draw too much attention to the other guy’s charges,” this thinking goes, “and so do his work for him.”

Usually, to be sure, that’s good advice. But when the other guy lies—or, let’s be charitable, makes a mistake—that is a chance to turn the attack around and beat the attacker with his own cudgel. To win over skeptical reporters who resent being lied to; to score points with politicians; and to fire up your own troops.

That should be the first thing you look for when the other guy launches his press release about you: Did he screw up a fact?

If he did, he just handed you a gun to shoot him with. You get your snarkiest prose ready for the response; point to the mistake; point to your irrefutable proof it’s a mistake (not simply

a difference of opinion); and then cast aspersions on his motive for, shall we say, getting the facts wrong.

There is a strong caveat here, of course—don’t ever get your facts wrong. Make sure every fact in every statement, speech, press release, blog entry and Web page is correct. Triple-check. Don’t leave yourself open to this kind of devastating attack.

But then, when you’re attacked and they miss like this, go for the jugular: We don’t have to look terribly deeply at Mr. Smith’s funding from Gigando Petroleum to understand why he would lie about the Clean Oceans Coalition’s research showing that Gigando routinely spews poison from one end of the environment to the other or some such. You get the picture. Make sure every reporter who covers you and Gigando sees it and gets copies of the original lie and the irrefutable proof it is a lie. In short, make the most of the other guy’s mistakes. These opportunities won’t come along often, but when they do, see them as that—opportunities, not just as problems.

sance at Self-Help to the Center For Responsible Lending's home town newspapers, the *Durham Herald* and the nearby, bigger and more respected *News and Observer* in Raleigh.

As luck would have it, I had worked as a business reporter for the *N&O*, as it's known across eastern North Carolina, for five years in the 1980s. I knew the business editor, although I had not kept in touch as I'd moved on to *The Los Angeles Times*, *Bloomberg Asia*, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*. But it wouldn't have mattered, because I would have approached her the same way anyway.

I flew from Washington, where CRL had an office, to Durham to consult with CRL and Self-Help leaders about what to do with this latest assault.

As I talked to the business editor over lunch, and told her our attackers had misread our financial forms, it turned out the stakes had ratcheted up again: She had just nominated Martin Eakes, who led both Self-Help and CRL, for the newspaper's prestigious Tarheel of the Year Award. Now she was hearing that there was malfeasance?

Look, I said: Tell your reporter to come over and plan to spend the whole day; come yourself, too, if you want; bring any experts you want. We'd bring out all the forms and show where our attackers had misread the form.

My operating principles here (and the lessons I learned from this incident) were two: One is the old lawyer's saying about impeaching witnesses: If you can prove one thing in their testimony isn't right, you cast doubt on the rest of it.

And secondly, when you can show the accusations are wrong, you can often flip the attack back on the attacker, jujitsu-like. You have to see these attacks—especially sloppy ones, where you

can prove the allegations are wrong—as opportunities as much as challenges.

And that is what happened. I will simply quote from the article that subsequently appeared in *The News and Observer*.

"Randy Chambers, chief financial officer of Self-Help, said the loans were mislabeled. Rather than being payments to company officials, the loans were to Self-Help's Ventures Fund and were used to finance urban renewal projects in Durham and Fayetteville. His explanation was confirmed by the National Credit Union Administration and the N.C. Credit Union Division. Chambers said the forms that Self-Help uses to submit quarterly financial reports to regulators have no box in which to record loans made to affiliate groups such as the Ventures Fund. He said Self-Help officials recorded those credits in the loans-to-insiders box."

Martin Eakes became Tarheel of the Year that year, to go with his many other awards and honors.

And as a final note, the attacks continue.

In March 2010, Capital Research was back with an attack on Herb and Marion Sandler, the center's donors. In May, yet another conservative group, Americans for Prosperity, went after another donor who, it said, worked with CRL in a "conspiracy to pocket billions of dollars." **PRN**

Michael Flagg has been a senior editor, reporter and foreign correspondent for *The Los Angeles Times*, *Bloomberg Asia*, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Washington Post*. At this writing, he is a senior investigator at the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, created by Congress to learn the facts of the financial panic and write a book-length report, much like the 9/11 Commission.

Issues Engagement: From 'Respond and Defend' to 'Own and Lead'

By Margaret P. Farley

Reputational risks continue to besiege health companies. In this era of transparency and high societal expectations, these risks necessitate a new communications approach. Issues engagement brings together the best practices of issues management and crisis communications to help companies in the business of health take a stand and transform vulnerabilities into meaningful conversations for optimal results. It is as much a change in mind-set as it is in practice.

It's clear that broad social debate about the practices of companies involved in health is in full swing, making the companies fair game for politicization, public scrutiny and scorn. Such companies, once held in high esteem as innovators of life-saving medicines, are now denigrated for having hidden motives, exhibiting unethical conduct across the research-to-marketing spectrum and putting profits before people. Given the shifting political environment

and the changing communications landscape, these factors will increasingly serve as triggers for reputational issues and as lightning rods for the agendas of external individuals or entities.



Yesterday's communications model, through which companies provided clinically driven and controlled responses to address issues, is no longer effective.

And with stakeholders connecting in new ways and heightened criticism merging from political, regulatory, and media fronts, companies need to reengineer the way they identify, prepare for, mitigate and respond to emerging or escalating issues and crises. Healthcare companies must deal with more government inquiries and investigations, questions about corporate transparency and business practices, and negative commentary from elected officials, agencies, plaintiffs and public health experts, among others. Further, more than ever before, companies are also being scrutinized and judged for how they manage issues and crisis, and behavior can become the issue at hand. Yesterday's communications model, through which companies provided clinically driven and controlled responses to address issues, is no longer effective. Communicating no longer means simply talking to a specific audience—it means engaging stakeholders in a dialogue. People now want to know how a company meets their individual needs not just through what it says, but by what it does.

A New Response Model: Insights, Own and Lead

- Seek and apply insights in changing attitudes and behavior, and bring in the outside world.
- Move away from controlled, one-way messaging to engage in transparent, honest conversations in real time.
- Position the company at the forefront of relevant issues, and increase visibility of the company's points of view.
- Take a thought leadership role within debates and validate viewpoints among key external stakeholders.

Being a responsible and ethical corporate citizen, listening to stakeholders' views, and changing the way business is done as necessary—all of these

are now part of how a company communicates its value to the world. This external dynamic is especially important in times of crisis and is driving a new response paradigm that is participatory, conversation-driven, multi-channelled, and measured by behavior instead of the more traditional, passive, voluntary, one-sided responses.

From Issues Management to Proactive Issues Engagement

Issues engagement builds upon an appreciation of the best practices in issues management and crisis communications, including stakeholder, public affairs, media and government relations, corporate reputation and digital communications, and incorporates deep, cross-functional knowledge of the business landscape, and the changing attitudes and behavior of stakeholders. It fosters preemptive and proactive strategies, and as such, depends on scenario planning around foreseeable vulnerabilities and threats, and stakeholder insights that enable meaningful conversation.

Importantly, while issues engagement includes the essential process of anticipating various reputational risks and preparing rapid, real-time responses, it also includes taking the offensive on select threats and turning them into platforms of strength. Simply put, issues engagement illuminates longer term opportunities to take a leadership stance on potential and/or escalating issues. Companies can more directly participate in problem-solving conversations and build mutual trust and common purpose to preempt or neutralize contentious and potentially damaging situations. In turn, it ultimately may influence the direction and impact of an issue.

Putting the Issues Engagement Principle to Work

At a time when every critic can find a channel, and each stakeholder can quickly connect with

Environmental Drivers of Healthcare Issues

- Accusations of unethical conduct and putting profits before people
- Ever-increasing expectations for safety, efficacy and transparency
- Distrustful, demanding stakeholders who are connecting over similar interests
- Heated debates on access, cost and affordability at multiple levels
- “Guilty until proven innocent”

like-minded people, via digital and social media channels, each holds the power to become a company’s greatest champion—or worst detractor. Companies can effectively address the needs and expectations, now and in future, of the full sphere of stakeholders who can publicly escalate any given vulnerability, drive a point of view and ultimately impact legislation or regulations that threaten a company’s license to operate, or distract and keep the company from achieving its public health mission.

Issues engagement involves taking a proactive and authentic stand and reaching out before, during and after issues escalations to ensure points of view are conveyed, understood, and considered.

Ideally, it also involves leadership collaboration to change the tone of conversation, and more fully engaging with stakeholders around issues instead of damping issues down or taking a defensive position when forced to respond to a public situation.

Through strategic insight and outreach, the tone of public conversation can be modified to not only mitigate an issue and inoculate a company against its impact, but also deepen relationships with the very opinion leaders and/or critics who are in a position to use their influence to either

Key Features of the Changing Media Landscape

- An explosion of media channels and citizen journalism
- Social media is mainstream media
- Media in constant flux with an appetite for negative news
- Sensationalism and controversy outweighs science

help a company communicate its perspective or to drive unfavorable backlash and reputational damage.

To be successful with this approach, mutual interests need to be identified and influencers must be tapped for their expertise, advice, experience, and non-commercial credibility. In short, companies can engage differently in issues outcomes by:

- Understanding and prioritizing stakeholders against issues and their ability or willingness to take positive or negative action
- Embracing a vulnerability and committing to problem solving in a meaningful, authentic way

- Developing positions and platforms for stakeholder engagement strategies
- Reaching out to stakeholders and finding shared interests for problem-solving; collaborating on a path forward
- Collaborating on initiatives across stakeholder groups—from small initiatives to larger mutual responsibility programs
- Transforming a vulnerability into a meaningful idea that changes the conversation, its tonality and its direction
- Assessing impact and/or current environmental changes and recalibrating strategies accordingly

The Benefits of Issues Engagement

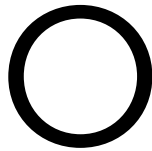
By putting issues into perspective, issues engagement helps convey the essential, distinctive value that companies bring to health and, in turn, helps companies lead in an environment that calls for more transparency, accountability, collaboration, and consideration of societal expectations. **PRN**

Margaret P. Farley is executive vice president and director of health issues at Edelman Health.

CASE STUDY

IHOP Gets Egg on Its Face After Humane Society Goes on Digital Offensive

By Shabbir Safdar



In Sept. 16, 2009, the Humane Society of the United States released a hidden-camera video of cruel conditions inside an egg supplier to the International House of Pancakes (IHOP) chain, urging viewers to send letters to the CEO of IHOP to implement cage-free egg supplier policies.

Looking back at the immediate aftermath of this video campaign, what impact did it have online? Did it catch fire? Did it create a groundswell of support? Did it create activity and excitement in others?

Launching the Campaign

The Humane Society launched its campaign against IHOP on Sept. 16 with a video taken by a smaller nonprofit, Compassion Over Killing. The launch elements included:

- Posting the video on YouTube;
- Posting a campaign call to action to their Web site (a letter to IHOP CEO Julia Stewart asking IHOP to start using cage-free eggs);
- Posting links on both their Twitter and Facebook presences;
- Posting a note on their president's blog;
- Emailing their membership; and,
- Finding and posting comments on individual blog postings that mention IHOP, even if they were unrelated to the egg controversy (such as ones that mention excitement about a new IHOP opening).

IHOP's Response

On Sept. 16, the Humane Society said that IHOP responded to them with a new section on its Web site, entitled "Cruelty-Free Food," and the accompanying claim: "It's important to state clearly that we are against the cruel treatment of animals used in the production of food for our restaurants."



Addressing the Humane Society publicly would direct attention to a conflict IHOP wanted under the radar.

Josh Balk at the Humane Society insisted that this page was created after they launched their cage-free campaign, but was not able to produce evidence of that. Jennifer Morrisson of IHOP said that she could not put a firm date on when this page was created.

Internally, Humane Society staffers most likely graded the effectiveness of their effort against IHOP according to three measures:

1. Did they force IHOP to change its egg supplier's practices?
2. How effective was it at attracting new members and donations?
3. How much attention did it garner online?

Impact On IHOP's Business Practices

Apart from the one statement, in the two months following the video release, IHOP made no announcements about its egg supplier's



A screen shot of IHOP's Facebook page fan wall shows users asking the company to use cage-free eggs.

practices. Josh Balk at the Humane Society said HSUS was in discussions with IHOP before the launch of this campaign, so presumably they will be in discussions again.

However, addressing the Humane Society directly and publicly would direct more attention to a conflict that IHOP would prefer to keep under the radar, which could explain their relative silence on the issue. This strategy appeared to work, and avoided fueling the Humane Society's campaign or drawing intense attention online.

In fact, there was remarkably little press coverage given the graphic nature of the video (in comparison to, say, Domino's YouTube snafu, featuring two employees finding less-than-appetizing uses for the pizza, which occurred earlier the same year). Could it be that secretly filmed footage no longer carries the publicity impact it used to?

Attention Garnered Online

Online, the reaction to the video was stronger, but still not as substantial as anyone might have expected. There are a number of ways to measure impact and popularity of such a campaign online. For example, popular campaigns will be shared, echoed and forwarded through social media.

The following are a few ways in which campaigns that fuel excitement create quantifiable data trails, which are then considered in the context of the Humane Society's video campaign against IHOP.

- YouTube views:** A hidden-camera video of poor living conditions for chickens ought to be the most popular asset of the campaign. A five-minute version was posted on Sept. 16, and a shorter two-and-a-half minute piece on Sept. 21. Both videos together had less than 11,000 views one month later, and they never broke into popular viral territory; plus, both stopped getting significant views within 10 days of their posting.
- Digg votes:** Digg.com is a well-known conduit for popular word-of-mouth topics. Hot topics such as Kanye's interruption at a music awards show easily garner thousands of Digg votes as users pass around the links or videos in question, and then create additional follow-on pages. In the case of the Humane Society video, though, it was submitted to Digg.com the week after its release, and then only received one Digg vote—a poor result from the Humane Society's perspective, but good news for IHOP.
- Google search pollution:** Invading a brand's top 10 Google results for its Google vanity search (a search of just the brand's name) is another way to measure if a campaign has broken into the public consciousness. A search on the phrase "IHOP" showed the Humane Society campaign linked at No. 12

for the Google search results. Breaking into the top 10 searches of a brand that cares is a surefire way to resolve an issue.

- **Wikipedia entry pollution:** Wikipedia is one of the most authoritative sites online; if you have a Wikipedia page, it will show up in the top 10 search results for your name, and be difficult to dislodge. Beginning on Oct. 1, 2009, an 11-day Wikipedia edit war began over a new section on IHOP's Wikipedia page labeled "Controversies," with various editors and contributors arguing over the adequate sourcing of claims in that section. Early versions of the page were clearly from the perspective of animal-rights advocates, who made unsubstantiated claims that "Tens of thousands of consumers called and emailed IHOP to urge the company to switch some of its eggs to cage-free" without any independent source to verify it. Then, on Oct. 6, a user deleted the entire Controversies section, which was rewritten five days later on Oct. 11 with only verifiable information.
- **Facebook page:** The largest IHOP Facebook fan page had 47,000 fans at the time of the incident and a wall for users to post comments. It had a strong showing of complaints of people asking IHOP to use cage-free eggs (see image).

During the Wikipedia edit war, IHOP was accused of deleting complaints from the wall, but this too could not be verified. The default page users are directed to when they come to the IHOP fan page was not the wall, though; it was an NFL promotion. What's more, viewers of the wall could only see comments made by IHOP when they clicked "Just Fans"; only then did the negative comments become visible.

In addition, IHOP created a new fan page, which soon grew to just under 5,000 fans, people who appeared to be unconcerned or unaware of the animal cruelty accusations and love IHOP's food.

- **Online petition:** The Humane Society announced that its Web-based petition to IHOP reached 10,000 members on Oct. 8, 2010 about three weeks after the start of the campaign. While that number wasn't enough to cause IHOP's management or franchisees to rush back to the negotiating table, it was probably enough to get their attention.

- **Google Search Insights:** Another great way to judge whether a PR/communications effort has influenced the nation's zeitgeist is to determine if it drives people online to search for the topic using Google. An examination of Google searches for "cage-free eggs" revealed two interesting things:

1. The searches were mostly from California.
2. There was no discernible spike in search relevance during the time frame of the campaign. There was a small increase at best, and its effect had already dissipated a week after the release. There were no sizable numbers of people searching for the topics of "IHOP animal cruelty."

Grading The Response

For the Humane Society, the campaign seemed to be popular with their members, but it didn't achieve the breakout status that would allow it to grow legs and storm the Internet, recruiting tens of thousands of new donors to the cause.

IHOP's PR team did a great job of not feeding the publicity around the Humane Society's campaign. They neither tried to take the videos down, which would have created a Streisand Effect (see Chapter 6) of added attention, nor did they acknowledge the campaign publicly. To use a poker analogy, given the cards IHOP was dealt, they played their hand to the best possible outcome. **PRN**

Shabbir Safdar is founder of Virilion Inc.



“Most crises change or pass, but the social Web’s ability to bring people together, resolve problems and profoundly impact your organization’s reputation will be long lasting.”

– Heidi Sullivan, Vice President,
Media Research, Cision

Digital Communications

6



Maximize and Monitor Your Social Media Channels—Before a Crisis Hits

By Stafford Kendall

In a crisis, truth and fiction start flying around social networks as soon as the news breaks. Attempting to monitor, broadcast and interact in an instant can feel daunting.

Regular social media channels quickly get co-opted by discussion of the crisis, personal concerns and political fray. Keeping control of your organization's social channels and using social media in periods of crisis is paramount to maintaining your reputation and sharing information with stakeholders and fans.

Don't Break the Rules

Blending your regular internal communications policies with the social mores in interactive media can be a challenge in regular circumstances. When a crisis hits, your inclination can be to move more quickly and with less formality than in regular press relations. There are two keys to making it work:

1. Choose the Right Spokesperson – Choosing the people to be in charge of broadcasting and driving the conversation in social media crisis is essential. Your spokesperson must understand the channel, have great instincts and be trusted to speak on behalf of the organization. If you've regularly allocated social channels to a person who understands the medium, it doesn't necessarily give them the judgment needed to speak on your behalf to a world that's listening.

Easily quoted and repeated, your messaging in social media has to be even more thoughtfully crafted. The tools are easy to learn technically, so you can assign the social task to someone you trust to be speaking to the world. Keep in mind that national and global reporters love Twitter, and will contact you through it. More impor-

tantly, you can contact them. While monitoring traditional media, don't hesitate to tweet to a reporter or media channel to correct facts or offer assistance.



Maximize your information-gathering resources around the facets of the conversation that people are spreading.

2. Fact-Checking and Approvals – There's intense pressure to move quickly in social media, but keep in mind that's how almost all crisis communications turn bad. After 32 hours of talking to reporters, something is bound to slip out of your mouth that you'll regret. It's even worse when it gets retweeted to hundreds of thousands of people verbatim. Never skip this step, don't offer possibilities and, most importantly, never retweet, share or repeat what you don't know to be true.

What and How to Broadcast

Generally, you'll do fine with the messaging you normally put out. It's been scrutinized through legal and operations, and you know that it's true.

Remember that there are ways to make use of the small amount of information that you might have at any given moment. Take your fully vetted press release and pull the individual facts out of it. Use a bit.ly link for each relevant fact that you tweet from the same release. Monitor which facts get retweeted or shared on Facebook. Maximize your information-gathering resources around the facets of the conversation that people are spreading. Invariably, you'll have messaging that you want to get out that people just don't want

Tips for Using Facebook, Twitter and Flickr in a Crisis

The channels that should be used depends on the crisis. The most effective three to use in a crisis (in the U.S.) are Facebook, Twitter and Flickr. Here are the rules I've used with success:

Facebook:

Only update your "status" once or twice a day, even in a crisis. You can also post a link or a photo, maximizing its impact with four wall posts per 24 hours. Use your responses to the people who are writing on your wall to expand on your messaging. Make sure your posts are simple and comprehensive. Drive them to your Web site for continuous updates, but don't overwhelm their newsfeed with too many posts. People will stop "liking" you if you post too often.

Twitter:

Follow everyone who follows you. Twitter users expect a reciprocal relationship. Don't worry that you'll be overwhelmed with direct messages, but it's important to give people a way to contact you privately. Most reporters don't want to broadcast their query, and some people would prefer to question you without everyone "listening." It's also a great way to show people that your organization cares about what the public thinks.

Thank those who retweet you privately or publicly. It's not just polite, it's also a great way to show that you're monitoring the Twittersphere and understand the medium.

Create private lists of the other players in the crisis. Depending on the crisis, this could be another party in a lawsuit, the police, government agencies or another company. Retweet your allies, monitor your foes. Make sure you know what the other parties are saying in the social space, and make sure you're winning the conversation.

Flickr:

Spreading your photos through the Web can be done with Facebook photos (but only for Facebook users) and Twitpic (but the audience who gets twitpic is very small), so, generally, Flickr is the best option. Since people can share your photo, post comments to it and view galleries of information, it's the preferred method. Also, you can give a photographer an email address on-site to post photos live as they're shot. In the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security used Flickr, and kept geo-locationing information on photos to create maps of each day's observances.

to share. Find different ways to say the same thing and watch which words get picked up and repeated... and then use that messaging with traditional media.

When and How to Interact

To take full advantage of social media—it's essential to interact with the public. This includes responding to direct questions, rumor control and

reaching out to influencers who are posting about you.

Questions may come in that you don't have answers for, and facts will be posted that need to be disputed. A PR team can begin to feel like a call center on Twitter and Facebook, and using "I'm sorry, but we're not allowed to release that information right now" as a response doesn't cut it. If it's an inbound question, explain that you're gathering the facts and will get back to the

person within a set time. Develop a process for a researcher who can receive questions via email to do fact-finding, then craft the message which answers the question truthfully and simply.

Watch trending topics on Twitter and use the public Facebook search to find the people who are talking most about your crisis to the most number of people. Reach out to them in private. Offer them direct access to you to get their questions answered, even if (and especially if) they are critical of you or your organization's response to the crisis. Oftentimes, folks just want to be heard. If you are listening to them, they don't feel as compelled to tell it to their 75,893 followers.

Essential Social Media Tools for Your Arsenal

The tools you use for social media are even more vital in a crisis. They make the difference between being able to respond quickly, and getting flooded with inbound comments.

These are two tools I've relied on heavily:

1. Bit.ly - Watch your bit.ly info pages to see who is retweeting you without crediting you. Then, go ahead and follow them. The bit.ly tweets are a great way to watch a piece of information fly through the virtual world, and track the commentary.

2. CoTweet - Using a Twitter management tool like CoTweet allows you to be certain that you don't miss any mentions by providing an inbox of tweets that have mentioned you. When you reply, your message is stored in CoTweet along with the original tweet.

CoTweet is also useful for filing all of the back and forth that you might have with certain accounts. Before you reply you can see what you've already said to that person. The dashboard view in CoTweet is a huge help regardless of whether you have a full team of people managing the account or even just one person.

Developing a Scorecard

How to judge your work in the heat of the moment is invaluable. It allows you to change your methods midstream. While coverage and engagement are easy to judge pass/fail, you should look into the intricacies of how to improve your performance.

Focus on your influence, rather than follower count. It doesn't matter if you have thousands of followers if they aren't repeating your news and don't care about what you have to say. Having a few thousand followers who repeat everything you say to their thousands of followers should be the goal of all social media investment, especially in a crisis.

You want to develop followers who will trust you enough to support you through their own networks. Think of it like building an MLM (multi-level marketing) pyramid—focus on your best distributors.

Facebook Insights allows you to monitor the demographics of your "fans" as well as the people who interact with you. When a crisis hits, your appeal will expand geographically to a much larger circle than the usual suspects.

Another useful tool, Klout can be used to monitor your own success in Twitter—where you are falling behind and what you're doing well. More importantly, it offers a quick view of who your most influential followers are that are interacting with you, providing a way to focus your attention on those who care enough to tell thousands about you.

In a crisis, failure to monitor social channels to understand the conversation is careless. Not having a channel to publish through is as bad as "no comment" in the morning's newspaper. **PRN**

Stafford Kendall is co-founder and director of interactive strategy at Covalent Logic. She has wide-ranging experience in crisis management, including developing and executing strategy for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill response effort.

How Not to Create a Crisis: Suppressing Online Speech and the Streisand Effect

By Shabbir Safdar

This is the story of a murder and the unfortunate public relations consequences of such. In your entire professional life as a PR person, you will probably never find yourself representing a murderer wanting to clear their name.

However, you will consistently have clients that are criticized online, either directly or through Web sites like VerizonSucks.com. When they ask you, or more likely ask their lawyers, to try and suppress that speech, you have to be able to advise your client of the consequences.

The Clients

Alexander H. Stopp is an attorney representing two men, Wolfgang Werlé and Manfred Lauber, who were convicted of killing a German actor, Walter Sedlmayr. Sedlmayr had been tied up, stabbed in the stomach with a knife and beaten on the head with a hammer. Werlé and Lauber, former business associates of Sedlmayr, were found guilty of his murder and sentenced to life in prison. They were each released in the last two years.

German law provides convicted criminals the right to have news accounts scrubbed of their identity after their debt to society has been paid. The pair successfully used the German legal system to have their names removed from the German-language Wikipedia, which had previously identified them.

The Problem

However, no such provision exists in U.S. law. Attorney Stopp went ahead and filed with the German courts to order the Wikimedia Foundation, the American entity that runs the



The Streisand Effect is named for Barbra Streisand, who sued to get photos of her home in Malibu removed from the Internet, only to draw more attention to them in the process and fail spectacularly.

English-language Wikipedia.com, to remove his clients' names from the article about their crime. The attempt backfired wildly, as the case gained coverage in many news outlets, including *The New York Times*.

I spoke to the Electronic Frontier Foundation, which has a record of defending the American First Amendment online, about efforts to stifle speech. (Disclosure: The Electronic Frontier Foundation is a client of mine at Virilion.) "Efforts to suppress online speech almost always have the opposite effect of drawing far greater publicity" said Jennifer Granick, civil liberties director at the EFF. "That truism is so well-documented that it now has its own name—the Streisand Effect."

Streisand Strikes

The Streisand Effect is named for Barbra Streisand, who sued to get photos of her home in Malibu removed from the Internet, only to draw more attention to them in the process and fail spectacularly. In the 2003 incident, Streisand unsuccessfully sued photographer Kenneth Adelman and Pictopia.com for \$50 million in an attempt to have the aerial photograph of her house removed from the publicly available collection of 12,000 California coastline photographs, citing privacy concerns.

Adelman stated that he was photographing beachfront property to document coastal erosion as part of the California Coastal Records Project. As a result of the case, public knowledge of the picture increased substantially and it became popular on the Internet, with more than 420,000 people visiting the site over the next month.

You might ask, “How much worse did the murderers’ attorney make their reputational crisis?” Measurably, it became quite a bit worse.

In looking at Google searches during the last five years for each of the murderers’ names, there was little activity—until the U.S. Wikimedia brouhaha began this year.

The newfound fame came directly from *The New York Times* story on Nov. 12, 2009, in which Stopp was quoted as saying: “They should be able to go on and be resocialized, and lead a life without being publicly stigmatized for their crime. A criminal has a right to privacy, too, and a right to be left alone.”

This story, of course, caused a huge spike of interest in the pair.

Resolution? Not So Fast

The Google attention for their names lessened in the first few weeks after the story, but nothing could erase the enormous number of articles, blogs, tweets and discussions about their crime. I stopped reading after the first three pages, but I suspect their lawyer didn’t.

But What About Trademark and Copyright?

The solution is clearly not to use the legal hammer, unless you know it will actually work. Many attorneys may insist that when it comes to copyright or trademark, you have to act and, if you do, you’ll be successful. But “be careful,” says the EFF’s Granick. “Trademark law will not protect a mark from parody, satire, political or non-commercial commentary. Trying to force the law to do so will be unsuccessful and, by looking like attempts to censor speech, will do more harm than good to the brand.” **PRN**

Shabbir Safdar is founder of Virilion.

Spheres of Online Influence: Using Social Media Outreach in a Crisis

By Heidi Sullivan

Social media engagement—and tools that monitor online buzz, suggest the best proactive and reactive outreach strategies and analyze and measure the impact of conversations on the social Web—are essential to crisis communications management.

They address urgent problems and clarify misconceptions; they help bring the crisis to resolution; they can rebuild brands and preserve reputations. In times of crisis, public relations professionals need both an understanding of the tools at their disposal, and the processes they can use, to communicate most effectively.

Crises can range from “Twitterstorms” to authentic and dire natural and man-made emergencies. It’s important to emphasize, at the outset, that the value and power of the social Web lie in the ability to get credible and useful information to the right audiences swiftly; to answer questions, address concerns and seek honest feedback; and to bring issues closer to resolution.

Thus, it’s critical to remember that the basic best practices of social media interaction—responsiveness, transparency, honesty, accountability and civility—are even more fundamental in crisis management situations.

The Tools: Both Basic and Advanced

With tens of millions of online news sites, bloggers and citizen journalists—and over 160 million users of Twitter alone (as of October 2010)—the idea of monitoring online conversations and engaging effectively can appear daunting, to say the least. But there are excellent solutions available that can help you monitor the social Web, determine

the right targets for engagement and respond effectively.



If you already have a successful social media outreach program in place, you already know a good deal about the communities that will be affected by a crisis, the most influential bloggers and voices in those communities and how to engage with them.

These include basic, free services: Google Alerts, which sends you email and RSS-delivered alerts of online mentions based on keywords and key phrases that you define yourself; Technorati, the search engine that tracks millions of blogs and influencers; and the search functions on Twitter and Facebook, which help you find out who is talking about you on those social media hotspots.

And there are more advanced products/services: Radian6, a service that provides a full platform for listening, engagement and measurement across the social Web (and, in the spirit of transparency, whose technology is provided to Cision subscribers through its integration into the CisionPoint Social Media Release and the Cision Social Media Dashboard); Yahoo Pipes, a free composition tool that aggregates, consolidates and manipulates online content; and Ning, a service that enables people to create custom-branded social networks.

The basic tools can get you started; the more advanced tools can enable you to respond more swiftly, engage more effectively and analyze more fully the impact of social media on the crisis communications campaign.

Monitoring Tools Stop Crises in Their Tracks

Organizations such as Network Solutions try to identify a potential crisis before it develops.

Using monitoring tools, they track issues raised by bloggers who have a Technorati rating of 50 or above, or people with over 100 followers on Twitter.

They classify the nature of the problem, work to resolve it if appropriate and engage in the right forums with the people who raised it in the first place.

The Process: Four Key Steps

There are four key components to successful crisis communications management on the social Web: (1) Monitoring and Research; (2) Deciding How to Connect, and With Whom; (3) Response; and (4) Analysis, Ongoing Monitoring and Engagement.

If you already have a successful social media outreach program in place, you know a good deal about the communities that will be affected by the crisis, the most influential bloggers and voices in those communities and how to engage with them. But if your social media presence is still new, or if the crisis brings your organization into contact with a broader audience than you normally speak with, it's time to go back to basics.

1. Monitoring and Research

The first basic task you face is to find out what is being said, who is saying it and how your stakeholder community is responding to the conversation. Keywords are the first important component of successful social media monitoring. Free tools like Google Alerts enable you to create sophisticated queries that filter results; more advanced tools let you define and enter an infinite number of keywords into a topic profile that can provide either a wide angle or extreme close-up view of social media conversations.

What kinds of keywords should you consider? Your organization's name (and nickname, if it has one); its products, brands, key executives and spokespeople; general terms related to your organization, the industries or constituencies that it affects; and key words related to the crisis itself (e.g. oil spill, oil leak, oil slick, environmental disaster, Gulf of Mexico ecosystem, etc.). You also should list all of your competitors, their products, brands, executives, etc.

2. Deciding How to Connect, and With Whom

Once you begin receiving alerts and reports, however, you face a new challenge: determining your key influencers—who, among the many who are commenting about your crisis, are the people that can most affect the tenor of the conversation?

Raw numbers on their number of unique visitors or Twitter followers are important, but go beyond them. Look at social metrics, like the number of the influencer's on-topic posts or videos/images that correspond to your key words; the total number of unique commenters and the extent to which commenters are focused on your topic profile; the number of inbound links into the influencer's posts that match your profile; and the way the person is rated by users of sites like Delicious or Digg.

You can find influencer scoring on many of the premium tools mentioned above, and use free tools from Klout or Edelman's TweetLevel to give you fresh insights on engagement and authority data. But use your own judgment, too: Does the influencer interact thoughtfully with commenters or Twitter followers, or is he or she more passive or superficial?

3. Response

Your time to respond should be as swift as possible—the major reason why having a social media outreach program in place before a crisis hits is so crucial. You may need to respond at any time on any day: The firestorm over Johnson & Johnson's Motrin baby-sling TV commercial broke

Twitter Monitoring and Response Best Practices

- Make the community aware of your presence, and be transparent; identify yourself as a representative of your organization.
- Provide a resolution in less than 140 characters, if possible.
- Follow up; if you deal forthrightly with detractors, some may become your fans.
- Avoid arguments, and know when to take a conversation off Twitter.
- Don't sell.
- Acknowledge your "fans."

on a Saturday and might have been mitigated had it been confronted right away.

Develop coherent messages that explain your organization's position or set the record straight; later you can track adoption of key messages when you analyze the results of your social media activity. These messages should be rooted in truth and transparency. If there is culpability (a product defect, for example), acknowledge it, own up to it, flag those in your organization who can begin to rectify it, and issue progress reports when possible. If the crisis is based on a misunderstanding or misstatement, clarify matters with civility. If the situation requires escalation up the organizational chart, line up spokespeople who can speak with authority.

Use your monitoring tools, and your influencer data, to determine who is pushing the crisis forward on the social Web, and start your responses there. Consider supplementing your outreach using free multimedia tools on sites like YouTube, Flickr and Facebook to get your messages out.

In responding to individual detractors, remember that customer service, product management or investor relations specialists may be the most appropriate points of contact. You may also decide to engage by other means—like via email or the telephone—or to ignore the small percentage of people who seem to just have an ax to grind.

4. Analysis, Monitoring and Engagement

Advanced tools can measure key message adoption, and track the time line of the crisis. When was social media traffic at its height, when did it abate, and what actions did you take that provided resolution or calmed the troubled waters? What might you have done, and when, to be more effective?

Moreover, ask yourself this: Can closer engagement with your online communities avert communications crises in the future? If you haven't yet formulated an organization-wide set of social media guidelines and organized a monitoring and response team, begin the process as soon as possible.

Consider creating an online newsroom as both a day-to-day place for media, online influencers and engaged consumers to stay current with your organization, and as a situation room if and when a crisis happens. Include multimedia content—and make the content easy to share on the social Web. The Toyota USA newsroom (<http://pressroom.toyota.com/pr/tms/default.aspx>) is one of the best sites of its kind—informative, interactive, and comprehensive.

And, above all, stay engaged. Most crises change or pass, but the social Web's ability to bring people together, resolve problems and profoundly impact your organization's reputation will be long lasting. **PRN**

Heidi Sullivan is vice president of media research at Cision North America, and oversees all research of print, Internet and broadcast media.

The BP Oil Spill: Digital Lessons Learned

By Liz Mair

For months, oil spewed into the Gulf of Mexico and, as more of it flowed, BP's public image correspondingly sank. Here's what we'll always remember: an inability to stop the leak; multiple cringe-worthy clips of CEO Tony Hayward; and an outmoded, 20th century approach to communications.

While BP aired a TV ad with Hayward talking directly to the camera and pledging to take responsibility, its digital efforts seemed, in many cases, almost invisible or tactically lacking. While the consensus appears to be that whatever BP did it wasn't be enough, here are five digital lessons learned from the BP spill—lessons that you might be able to apply in your crisis situations:

1. Engage With the Blogosphere: BP should have reached out to bloggers much earlier, much more openly, much more aggressively and more often. The Deepwater Horizon Incident Joint Information Center has done this, but that has not proved to be a substitute for action led by BP itself, which has been ripped to shreds by political bloggers. Environmental bloggers have posted increasingly depressing images of stricken wildlife.

Recent studies show that up to 90% of reporters get story ideas and information from blogs; ordinary Americans typically come across blog coverage in Google search results; government staffers and public officials regularly read content from the biggest blogs also. Consequently, devoting substantial attention to high-impact bloggers up front, instead of relying primarily on communication with the usual mainstream media suspects, could have paid real dividends for BP.

2. Go Straight to Video: Another more innovative step BP might have taken relates to that Hayward TV ad. Appropriate for TV as it looks and sounds, BP almost certainly would have done better to have sat Hayward in front of a camera, skipped the well-crafted background scenes and high-end production and had him deliver the same basic message—and then stuck the video on YouTube. This would have helped BP avoid the stinging criticism from President Obama over its spending on an expensive TV ad campaign. Ironically, BP's chosen medium actually underlined the sense of misplaced priorities that officials and members of the public have regarding it.



While BP aired a TV ad with Hayward talking directly to the camera and pledging to take responsibility, its digital efforts seemed, in many cases, almost invisible or tactically lacking.

Furthermore, BP would likely have gotten an equivalent amount of attention focused on the clip, which would have garnered media coverage on the networks and cable, and in contexts where viewers might be less likely to mute and ignore the ad, or, alternately, fast-forward through it if captured by DVRs.

3. Modernize the Homepage: At the time of the spill, BP's homepage was heavily reliant on the archaic press release, and, notably, it did not host a blog. This matters because of the way the public perceives these two tools of message dissemination. Press releases, while useful, familiar and inoffensive to reporters, scream undisguised propaganda to ordinary members of the public. Here

again, BP's chosen approach served to underline what the public came to perceive: BP's only objective was to look good (as opposed to "do good"), and if that means concealing the facts or obscuring reality, well, so be it.

4. Create Communities: Given the overwhelming interest shown by volunteer groups in helping with the cleanup, it would have been smart for BP to set up an online community forum—similar to a community blog or Ning network—linked from its homepage, where people could organize themselves to assist with operations. More valuable than a wildlife distress phone number to call—or something to offer along with it—would be an actual link to charities rescuing and caring for wildlife.

5. Tweak Tweets: BP should have better used Twitter hashtags to insert itself into ongoing

online conversation. Of 20 tweets from BP's @BP_America account reviewed on June 7, 2010, only three of them used the hashtag #oilspill, which Twitter users—including reporters—were searching for to get up-to-date info on events in the Gulf.

During much of the spill, #oilspill was one of the top 10 trending terms on Twitter nationwide. Meanwhile, @BP_America had only about 14,000 followers watching what it had to say, directly, on Twitter; the highly critical fake BP account @BPGlobalPR, however, had over 160,000—again making Twitter a weak point in BP's digital communications chain.

Ultimately, there is a lot to learn from BP's handling of this crisis. Where digital communication specifically is concerned, the simplest lesson is "every little bit helps." **PRN**

Liz Mair is VP of Hynes Communications.

Mastering Two-Way Communication: Turn a Crisis Into a Social Media Success Story

By Gayle M. Pohl

Crisis communications has evolved into a complex yet swift process with the invention of social media. Live news updates are expected by viewers today, so any type of crisis is part of a daily conversation in our society within seconds of its occurrence. Not only are the details of the events reported so are the opinions of the public. In fact, the public demands that its opinions are published via blogs, social networks such as Facebook or discussion sections below an article. We are no longer a society that just supplies the facts via broadcast or print. We are a society that demands immediate two-way communication through social media.

Maclaren and the Umbrella Strollers

For generations our society has responded to crises. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries we, as a people, have been more vocal with our opinions on how those crises have been handled. Social media venues have given us this opportunity. For example, Maclaren, a children's stroller manufacturer, was thrown into a crisis when it was revealed that its top-selling umbrella stroller had such sharp hinges that children's fingers were being amputated. There was one injury reported. About 1 million baby strollers were recalled.

Maclaren was totally unprepared for this crisis. Once the crisis hit they did not take the time to prepare any of their social media sites and accounts (Web, Facebook page or Twitter) with current information. The first place people search for information in this digital age is a company's Web page. It appeared that Maclaren took it

offline. To maintain credibility with consumers a company must supply honest and accurate information in times of crisis. Maclaren failed the test of social media preparedness.



Identify all blogs that are talking about your company and respond diplomatically to the comments. Be helpful—not antagonistic.

A second rule of thumb is having an organizational presence on Twitter. Once an organizational crisis hits, people will be talking about it on Twitter. Assign an employee who is good with social media and who is diplomatic in responding to concerned and often angry customers on Twitter. This employee really should be interactive and proactive in his/her comments. Imaging the company as emphatic, apologetic, and working to correct the crisis as soon as possible, while preventive measures for the future.

Next, identify all blogs that are talking about your company and respond diplomatically to the comments. (In Maclaren's case, they could offer suggestions for parents who own the strollers on how to return them for a refund or how to fix the sharp hinge.) Be helpful to those who are actively involved in the crisis or who have some interest in the crisis. Offer contact information for recall instructions, if that applies. The same strategy can be used for Facebook users.

Overall, Maclaren was unprepared, slow in responding, oblivious to the power of social media and insensitive to the feelings of their consumers. They tarnished their public relations image simply because they refused to

Toyota and Social Media Usage Post-Crisis

Toyota learned to use social media to its advantage after its accelerator crisis occurred. Was it too little to late? After the January 2010 recall of all Toyota cars with defective parts, the company became an aggressive social media user.

Jim Lentz, president and COO of Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A., broadcasted a live Digg interview, a first for the company. Toyota also increased its Facebook fan base by more than 10% since the January recall. In February 2010, Toyota created a TweetMeme called "Toyota Conversations" to gather all online conversations and to respond directly to people's comments and questions. In posted videos, Toyota representatives discuss safety initiatives that they are putting into place, and they highlight the safety awards they have received. The video and images displayed show plants located in various U.S. locations where Americans are employed. This is a savvy strategy on Toyota's part to show Americans that they are supporting and stimulating the U.S. economy, especially during a recession.

In its newsroom, Toyota posts news stories about grants they have awarded to various nonprofit agencies. Photos detailing the event featured accompany each news story.

Toyota has gone a step further and asked bloggers and loyal consumers if they can post their videos, emails, tweets and other correspondence online to promote positive discussion. This is another effective public relations strategy.

In the wake of its crisis, Toyota has certainly learned how to use social media to its advantage.

acknowledge the far-reaching arms of social media venues and social media networking.

Nestlé, Palm Oil and Orangutans

In another example of crisis communications, Greenpeace accused Nestlé of importing palm oil from suppliers that are destroying the Indonesian rainforests that house endangered orangutans. Nestlé responded weakly in defense of its palm oil policy. Enraged environments flooded Nestlé's Web site, Facebook and Twitter pages, and its blog pages with abusive dialogue. Some tampered with Nestlé's logo, and Nestlé responded by saying, "We welcome your comments, but do not alter our logo as your profile picture will be deleted." As you might expect, this response only added fuel to the fire, causing more logo and verbal abuse.

Greenpeace created a video of an office worker accidentally biting into an orangutan finger instead of a Kit Kat and posted it on YouTube. Nestlé had YouTube remove the video, but Greenpeace put it up on Vimeo, which only served to increase its popularity. Nestlé just played into Greenpeace's hands and escalated the crisis. Unfortunately, Nestlé had a social media moderator who did not exercise diplomacy when responding to consumer responses. The moderator helped create an increase in social media buzz.

Nestlé needed to respond to attacks in the venue where they occurred. If an organization exercises its right to freedom of expression, then exercise yours. Explain your organization's behavior tactfully. You must give information to build and maintain trust and credibility, especially in social media arenas.

Tiger Woods, a Fire Hydrant and Infidelities

Tiger Woods' car accident and prior infidelities offer a third example of crisis communications. Immediately after Tiger Woods ran over the fire

hydrant and it was reported, people flooded the Internet, Twitter, Facebook and blogosphere to learn the details of the incident. Woods, however, did not issue a statement of any kind for three months. This gave the public three months to speculate and spread rumors.

Tiger Woods is a celebrity and a spokesperson who had been tied to billions of advertising dollars. He is a commodity and not just a golfer. He had a responsibility to protect his image for the organizations he represented. Therefore, he should have immediately issued a statement saying, "Oops, I am embarrassed. I feel foolish. I am fine, but need time to recovery my dignity."

Waiting three months to deliver a poorly read and stiffly presented speech is unacceptable.

BP Oil Spill and the Gulf of Mexico

Crisis communications is dependent on real-time dialogue with the public. A social media strategy needs to be designed to effectively manage the organizational online communication. This is evident with BP oil spill.

Prior to the oil spill, BP had a Web site, Twitter account and Facebook page. The company was not diligent about updates, though. When the oil spill began after the April 20, 2010, Deepwater Horizon explosion, BP waited until April 27 to issue its first tweet. With online conversations between people occurring 24/7, waiting even an hour is sometimes risky. To wait seven days for a response is like waiting for Tiger Woods to issue a statement.

We must remember that social media has changed the way an organization should handle crisis communications. After its first tweet, BP used Twitter on a daily basis to send updates on what was going on in the Gulf of Mexico and even answer questions from its followers.

BP's Facebook page maintenance followed its Twitter pattern. The company media guru posted

daily updates about the amount of oil removed each day and the total amount removed over time. BP also created news and note tabs where fans could comment.

BP created a YouTube channel video page, featuring people's responses, and information about beaches and cleanup, claims and the economy, health and safety, and restoration of the environment and wildlife.

A dialogue between the public and BP has been established. BP, however, has emphatically stated that comments containing inappropriate language or that are not deemed constructive or respectful will be removed. There has been an outcry about the comments that were removed by BP. The company claims this is their site, so their rules will be followed.

BP also set up a Flickr site to showcase images of the cleanup and the work being done on behalf of wildlife. To BP's credit they are not hiding the severity of the spill with phony images.

Social Media Crisis Communication Plan

Looking at these public relations crises and how these organizations used (or misused) their social media venues, it is abundantly clear that each and every company today needs a social media crisis communications plan.

A social media crisis plan needs to be incorporated into your company's overall crisis plan. Here are some steps to include:

1. Analyze your company's crisis, review the issues that are included in your crisis communications plan and prepare social media content around each one.
2. Respond with an immediate statement. People will be online talking with each other about the crisis event within 10 minutes of learning about it. Let them read a company

- statement before they start talking or blogging.
3. Consistently review the blogosphere for public opinion.
 4. Tweet a diplomatic response for each issue and provide a direct link to a statement from the company's spokesperson.
 5. The company will need to decide if it is going to respond to tweets, blogs and email responses. If so, then decide on a tone and an appropriate theme for the messages. Remember, each response is virtually in a public forum and has the potential to anger or calm people.
 6. Consider when to approach people via an offline venue. It may be best for the company brand to take an extended discussion to a non-social media venue so that the public is not involved.
 7. Facebook responses are never removed unless you delete them, so be careful in responding.
 8. Train your employees what to say and how to say it via social media networks. Keep them informed and tell them what they are allowed to discuss.
 9. Always consider a YouTube response. This is another way to reach people directly. Remember—you need the right location and spokesperson to deliver the message.
 10. Flickr is always a good way to reach people as well. If the crisis is visual, provide honest photos of what your company is doing to make the situation right again.
 11. Invite bloggers to news briefings.
 12. Make sure all the company's social media networks are linked.
 13. Always have a backup energy source to log on to the Internet—it is our means of communication.
- Social media is becoming the lifeblood of communication. Are your organizations ready to tweet, flickr, YouTube and blog their way out of a crisis? **PRN**
-

Gayle Pohl is an Accredited Public Relations practitioner, specializing in nonprofit, healthcare, entertainment and educational public relations, and is a faculty member at the University of Northern Iowa. Her publications include *No Mulligans Allowed: Strategically Plotting Your Public Relations Course*, 2nd ed., and *Public Relations: Designing Effective Communication*.

How to Deftly Manage User Content on Facebook: When to Engage or Step Back

By Jason Winocour

More than 5 million people “like” Coca-Cola on Facebook, and Skittles isn’t far behind, with nearly 4.5 million Facebook fans. These brands have acquired and retained millions of fans because they engage with their followers in dynamic two-way conversations rather than pushing out bland, overly commercial content.

But how can brands with this many followers possibly manage the avalanche of user-generated posts coming through on Facebook every day? And even if your brand isn’t a juggernaut on Facebook and you’re managing user-generated content from, say, 50,000 fans at fictional “XYZ Burger Co.,” how can you stay abreast of the conversation and not have nightmares that a Facebook post about health code violations at the local XYZ Burger joint won’t spread faster than a California wildfire?

Here are my top five tips for managing user-generated content on Facebook:

1. Map out the “rules of the road.” Set guidelines for user-generated posts, and ideally put these rules of the road on both the “wall” and “info” tabs of your Facebook page for maximum visibility. Make it clear that while XYZ Burger Co. can’t monitor every posting or conversation, XYZ expects that users will not post content that falls into certain categories and reserves the right to remove postings that are:

- Abusive, defamatory or obscene
- Fraudulent, deceptive or misleading
- In violation of any intellectual property right, law or regulation
- Otherwise offensive

- Promoting a political or other agenda that’s unrelated to XYZ Burger Co.



Social media doesn’t fit neatly into any single corporate function, making it difficult for top management to classify it and assign responsibility.

Try to keep these rules concise and simple. If the corporate attorneys can’t help themselves and insist on adding tons of legal jargon, create a separate hyperlink for fans who like reading polysyllabic words such as “infringement.”

2. Trying to guess will minimize stress. Try to anticipate what types of comments fans may post. Sort your laundry list of questions/comments into low-, moderate- and high-risk categories. Then develop a recommended approach for posts in each category based on your tolerance level.

Based on the rules of the road, it’s clear that a user-generated comment that includes one of George Carlin’s seven forbidden words should be removed. But what about a negative, subjective comment (e.g.) “XYZ Burgers taste like cardboard,” or a false, defamatory comment (e.g.) “XYZ Burgers are made from cattle that are treated unethically”?

3. Sometimes it’s better to turn the other cheek.

So how should a PR pro handle these types of comments? Surely the temptation is to remove such posts, but this has the potential to backfire. If the author of those posts becomes irritated about being censored, he/she may attempt to spread negative comments through other social media channels. Furthermore, in the case of the subjective “cardboard” comment, it’s important for the brand team to listen to such feedback. If other users add

similar comments in response to the initial post, XYZ should take a hard look at improving the quality of its burgers.

In many instances, responding to negative or defamatory posts may unwittingly pour gasoline on the fire by adding life to a comment that would otherwise die a quick death. So, oftentimes the best course of action is for the brand to ignore the post and see if it drops off the page through more recent user posts. Fortunately, what often happens is that even before the post can fall off the radar, the community will police the “offender” by rebutting the negative comments.

4. Beware of the not-so-Fab Five. So what happens if XYZ Burger’s Facebook community doesn’t come to the rescue? Should the brand respond? If so, how? A general rule of thumb is for the brand to join the conversation if and when five fans have commented on or questioned—but not rebutted—

the initial negative post. At this point, the issue is beginning to gain traction and may start to spread virally. A short response outlining XYZ’s track record on its ethical treatment of cattle, including a hyperlink on XYZ’s Web site for more information, is a good response.

5. The importance of early detection. For better or worse, monitoring a brand’s Facebook presence is like raising kids or working on a farm—it’s a job that never ends. So it’s important for the social media team to adhere to a schedule to monitor comments on the brand’s Facebook page several times a day, seven days a week. Diligent monitoring will facilitate early detection of problems, thereby helping to nip a potential crisis in the bud. **PRN**

Jason Winocour is an agency partner and social & digital media practice leader at Hunter Public Relations.

Five Building Blocks for Managing Your Company's Social Media Program

By Jonathan Spampinato

Social media provides executives and communication managers with a powerful set of tools to help guide a company through periods of crisis. But just like an ill-considered press release or a poorly worded customer letter, social media forces can take a destructive turn. Thanks to social media networks, anything that happens inside your company can be read and seen by millions of people, almost instantly.

Just a few years ago, a maritime disaster on the high seas would have likely become stale news before anyone knew it happened. Now, a storm in the middle of the North Atlantic can hit YouTube and trigger blog postings while the waves are still crashing. Rumors of damage and death can reach customers and reporters before even the quickest of writers can churn out a media statement.

For the unprepared, the perfect "social media storm" is never far off. For those crisis managers who are prepared, however, the rewards of social media are powerful and compelling. To help you reap those rewards, this article outlines five conceptual building blocks to consider as you successfully integrate social media into your crises plans and processes: Governance, Monitor, Respond, Protect and Convince.

1. Governance

Social media doesn't fit neatly into any single corporate function, making it difficult for top management to classify it and assign responsibility. So instead, it appears on the planning agenda in fits and bouts and is implemented in many companies inconsistently and haphazardly,

adopted by some regions or departments while ignored by others.

Marketing-savvy managers are often strong proponents of social media as they search out new and exciting ways to engage customers and other stakeholders. Younger managers in particular tend to lead the social media cheerleading squad, certain that the upcoming generation of employees simply won't work anywhere that doesn't embrace social media tools, doesn't have a YouTube Channel, and isn't on Facebook. On the other side of the spectrum are the naysayers from the various corporate departments, namely, legal, IT and HR. They tend to be indifferent or outright skeptical of social media. To them, social media is one great big bundle of risk, and their perspective can be reduced to a single word: no.



For the unprepared, the perfect "social media storm" is never far off.

With these dynamics at play, social media either becomes a hot potato tossed from one department to the next, or it gets the silo approach—oversimplified and pigeonholed into IT or marketing. Either way, the wrong governance conversations usually take place. As a result, many companies are lacking an appreciation for how social media impacts their ways of working.

Crisis managers should drive their company to adopt a policy that allows for and encourages social media interaction, while acknowledging that even a well-intentioned employee can trigger or exacerbate a crisis with a simple, seemingly harmless tweet or wall post. Too

permissive a policy could leave you explaining things to the media that no one outside your company should ever see; too restrictive, and you are left fighting a crisis with one hand tied behind your back, unable to take advantage of opt-in networks of loyal customers and suppliers who are waiting to hear your side of the story.

So long before your CEO starts blogging and tweeting, or your IT department starts blocking YouTube and filtering interactive emails, your very first stop should be the HR department. Start your social media efforts by collaborating with colleagues from human resources, marketing and IT to develop a thoughtful policy that clearly explains a) why social media is important for your company; b) what kind of activities are allowed, and c) what kind of activities are not allowed. Like any other governance document, take your lawyers on this ride, but don't let them drive the bus.

Once employees know what is allowed and what isn't, chances are the vast majority will stay clearly on the right side of the line. Adopting a balanced social media policy that encourages employees to become brand ambassadors while outlining unacceptable online "behavior" is a critical safeguard.

- **Hot spots:** Building consensus with IT, HR and legal; creating an employee backlash.
- **Sweet spots:** Use the process to learn how your workforce is really using social media.

2. Monitor

During a crisis, the strategic imperative is always the same, regardless of the scenario: Protect the brand. But if you think that protecting is a function of power or control, you probably aren't a big fan of social media. Rumors that once would have lived an ugly but brief life in the break room can now go global in just a few seconds, a dynamic that must keep alpha dog flocks in a

Five Shortcuts to Upgrading Your Crisis Plan

1. Recruit HR to develop a Social Media Policy:

Some example are available at socialmediagovernance.com/policies.php.

2. Update Media List:

Take your stakeholder list and add to each audience the top blogs, LinkedIn and Facebook groups they use.

To be even more thorough, a quick email to a few stakeholders in different countries and media markets should yield some sites you overlooked, supplemented by an online search using sites like technorati.com.

3. Set up a social media alert:

Google Alerts are a must. Then go to your top-tier blogs and subscribe. Recruit employees to join forums like Facebook and LinkedIn where content is invisible to Google, and notify you of posts and threads that mention your brand. Meltwater and Vocus are two of many service providers that couple monitoring with analytics and metrics reports.

4. Create a Social Media Newsroom:

This will enable you to integrate social and traditional media activities, post videos and pictures and get your messages out quickly via sharing tools. You can do this in-house by simply modifying your Web site, or outsource with a hosted solution like PitchEngine. The latter route can have you up and running in literally minutes.

5. Practice, Practice:

Stage a crisis simulation (even alone if need be) and practice your new routine so you get the hang of how to activate your social media tools. Don't wait for a real crisis, when there is no room for error.

constant state of aggression and paranoia. But trying to regain control is a quixotic pursuit.

To be an effective brand guardian in the age of social media, you don't need more control, you need more information: what's being said, who is saying it and who is hearing/reading/watching it.

Learn the ways that your company, your industry and your customers are interacting online and then develop your strategy for gathering intelligence.

Customers and employees today are posting comments on major media stories, writing their own blog posts, creating niche forums and groups for trading information, uploading videos from their Flip cams and simply indulging themselves with opinionated tweets.

While it is true that much of this content can't be easily monitored or tracked, most of it can. So be certain your crisis plan is upgraded with a new reconnaissance strategy that focuses on active ways of monitoring media outlets, social media sites and blogs. If you are still relying upon a traditional clipping service, you simply aren't casting your net wide enough. The egalitarian forces of social media might undermine your control, but paradoxically, these same technologies can be harnessed to provide you with a far better snapshot of how your brand is perceived during a crisis.

- **Hot spots:** Employee and customer privacy; black holes where content evades online searches.
- **Sweet spots:** Using services that can both monitor and generate metrics, you can fine-tune tactics midstream.

3. Respond

When and how a company responds to a crisis is ultimately what determines how well they fare. So naturally, if you want to have the most impact during a crisis, you should spend most of your brain power thinking about (and planning for) when and how to respond. Too soon, and you might step in front of a bullet you should have easily dodged. Too late, and you might never regain lost customers, revenues, and trust.

Judging exactly when to respond was much more straightforward in the dark ages of traditional media: a colleague would activate the alarm tree and notify you of a potential issue as prescribed by company crises procedures or, perhaps more commonly, you'd get a call from a reporter.

Today, practically anyone can "broadcast" news items on their own, and a crisis can get far ahead of you long before your alarm tree is activated. Your response strategy needs to accommodate this dynamic.

Remember though, despite appearances to the contrary, social media is not the media. Rumors are hurled into the blogosphere without consequence or credibility. Anyone can anonymously create an online personality, publish a blog, broadcast a video, and give your brand a real drubbing. As frustrating as that is, don't overestimate its impact or react impetuously. Avoid adding fuel to the fire by overreacting, or adding credibility to a non-issue. The very act of responding creates the dynamics that a reporter needs to file a story. Conversely, an online firestorm might never make it into the mainstream media, but that doesn't mean you don't have a crisis on your hands. Think about what this means for your crisis plans, and then amend your plan with a simple formula or chart that allows you to quickly and rationally evaluate the reach, credibility and impact of a variety of social media crises.

Social media also impacts how you can respond, and fortunately, this is almost all upside for crisis planners. The science of social networking is essentially tapping into other people's databases, and creating or joining the right groups and forums means you can quickly deliver segmented messages. Do your research to identify groups of your stakeholders, and you'll see that Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook will do the heavy lifting for you, minimizing the amount

of valuable time you need to spend on list management.

- **Hot spots:** Mismatching messages and audience; triggering negative responses or threads that you can't shut down; getting lost in the clutter of comments, wall posts and oversubscribed groups.
- **Sweet spots:** Metrics, in just about everything (Google Analytics for sites, opens and click-throughs for emails, etc) so you can evaluate delivery effectiveness and message impact.

4. Protect

"Protect the brand" is the first commandment of crisis managers, and social media offers some ingenious opportunities to go proactive, while still focusing on your defense.

However, I know from experience that going proactive is heretical with some crisis practitioners. Not without good reason, many crisis managers instinctively eschew proactive media activities. For them, protect is synonymous with defend, and when a crisis hits, they prefer to batten down the hatches.

The opportunity cost of playing defense only has increased dramatically in the age of social media. This is the time to activate your brand ambassadors and supporters, and leverage the credibility of third parties.

First and foremost, tap into your employees. They are your most reliable and knowledgeable allies, so develop ways to deploy them. In the past, the risks of spontaneous comments or lack of knowledge forced management to leave their workforce on the sidelines when a crisis hit. Now, those risks are easily managed and overcome. During the BP oil spill crisis in the Gulf, the stories from men and women working at various companies involved have been most memorable to me; their stories were real, laced with honest emotions including anger and frustration at their

own management. Those stories have done more to humanize this tragedy and plant the seeds of empathy for the companies involved, far more effectively than any press release or executive interviews.

Also think about which of your social network members are most relevant to your crisis, and offer them ways to communicate their support. You can direct them towards media stories and blogs for comments, and offer them messages to share with their networks on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. social networks are generally opt-in, and self-sustaining, which means the messages your followers share across their own networks can have far more influence than typical media stories and standard customer letters. Tap into this.

- **Hot spots:** Exposure of your orchestrated crisis campaign; over-spun messages that supporters and third parties simply won't tweet, retweet or share.
- **Sweet spots:** Influencing media coverage with authentic supporters; sharing tools (Add This, Share This, PitchEngine, etc) make it easy to retweet, share Web pages, news stories, etc.

5. Convince

Holding statements from yesteryear frustrated reporters for the same reason they frustrated embattled executives: They seem contrived, insincere and carry no emotional depth.

The art of persuasion is essential when managing a crisis; indeed, persuasion plays a more critical role in crisis communications than any of the other communication disciplines. The marketers have products and consumer demand to rely on; those in investor relations have income statements, balance sheets and the profit motive to rely on. Consumers want good products and they seek them out; investors want good returns and they seek them out. But during a crisis, there are

no demand-side forces playing in your favor. You win or lose based on your words and actions.

So don't simply pour old wine into a new bottle. Social media and desktop technology allow you to weave the more powerful elements of persuasion into your crisis activities: personal appeal, fact and third party testimony. So use social media to its fullest advantage, and identify where when and how you should post links and images, adding context and credibility to your holding statements.

When prudent, consider the value of delivering your statements by video, audio, and with supporting documents; build online personalities for your executives in advance, so when a crisis hits, they already have credibility with online audiences. Remember, social media doesn't displace the value of personal communications skills, it amplifies them.

- Hot spots:** Repurposing quotes and testimonials from marketing to crisis; credibility of online content you use (i.e. citing Wikipedia); your executive videos being hijacked and used against you.

- Sweet spots:** "Unlisted" and "Private"

features on YouTube bring the possibilities of segmented video delivery to crisis communications.

Despite the onslaught of social media apps, connecting us in whirling, dizzying networks of information, the role of a crisis manager remains constant: Get your arms around the flow of information; communicate as directly as possible with impacted parties; and limit the damage to your brand.

But if your crisis plan relies on a heavy dose of control for its effectiveness, good luck to you. For better and for worse, social media has eliminated many of the barriers between companies, customers and the media, diluting the traditional value and power of corporate message control—but enhancing credibility and engagement. With the right building blocks in place, your crisis plan will, too. **PRN**

Jonathan Spampinato is senior manager of global external communications for Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistics, a global shipping and logistics company. He has developed communications programs for some of the world's most recognized brands including Pfizer, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Ford Motor Co., Lysol and the Gates Foundation.

How Royal Caribbean Communicated Its Return to Haiti Through Social Media

By Cynthia Martinez

A crisis can affect any company at any time. As much as organizations plan and prepare, crises are just simply unavoidable. However, in order to minimize the long-term risk, and allow your company to mitigate the event as quickly as possible, you must have a complete and thorough crisis communications plan. Most plans include traditional public relations tactics, such as press conferences, press releases and media interviews, to get key messages out. But how about social media? In this day and age, social media must be a part of every crisis communications plan.

Social media provides communicators with another method to get important messages out during a crisis. When Royal Caribbean needed to communicate its return to Haiti after the earthquake, it utilized its social media tools—Web site, blog, Facebook and Twitter—to keep the public and media regularly informed. The integration of traditional tactics and social media were crucial in handling the negative publicity Royal Caribbean briefly received and prevented any financial impact or long-term damage to the brand.

Background

On Jan. 12, 2010, the Caribbean island of Haiti suffered a catastrophic earthquake causing severe damage throughout the country and staggering loss of life. For more than 30 years, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. has had close ties to Haiti, and has been one of the country's largest investors. Royal Caribbean's involvement in Haiti includes its private beach destination called Labadee, located on the northern coast of the island. Upon confirming that Labadee

had not experienced any damage from the earthquake, the cruise line faced the significant and important decision of whether or not to return to the port of call for upcoming cruises, a decision that the company did not take lightly. It was only after receiving approval and encouragement from the Haitian government did Royal Caribbean make the decision to return to Labadee.

Although the first ship would call on Labadee on Friday, Jan. 15, just three days after the earthquake struck, it was determined that not only would the return immediately begin to fuel the local economy with vital tourism dollars, but that the ships could also be utilized as a way to deliver much needed relief supplies and support. This decision to return to Haiti would make Royal Caribbean the subject of negative news articles and blog postings, ultimately sparking a public controversy on whether returning so soon was ethical.

Within hours of the earthquake striking Haiti, internal teams were immediately put into action to assess the situation, respond to incoming media calls from around the world and



Trucks load up emergency supplies from a Royal Caribbean ship at the port of Labadee—bound for areas hit by the Haiti earthquake.

determine a response strategy. Along with the more mainstream channels, Royal Caribbean's various existing social media tools, including the Royal Caribbean Web site, the company president's blog, Facebook page and Twitter handle, were used as key portals for keeping guests, crew and media informed.

For two weeks following the earthquake, the president's blog "Nation of Why Not" was almost entirely devoted to Haiti. Post included photos of relief supplies heading to Haiti onboard their cruise ships, updates on the search for missing crew members and even details on the company's internal processes with a PDF of the daily meeting notes.

As the media coverage of Royal Caribbean's return turned negative, social media was once again used to get the message out. The CEO wrote a blog post addressing the issues raised in an article in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, "No Room in Haiti's Cemeteries, but Cruise Ships Find Berths." Through the president's blog, Royal Caribbean was able to respond directly to the issues raised in the article the same day it appeared in the paper. To this day, Royal Caribbean is still providing detailed information on their long-term recovery efforts by utilizing the president's blog, Facebook and Twitter.

Social Media Crisis How-To

When a crisis strikes your company, social media should not be ignored, but rather viewed as an additional communications channel that can be used to get your message out. Below is some valuable information regarding social media that can be applied when—not if—your company faces a crisis.

- **Now, not later** – Make sure your company has its social media outlets established before a crisis happens. Once you're in the midst of a crisis, it's just too late. Also, if your company doesn't own its brand name on the

web, in Facebook or in Twitter, someone else will. Since Royal Caribbean already had a president's blog, Facebook page and Twitter account that was well known by the public, it was able to include them into their crisis communications response plans.

- **Put it in the plan** – You know that all companies must have a crisis communications plan. But in order for social media to be effectively utilized during a crisis, it must be included in your plan. If it's not, your company is missing out on significant opportunities to maximize social media's effectiveness.

- **Get the C-suite onboard** – Your executives need to be familiar with how your company uses social media on a day-to-day basis to promote your brand, as well as how it can be used to reach your stakeholders during a crisis. Royal Caribbean's president regularly uses his blog to provide information and news to the public. So when it was suggested that he blog about Royal Caribbean's return to Haiti, it made complete sense to him and was an easy sell.

- **Don't ignore your Web site** – Everyone always talks about the latest and greatest social media tools, but you can't overlook your Web site. It's where your customers go to find information about your company, so you should use that to your advantage. During the Haiti crisis, Royal Caribbean had a pop-up box appear as soon as the Web page loaded with a link to the "Haiti Relief" page. That page contained the latest press release, up-to-date information, as well as pictures.

- **Key messages** – When traditional media tactics aren't working as effectively as you would like at getting your key messages out, use social media. Royal Caribbean had provided various media statements, press releases and granted media interviews to

explain the reasons for our return to Haiti, but the messages was being filtered through the media. By using social media, such as the president's blog, Facebook and Twitter, Royal Caribbean was able to get the message out to the public directly.

- **Communicate often** – Users of social media are accustomed to and expect multiple updates throughout the day. If possible, assign someone on your team to post updated information often. This person could also be tasked with monitoring the social media channels.

- **Talk, but also listen** – As you know by now, social media can be a great tool to get your company's message out during a crisis. But it's also a get venue to hear what the public,

and even media, is saying about you. By monitoring social media, your company can actively respond to questions or concerns, as well as gauge public sentiment.

By following this simple how-to, you can ensure your organization utilizes social media effectively and successfully during a crisis. Social media cannot and should not be ignored, but rather managed and employed along with traditional media tactics to successfully navigate any crisis.

PRN

Cynthia Martinez is manager of corporate communications for Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. Martinez led Royal Caribbean's overall national and international communications strategy for the company's return to Haiti after the earthquake.

Virtual Drills: Add Key Digital and Social Media Elements to Crisis Simulations

By Andrew Gilman

Crisis simulations and drills are critical to adequate crisis preparation. We advise clients that even the best, most carefully crafted crisis plans are only worth the paper they are written on unless the client engages in a drill or simulation to test the words.

Since social media is now an important element in crisis response, it's important to incorporate the platform and the latest technologies into crisis simulations and drills.

Each time we run a simulation, we add more and more social media elements. A recent simulation for a client was probably the richest in terms of social media elements and taking advantage of new technology. Here's what we did:

1. Draft fact patterns. In order to engage the participants, it's important to draft a set of facts about the crisis that are plausible and also stretch the teams. The fact patterns should reflect the elements of current communications, and from a social media perspective, might include the following:

- Twitter postings from those impacted by the events
- Twitpic photos of the events
- Bloggers who can post from a laptop in the middle of an incident
- YouTube videos

2. Set up the simulation. We usually introduce the fact patterns with an initial premise, followed by two or three pages of events. It's just as easy to use two or three PowerPoint slides with video embedded into the slide.

3. Utilize technology. Flip cams or broadcast cameras? Until a couple of years ago, we usually hired camera crews and set up editing suites for rapid filming and turnaround of drill segments. Now, with Flip cameras, video production has changed. During the drill, one or two Flip cams at less than \$200 per camera are reasonable substitutes for high-end cameras.



Since social media is now an important element in crisis response, it's important to incorporate the platform and the latest technologies into crisis simulations and drills.

In addition, Skype interviews beat out using a speakerphone. One of the key actions in a drill is to conduct a live interview with role players. Skype makes the interview truly come alive. Arrange for a team member to be available, set up the Skype video interview and let it play.

Other key digital/social elements to include in a crisis simulation are:

- Pre-plan faux Web sites, publications and Twitter pages. It's very easy to click on a site and draft a Web page or create a fake Twitter posting. For example, a recent fact pattern involved events at Ohio State University. In advance, we created pages for the *The Columbus Dispatch*, a local TV station and the Buckeye Boosters organization.
- A laptop and a flash drive are all you need to set up blogs during a session. Appoint one of the participants to be the blogger and ask the person to write a post every five minutes.

Then put these up on the screen or print them out for participants as needed.

Caveat: As tempting as it is, do not post any simulation components on a real social media site. It's not worth the risk to have a fake posting up, even for 60 seconds.

4. Realize budget savings. Don't get me wrong. There's nothing better than the full-scale simulation with camera crews and edit teams, video monitors and extras. However, in today's economy, most clients prefer to put the budget into preparation, planning and real-world events. Flip cams and the use of digital platforms can reduce the out-of-pocket simulation costs by up to 80%.

5. Provide a list of social media resources.

Following the crisis drill, it's helpful to provide a list of the social media tools that were used in the simulation. We recommend that clients select a social media monitoring service for keeping on top of any crisis.

So what hasn't changed in crisis simulations?

The best ones have at least two drills during the course of the day. The first drill works well as tabletop, with all participants responding to facts and making decisions. This is the warm-up drill. The warm-up has social media elements and also hints at the skills and tools that will be needed in the more involved second scenario.

One of the lessons that should be incorporated into the first drill and carried on in the second is the need to monitor the social media space. You'll need to know how and when to respond to Internet posts.

Crisis drills are like buying insurance. It's a rare day when an individual wakes up and says, "I want to buy more insurance." Yet in the event of a loss, it's a good idea to have a policy. Similarly, investing in crisis planning and simulations is good insurance. **PRN**

Andrew Gilman is president and CEO of Commcore Consulting Group.



"Ultimately, bankruptcy is an exercise in rebranding an organization."

—Scott Tangney, EVP, Financial and Professional Services, Makovsky + Company

Litigation PR

7



Stake Out Your Power Position for Messaging During a Chapter 11 Filing

By Kathy Scott

Chapter 11 is such an ugly phrase. It doesn't help that it's a chapter of the United States Bankruptcy Code, either. "Bankruptcy" is an uglier word.

Background

On Aug. 2, 2009, Cygnus Business Media announced it had filed a "prepackaged Chapter 11." Prior to the filing, Cygnus had spent the past year negotiating with a potential buyer, but while the deal dragged on, so did the recession. As a b2b media company, we cover industries, many of which were falling further into despair. Our own *RV Trade Digest* announced the biggest years ever for recreational vehicles in 2005/2006. By 2009, Elkhardt, Ind., the RV manufacturing capital of the world, was all but dead and *RV Trade Digest* was eventually shuttered.

Next came a series of media industry layoffs and headlines that announced to the media industry that the sky was falling. It's hard to put a price on a sky when it's falling down.

Unfortunately, Cygnus Business Media took on secured debt in 2000 when CommerceConnect Media Holdings Inc. purchased a wide range of targeted media products, including Cygnus Business Media. At the time, and up until the August filing, the company had the ability to support that secured debt.

Our lien holders had a few choices: sell the company as a whole at a rock-bottom price; sell pieces of the company to recoup their investment; or agree to reduce the debt the company owed in exchange for more of a share of the company and recover their investment later.

After months of negotiation, 23 of the 24 lenders chose the latter, coming to an agreement to reduce Cygnus' debt from approximately \$220 million to \$60 million and take a bigger piece of the company. One lender dissented. Because this type of secured debt restructuring requires that all lenders agree on the terms, our only recourse was to file a Plan of Reorganization under Chapter 11, which would then finalize the plan the 23 lenders had agreed upon.

The first and most important stakeholders for Cygnus to focus on with the initial Chapter 11 announcement were its employees.

First Step: Determine Stakeholders

Determining your stakeholders is the first step in developing a crisis communications strategy. It helps to craft your message and insures that business continues as usual. It's no secret that your competition will find every opportunity to take you down (it's not personal, it's just business). Make sure you are on the offense from the beginning of a crisis to the end.

Cygnus Business Media Stakeholders

1. Employees
2. Our Customers
3. Our Media Consumers
4. Vendors
5. Extended Family Members of Employees
6. Landlords

Checklist of Prepared Documents for a Chapter 11 Filing Communications Plan

Most of the items on this checklist for a media company filing for Chapter 11 can be applied in a wide variety of corporate sectors.

- ☐ Anticipated Tough Q&A
- ☐ CEO Letter to Employees
- ☐ Chapter 11 Fact Sheet
- ☐ Document Checklist
- ☐ Email Memo End of First Day
- ☐ Employee Briefer
- ☐ Employee FAQs
- ☐ Glossary of Terms
- ☐ Instructions for Buying
- ☐ Instructions for Communicating Managers
- ☐ Letter to 401k Administrator
- ☐ Letter to Expo Vendors
- ☐ Letter to Publications Vendors
- ☐ Letter to Advertisers
- ☐ Letter to Exhibitors
- ☐ Letter to Landlords
- ☐ Letter to People Receiving Severance
- ☐ Letter to Third-Party Insurer
- ☐ Letter to Trade Associations
- ☐ Media List
- ☐ Phone Scripts for Phone Tree
- ☐ Q&A for Vendors
- ☐ Q&A for Sales
- ☐ Restructuring Release
- ☐ Security-Receptionist Front Door Guidelines
- ☐ Talking Points for Advertisers/Exhibitors
- ☐ Talking Points for Vendors
- ☐ Talking Points for Town Hall Meeting/Call
- ☐ Vendor Memo First Day Orders
- ☐ Vendor Reclamation Guidelines

A company's stakeholders together make up the nucleus of any business. If just one loses confidence in a company's ability to perform, it will affect how the others view the business.

Tip: Fear, if left unchallenged, can destroy an organization more quickly than a thousand competitors.

The first and most important stakeholders for Cygnus Business Media to focus on with the initial Chapter 11 announcement were its employees. It was crucial that they understood the process and felt comfortable with the course of action. They would become the most powerful ally that Cygnus had.

Second Step: Devise the Message

Filing Chapter 11 means that a company can no longer service its debt, needs protection and plans to reorganize. Fortunately, our Plan of Reorganization did not affect any of our vendors. If it had, we would have been unable to pay debt for our printing costs, trade show operations or day-to-day operations. It would have been extremely difficult to continue because our vendors would no longer care to do business with us. Having said that, it was crucial to be completely open and anticipate questions in order to set our stakeholders' minds at ease.

► **Pros and Cons.** Make a list of positives and negatives of the Chapter 11 filing. Although there are a number of pros and cons to a Chapter 11 filing, it is important to sort through and focus on one message: "a more manageable financial structure."

Trying to combat all potential issues has an air of defensiveness and excuses, and all but assures the public and the stakeholders will view the company as weak. The company should always maintain the power position in a crisis. The power position is the location where all messaging is being disseminated and where stakeholders look to for an explanation of any crisis. To maintain this

position, all company communications must be viewed as unbiased, open and honest, distributing information as fact without colorful words.

Primary Message: Cygnus Business Media Inc. reaches agreement with senior lenders to reduce secured debt; files prepackaged Chapter 11 to complete secured debt-equity swap.

Cygnus' Key Communication Points:

- Cygnus Business Media Inc. has reached an agreement with 23 of its 24 secured lenders on a financial restructuring.
- The restructuring plan fell short of unanimous agreement, requiring the company to complete its restructuring under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code.
- Company filed its prepackaged Plan of Reorganization and Disclosure Statement.
- Both of these documents are subject to approval by the Bankruptcy Court, which approval the company expects to obtain in the next 45 days.
- Cygnus Business Media will operate as usual, and it does not expect there to be any impact on its day-to-day operations.
- The Plan of Reorganization, when approved by the Bankruptcy Court, provides that all general unsecured creditors, including all suppliers and vendors, of Cygnus Business

Media will be paid the full amounts of their claims.

- Business sectors show positive contribution.
- Business will continue without interruption to meet the needs of the customers in our vertical markets.
- We have sufficient funds to support our working capital needs.
- Agreement will permit us to leverage our strong market standings and position the company for future growth.
- Additional information about the company's restructuring may be found online at www.cbmrestructuring.com.

Our employees were told first, and they were given numerous documents to read through with a list of every imaginable question. None were left off our Q&A.

Forty-nine days after the filing, Cygnus emerged with a more manageable debt structure, a new, highly respected CEO and a board of directors made up of the media industry's top executives.

Cygnus Business Media did not lose one of its 30,000 customers due to negative publicity surrounding Chapter 11. **PRN**

Kathy Scott is the director of public relations for Cygnus Business Media.

Keep the 'Head' and 'Heart' of a Bankruptcy Filing in Balance for Stakeholder Support

By Scott Tangney

Bankruptcies are booming. In 2009, they were up 50%, with more than 200 big companies in a broad range of industries filing for Chapter 11 protection. Experts predict that these trends will continue beyond 2010, and that successfully emerging from bankruptcy will become ever more challenging.

Heart of the Matter

Every bankruptcy has a “head” and a “heart,” and each is crucial to the process.

The head—the technical, legal and financial issues—is, of course, essential. Unless these issues are addressed efficiently and effectively, the organization has little chance for survival.

Then there is the “heart.” Bankruptcy forces a company into a high stakes communications environment. “Do I want to keep buying this company’s products/services?” “Is this a place where I want to build my career?” If customers and employees, respectively, decide to answer “no” to these questions, a company cannot survive. The heart, therefore, is the key to survival.

There are three phases of bankruptcy, and communications must play a role in each:

► **Pre-Filing:** Rumor control: The pre-filing period is the moment when persistent financial problems—declining sales, balance sheet issues or strained creditor relationships—spark rumors of bankruptcy. Bankruptcy rumors, whether true or false, are dangerous because they signal that management is losing control of communications with audiences whose support is crucial to the company’s survival.

Fearful of the communications minefield around them, most companies respond to a bankruptcy rumor with a curt statement: “There is no substance to the rumor that ...” Not surprisingly, the public is rarely convinced. Better is what we

Naturally, communications options are limited if a company is actually weighing bankruptcy.

call the informational denial—giving evidence for “no substance.” Blockbuster, for example, denied rumors of imminent bankruptcy by explaining how it was currently working to replace an expiring line of credit.

Naturally, communications options are more limited if the company is actually weighing bankruptcy. Here the goal is reinforcing that the company is making deliberate and intelligent decisions about its future, without explicitly denying bankruptcy is on the table. General Motors, for example, explained its principal options and emphasized that Chapter 11 was a “last resort.”

► **The Filing:** Filing day communications should follow a carefully scripted scenario, moving rapidly from internal to external audiences, all triggered by the filing of the petition in bankruptcy court.

- **First, senior management:** In-person (or teleconference-assisted) meetings to detail the plan, explain what it means for the organization going forward, review key messages and discuss communications responsibilities.
- **Next, all employees:** Group meeting or prerecorded CEO statement; communicate

what is known about HR-related issues (pensions, etc.), emphasize that bankruptcy is an opportunity to emerge stronger.

- **Finally, the purchasing and sales staff:**

Each will be given responsibilities for contacting the company's key suppliers and customers with relevant facts about the filing.

Balanced Release

Once internal business is addressed, the company should issue the press release. The public statement should have three equally balanced components: technical details; reassurance; and vision. One common flaw: Releases are often long on head and short on heart.

► **Post-Filing:** General Motors, in its creative use of electronic and social media since its Chapter 11 filing, reminds us that bankruptcy is a public process that demands continued outreach to customers, employees and others. GM has virtually branded the term "Reinvention" as a

concept to communicate a new identity for the company. Its communications tools include:

- The Reinvention Web site, which features live chats with company executives, Twitter, Flickr and Facebook links, news forums and progress reports;
- A corporate Facebook page that is the foundation of its social network, focused on reinvention; and,
- Several corporate blogs that are candid and objective in editorial focus.

Ultimately, bankruptcy is an exercise in rebranding an organization. Without ongoing support and a recommitment of all stakeholders, the difficult task of emerging from Chapter 11 as a new, restructured entity will be impossible.

PRN

Scott Tangney is EVP of financial and professional services at Makovsky + Company in New York.

Prevent Lawyerly Leaks and Stay On Message

By James Lukaszewski

In legal scenarios and trials, lawyers are frequently the greatest source of leaks and surprise releases of information. Every time you see, hear or view one of those in-depth analyses of a legal situation, it's likely one of the participating attorneys is involved, because reporters sometimes are lacking in legal knowledge and they find lawyers are easy sources.

In turn, lawyers often call reporters to trigger stories about their cases—when they feel the coverage is hurting their case, the reporter is especially inept or the lawyers are made to look foolish or incompetent. Lawyers believe that when they explain things logically and carefully, reporters will understand and adjust their coverage. As important leaks go, lawyers are second only to the top bosses and board members who get to do this because it is their enterprise. Leaks of substance never come from the mail room.

The fact is, leaks of substance shouldn't come from anyone without PR's permission. So how do you control lawyer/media communications during a trial? First, it helps to understand the synergy between lawyer and reporter.

Source Versus Relationship

Reporters learn quickly that lawyers love to talk about the law. Lawyers will talk on the record, off the record, behind the record and, unless specifically instructed otherwise, will often do it without their client's knowledge.

Like PR people who should inherently know better (because 70% of PR people are former reporters), lawyers delude themselves into believing that they can have "relationships" with reporters to exert some control over press coverage.

No reporter would ever admit to having any kind of compromising relationship with anyone. Those of you who are former reporters know this is the truth. Reporters have sources, not relationships.

Like reporters, lawyers also love contention and controversy; they enjoy the adversarial nature of the legal process. Yes, they feel it's important for the public to understand what's going on in the courtroom and most lawyers think they are great communicators, especially when it comes to upsetting or irritating opposing counsel. Rarely does the public care (unless client communication mistakes make them care).



The fact is, leaks of substance shouldn't come from anyone without PR's permission. So how do you control lawyer/media communications during a trial?

Button Exercise

The truth is, most comments by lawyers to the press are simply lawyers pushing other lawyers' buttons. This is part of the adversarial attitude still being taught in law school. What law schools fail to teach (because it is beyond the lawyer's responsibilities) is that button pushing rarely works in the courtroom and generally backfires on the client when done in public communication.

So how can a PR executive keep a talkative lawyer under wraps? Here are four important instructions you can give lawyers before a case starts:

1. All contact with the press will be handled, approved or denied through a designated spokesperson or trial communication manager (TCM).

2. All phone calls, questions and messages from reporters should be instantly shifted to the spokesperson or trial communication manager. This means even the simplest questions, the most innocuous requests for information, hypotheticals and pleas for help in understanding.
3. In face-to-face meetings with reporters (such as those in and outside the courthouse), all requests and casual conversations shall be directed to the designated spokesperson or TCM for disposition.
4. If an attorney has a burning desire to phone or email a reporter, such urges will first be shared with the designated spokesperson or trial communication manager, and their decision will be final.

It doesn't matter that:

- Lawyers feel they have good relationships with and communicate well with reporters.
- Reporters in your market may be used to talking to attorneys.
- Reporters have already contacted the lawyers, and the lawyer has promised a response.
- Your lawyers feel you are getting killed by the legal analysis (of others) in the press or online media.

Bottom line: Rogue lawyer behavior is disruptive to good message strategy and delivery. This disciplined approach will help reduce distractions, shorten time-wasting meetings and prevent dozens of off-the-wall questions and collateral distractions. It will help keep everyone on message and focused on their real roles in the case. **PRN**

Crisis manager James E. Lukaszewski is CEO and chairman of The Lukaszewski Group.

Your Company Has Been Sued: Now What?

By Montieth M. Illingworth

Lawsuits come in all shapes and sizes. Those that become business killers are in a category by themselves and have increased in frequency in this last recession, especially securities cases. This provides unique opportunities for PR executives. But it also requires us to see the strategic issues in broader terms, and thus beyond the tactical mechanics of “message.” That means using analytical approaches and solutions that are more comprehensive, integrated and carefully aligned with stakeholder concerns and interests. Shaping perceptions is a strategic outcome here, not the strategy itself.

Stakeholder Trust in Jeopardy

Common to potentially lethal legal actions is that they detail allegations—whether from a private party, a regulator or law enforcement—that materially impact most or all of an organization’s stakeholder bonds. Accusations related to management’s obligation to disclose specific information to shareholders about earnings fall into this category. So, too, does a product liability case, charges of insider trading or options backdating, to mention just a few. Such allegations can seriously erode stakeholder trust, regardless of the eventual outcome of the case in court. The damage is early and fast, and few organizations survive as they previously were. If they do, it’s usually with a new CEO and lower revenues.

Plaintiffs have the initial advantage in shaping the news media’s treatment of the “story,” and thus also stakeholder perceptions. Well-crafted plaintiff’s pleadings contain vivid accusatory language, a detailed fact-based narrative and dire-sounding statutory causes of action. It’s usually months before the defendant responds

formally with the other side of the story. By the time the defendant’s pleadings are filed, the damage among stakeholders, and the business, is done.

PR executives are well-qualified to play a key role in preserving stakeholder bonds during litigation.

Damage Control

It doesn’t have to be that way. PR executives are well-qualified to play a key role in preserving stakeholder bonds during litigation. PR often has the ear of top management; has access to critical corporate functions such as IR and HR; and, most importantly, possesses the skills needed to effectively communicate between these functions. Here are steps PR professionals should take when faced with a litigation crisis:

► **Assess the situation.** This requires a risk management approach—taking business, reputation and litigation issues into account when assessing the stakes of an impending legal battle. Important at this step is isolating the most critical “interactive” issues—meaning interrelated business, reputation and legal elements that all impact each other. This allows for the most comprehensive assessment of the situation. For example, one matter we advised on involved a product liability class-action suit against a plumbing supply manufacturer. The core interactive issue was a variation on the classic “what did you know and when did you know it?” In this case, questions concerned product’s design and performance under various conditions.

► **Establish a process for stakeholder feedback.** This process is set up to measure

stakeholder opinions about the litigation and its impact on their part of the organization. This step is where PR's position in the organization and communications skills really play a key role.

► **Prevent stakeholders' bunker mentality.**

Ongoing stakeholder engagement also means not letting the various functional groups "hide" in their bunkers—a natural human reaction early in the litigation but, of course, lethal to the organization. PR executives must "parachute" in to these groups and remind them of the strategic imperatives of the case.

► **Work closely with the business functions.**

The PR team should give ongoing advice to the relevant functional groups within the organization on how they can best protect stakeholder

relationships through the ups and downs of the litigation process (and media coverage), which can occur over two or more years.

Successful Outcome

Now, back to the example of the class-action case against the plumbing manufacturer. Through a comprehensive response strategy that emphasized clear stakeholder communications via the PR team, the suit was settled. The company survived, and largely because stakeholders believed it dealt with the matter from a position of total integrity. **PRN**

Montieth M. Illingworth is president of Montieth & Company, a New York-based communications consultancy.

Anticipating Litigation: Get Ahead of the Storm With a Rock-Solid Lawsuit Action Plan

By Sherry Treco-Jones

A lawsuit is never pleasant business. The results can mar a reputation and bring about internal turmoil, loss of productivity and a significant financial drain for years to come. More and more smart leaders are realizing the damage a potential lawsuit can bring to their organizations—and they are taking steps to get ahead of the storm. In anticipating litigation, whether pending or potential, those leaders are taking advantage of a golden window of opportunity to assess, plan and get ready to handle negative news when or if it occurs—news that eventually may affect every internal and external stakeholder. In the event of litigation, involving a public relations strategist at the earliest stage of the process increases the odds immeasurably for the organization to survive and maintain its reputation.

So how do public relations pros get involved in this process, and what are the most effective ways to approach it?

How to Anticipate Litigation

Following are a few observations that play into the anticipatory process:

1. Earn your CEO's trust before you take a seat at the table. You must have a strong, trusting relationship with your CEO and/or board chair and other C-suite level executives in order to be effective in litigation communications. Your contributions must be respected. Optimally, you need to work directly with the CEO for the most success.

► **Find Good Terms:** If you have a difficult relationship with your CEO, you will need to be aggressive in order to join the decision-

making group and then fight for your recommendations throughout the process. You may have to fight to ignite action internally and persuade others that a plan without a communications strategy will be weak. While not fun, it's necessary.



In the event of litigation, involving a PR strategist at the earliest stage of the process increases the odds immeasurably for the organization to survive and maintain its reputation.

2. Get to the table early. Getting word of potential litigation will be the result of strong relationships with C-suite level players. It can also be the result of your relationships across your organization. If the latter, get as many facts as you can and bring the information to your boss or CEO as quickly as possible. Then act—insert yourself into the process, at the start of the planning process. Frequently, the public relations professional is the bell-ringer in pointing out what can become a serious problem if no action is taken.

3. Be strategic first and tactical later. It is critical that you view the situation from 12,000 feet first. You will need that perspective to review all information to identify the strategic points that can become gateways to effective positioning and messaging and possibly successful resolution of the case and your organization's reputation. You must stay strategic throughout the process or your contribution will be of little value and lack credibility. Frequently, you will need to remind

other executives involved to remain strategic as well.

► **A Reminder:** Being strategic and being good at tactics are not mutually exclusive. A great strategist may also choose to prepare all relevant materials him/herself, simply because they “own” the positioning and messaging used, and think they can express it best. Oftentimes, since the materials are highly confidential, they must be prepared within the “circle of trust,” i.e., you will prepare them as the team specialist.

4. Do your own homework. Expect to research the situation yourself. Litigation anticipation requires deep thinking and you will not bring much to the table if you rely on others to do your homework. Reach your organization’s history, the current perceptions about your company and the history and current perceptions of the parties potentially involved in legal action. Also review other similar cases, especially in your field and/or geographic region. Find out as much as you can about the potential situation before you begin.

► **Extra Credit:** If a lawsuit is pending, read all legal and related documents thoroughly to gain as complete a knowledge base as possible. You may find the reading dense, but it is a requisite for understanding the heart of the case and all possible related facts, allegations and issues. You will not develop effective positioning and messaging unless you understand the case completely.

5. Be prepared to maintain confidentiality for the long term. Whether you have a month or six months to plan, you must maintain strict confidentiality about all that you do and know. This is harder than it sounds, especially if you work daily with individuals involved in a potential or pending lawsuit.

6. Develop the same materials and have the same conversations for a potential lawsuit as

you would a pending lawsuit. The difference will be in the depth and detail.

How to Prepare for Pending Litigation

Once you’ve done your research and litigation is pending rather than potential, these steps will put you in the best position to defend your organization’s reputation.

1. Work with a core team. Assemble and/or work as a member of a three-to-four-member team of executives, including legal counsel, who can act with complete confidentiality and make decisions quickly and over an extended period of time.

A core team includes the head of an organization, legal counsel for the organization, the head of operations and the public relations professional. Sometimes, risk management is involved and/or a board chair. Here are some tips to keep in mind for assembling a rock-solid team:

- The core team members may involve and/or liaise with others as needed, i.e., if they are crucial to understanding important information and/or needed to help make certain types of decisions.
- Help your CEO evaluate any other team members based on their personal agendas and relationships, and ability to keep confidences.
- Everyone will have a different point of view that will enrich the process and final product. Call it a “Socratic” approach.
- Set a regular call schedule for the team on secure numbers, assign responsibilities and determine how best to communicate within the team.
- Determine which team members will communicate with and/or influence specific target audiences/opinion leaders

- Select a spokesperson for any media efforts. Typically the CEO or board chair is the spokesperson, but if it is not wise from a legal standpoint, your lawyer may make an excellent spokesperson.
- Use email with great caution. Some team members may use personal email addresses vs. work addresses to ensure greater security.

2. Work with, not against, lawyers involved in your case. The public relations function has a rich adversarial history with the legal profession. We are used to hearing “no comment.” Some lawyers are still opposed to including communicators in any type of litigation planning. These lawyers typically do not understand messaging or the power of influence, and do not incorporate target audiences into their thinking.

You will have to stand firm in your beliefs and calmly fight for what you know is the right thing to do. Your relationship with your CEO will carry a lot of weight. The good news is that many more lawyers welcome the type of strategy, thinking and tools a public relations professional brings to a situation. They are also very open to explaining technical terms and their approach to a case. You must listen closely to their counsel in order to develop the most effective communications strategies.

- **Keep It Confidential:** In a pending lawsuit, you should be trusted to review all legal documents. You will be involved in the planning dialog at a minute level. You will be expected to treat everything related to the case in a confidential manner. You may or may not be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement. At some points, you may be asked to leave a conversation between lawyer and client, and rightfully so, because they will discuss “privileged information.” You definitely do not want to be part of that conversation, especially if you think you may be called as a witness in the legal proceedings.

3. Plan the most effective strategic communications approach. Once you’ve drafted the initial team conversation, get the facts quickly. Review all documents, as available, and research the situation for accuracy, facts and a 360 degree understanding. Once you’ve established a thorough understanding:

- Craft smart positioning and messages as the communications foundation for the entire case.
- Your core position and two to three key messages must cut through the clutter. Assess how your key internal and external audiences will respond.
- Look for the holes or strategic areas that will give your organization the edge in the case. You must understand how the opposing side will attack your organization’s position and what you can say to present your side in the best light. Your position and key messages must be air tight based on the facts you have at the time.
- This positioning will be informed by legal strategy and your knowledge of media, if the latter is involved.

4. Decide early which channels of communication you are going to use to achieve your goals and when. Decide if and how you want to involve media to your advantage. This is a game of chess in that you cannot control the media, but by being prepared and having a plan, you can help them tell your side of the story. Existing relationships with media can be critical to success. Depending on the relationship, an off the record conversation may be valuable, but handle with care as always. Here are some tips for dealing with media effectively:

- Assess relevant media for level of interest and/or coverage to decide which reporters to involve.

- Frequently, a press conference with press release distribution serves well to give all media the same information at the same time.

► **Backup Plan:** In some cases, media are not core influencers and/or may not have clout in your market. To hedge against leaks to the media, create a media response strategy—just in case. Use your positioning and messages to manage unwanted inquiries.

- Craft a plan that includes all target audiences, and is timed to legal and/or anticipated legal proceedings.
- The plan should be bulleted and easy to read and use. Make changes as needed, especially related to changes in the timeline.
- You may also see ways in which potential litigation can be avoided and these actions should be included in the plan.

5. Develop on-target documents and materials to support your organization's case. Have legal counsel and the core team review and approval all written materials, internal and external.

Typically, you will develop the following materials:

- **Core position and messages** – This is one of the most important contributions you can make.
- **A communications plan** - This includes goals, strategies, considerations, target audiences, recommended positioning and one to three key messages, messages by target audience, and a recommended timetable for action by the team

- Include a “**what if**” section that outlines responses based on possible scenarios.

• **Talking points**

- **Core press releases** for media (if appropriate)
- **Pre-file (lawsuit) statements** to prepare, position and protect the spokesperson(s) and key players in your organization
- **Q&A** – Think of every possible question that a reporter or anyone else can ask and respond using your position and messaging.
- **Testimonial letters** as appropriate
- **Board of directors brief:** Basic positioning, key messages and a few ‘hot’ questions with responses, to keep them on the same page.

6. Prepare, and then prepare to wait. Prepare your spokespeople in advance of potential and pending litigation. They need to be comfortable with the messaging, etc., so formal or informal media training is essential.

Once your core positioning and messages are set, your plan is outlined and your materials are created, you are ready to act whenever the shoe drops. Your hope overall is that it does not drop and you will avoid the immense loss of productivity entailed in any legal case.

However, no matter how much time you spend anticipating litigation, it is a fraction of the time you and your team will spend managing legal action with no prior planning. Be smart and get ahead of the storm. **PRN**

Sherry Treco-Jones is founder and CEO of Treco-Jones PR.

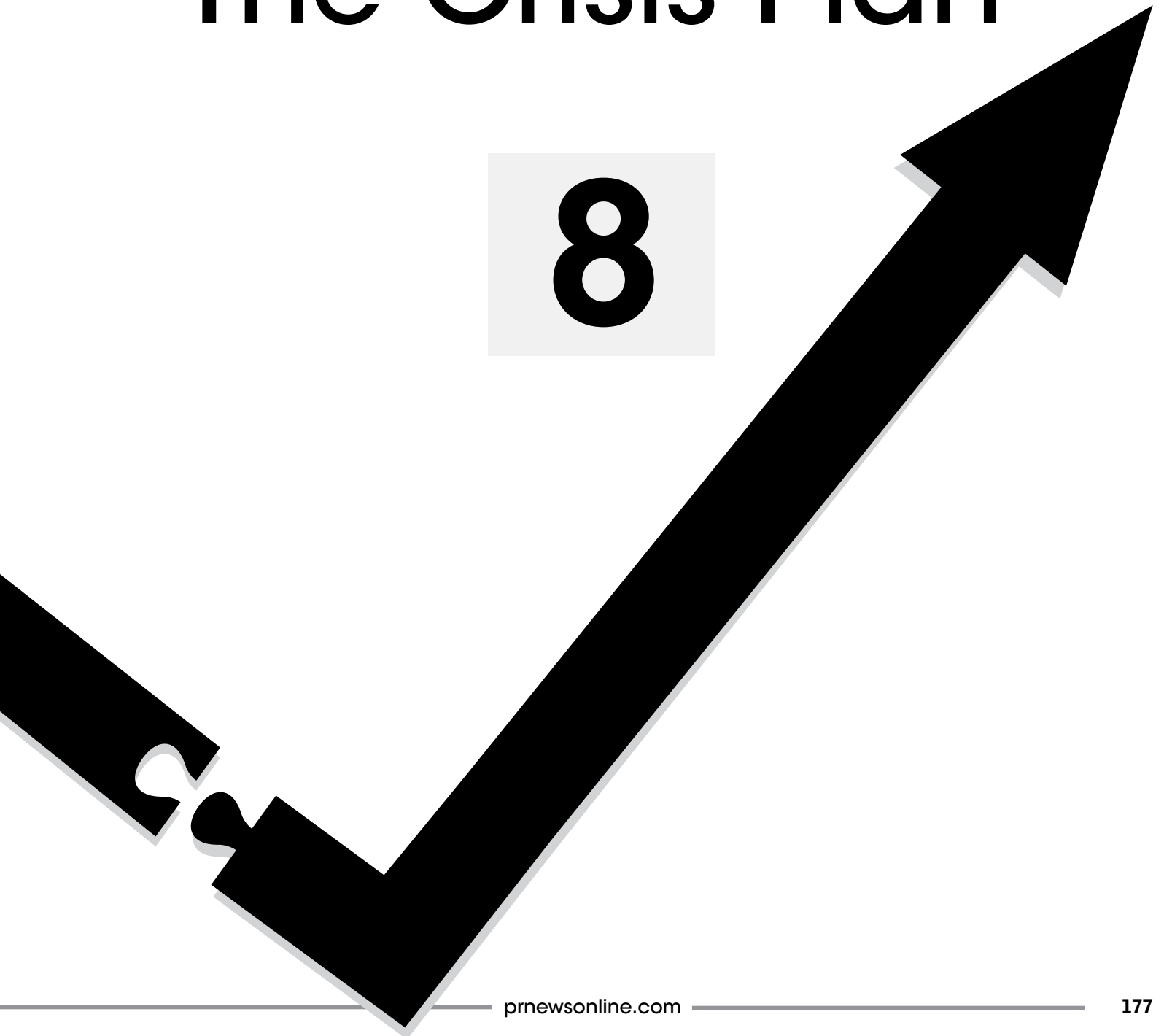


“How a company responds in the first hour—or hours—of an event will determine how the organization will survive and thrive post-crisis.”

—*Scott Farrell, President, Global Corporate Communications, GolinHarris*

The Crisis Plan

8



Navigate Crises With Opinion Research

By Bill Dalbec

Think about the American Red Cross, BP and Toyota. Chances are there is a clear image in your mind of what they stand for and how they operate. But, think about the Liberty Fund, Deepwater Horizon and “sticking gas pedals,” and chances are your image of each of these enterprises shifts somewhat.

During and in the aftermath of a crisis, one’s reputation can change. With 24-hour per day cable news outlets looking to fill time, the Internet streaming images and information as it happens, and bloggers endlessly opining, it is even more important to vigilantly guard one’s reputation. Those that are able to successfully navigate a crisis will likely emerge stronger, while those that don’t may be weakened for years.

Charting a course for any trip requires both planning and execution. A poorly planned trip can lead you off course; you might waste time and resources meandering, get lost, or find yourself plunged into danger.

As you set out on your trip, you have many factors to consider such as traveling companions, mode of transportation, potential routes, meal options and accommodations.

A well-executed plan will keep you on track and minimize the possibility of unforeseen dangers along the way. Think of a crisis as a trip—with proper information, planning and execution, the damage to one’s reputation is minimized.

Reputation: Meeting Stakeholder Expectations

Reputation is the extent to which the enterprise is meeting the expectations of its stakeholders. It should be noted that reputation is different from an enterprise’s brand. A brand is the relationship

consumers have with products and services; one’s reputation is how well perceptions of an enterprise align with expectations unique to its products or services, operations and business environment. Reputation is driven by a unique set of issues that drive perception.



Crisis communications should be grounded in qualitative research to provide context and assess awareness of the facts of the crisis.

Reputation is the currency of enterprises; it gives them a license to operate. Just like any currency, it can be banked, accumulate interest and be withdrawn when needed. And, an enterprise will need that reserve when it encounters a crisis. It will need to spend some of its reputation capital because it is trying to get stakeholders to give it the benefit of the doubt.

But will it have to empty the account? Opinion research is one tool an enterprise has to understand to measure the impact of a crisis on its reputation and indicate the response necessary.

In a crisis, opinion research can play an integral part in planning so that a crisis plan and its execution have the best chance to protect an enterprise’s reputation. Opinion research’s primary purpose is to assess the real and potential damage to one’s reputation. As such, it is important to ensure that what an enterprise says has the desired impact of both winning the argument and also protecting its reputation.

Research prior to or early on in a crisis sets a baseline for the enterprise’s image, awareness of the crisis issues, recall of the issues and impact of the issues; research during and after the crisis measures the impact on the enterprise’s

reputation and associated business outcomes. Here are some examples of the information opinion research can provide:

- Understanding current perceptions and attitudes toward the enterprise;
- Determining awareness of the issues involved;
- Uncovering the language used by stakeholders to help guide development of public messages;
- Evaluating an enterprise's story line and isolating the most powerful messages in protecting its reputation;
- Identifying emerging issues as the crisis unfolds and how the messaging may need to be refined;
- Connecting the enterprise's reputation with specific business outcomes such as giving the enterprise the benefit of the doubt in litigation or a crisis situation; and,
- Monitoring any escalation in negative attitudes toward the enterprise, its executives and products or services, and developing appropriate responses to mitigate these negatives.

Because reputation is about stakeholder perceptions, it is important to identify the key contextual stakeholders relevant to the situation it is facing. Key stakeholders will vary depending on the enterprise and the crisis it is facing. For a nonprofit, it may be donors, while a company in a regulated industry may be interested in government perceptions, and a consumer goods company would probably be most interested in purchasers (and potential purchasers) of its products. In a litigation situation, potential jurors could become key stakeholders. Clearly identifying the stakeholders makes the opinion research relevant and helps to guide how it is conducted.

Qualitative Research: Pointing You in the Right Direction

Crisis communications should be grounded in qualitative research to provide context and assess awareness of the facts of the crisis, evaluate the messaging that present the facts, delve into deeply held beliefs, and uncover the language stakeholders use so that it can be adopted in the communication.

Qualitative research answers the why and the how; why do people feel a certain way and how can an enterprise successfully communicate the facts. It uncovers the emotional and rational connections stakeholders make with the enterprise and identifies potential leverage points.

The most common qualitative research technique used in a crisis is the focus group. Focus groups are preferred because they are fairly quick to assemble and the group dynamic provides interesting insight into how the message is received and distributed among stakeholders. To assess reaction to a crisis, one would gather a group of similar stakeholders (donors to a charity, for example) to gain insights that will help determine the enterprise's course of action.

APCO Insight generally likes to include about eight people in a session and conduct at least four sessions; this design enables us to give people in the groups time to speak their minds, and provides us with enough reads of group dynamics to determine whether what we hear in a particular session is consistent with a trend or is an isolated feeling based on geography or group dynamics. Each situation is different and depends on the stakeholders under study, but this is a solid design for crisis communicators to follow.

Sometimes, focus groups are enough to answer the enterprises' questions and prepare them to navigate their crisis. Preparatory work for one recent client showed very low awareness of the potential crisis situation and little risk to

reputation once the information became public; upon evaluating the information we were able to counsel the client on how to respond and when to elevate the response, if necessary.

In another instance, focus group research found that while “environmental activists” were viewed negatively in the context of the client’s situation, using the term “environmental special interest groups” was even more powerful, as the term both raised suspicions about their motives toward our client and repositioned our client as the victim of unwarranted harassment.

Comparing pre-message reputation metrics with post-message measures enables the research firm to determine how many stakeholders change their opinion.

In working for the American Red Cross following public outcry about how the organization planned to spend money from the Liberty Fund that was established after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, we found that donors (including long-term ones) had very little knowledge about how Red Cross disaster responses were funded and that providing them with this information helped to lessen their concern about the Red Cross’ plans.

In each of these cases, focus groups alone were enough to provide the information needed to respond to the crisis. But other times the path forward is not quite so clear.

Quantitative Research: Confirming the Route

Taking the next step and conducting quantitative survey research provides an enterprise with an opportunity to evaluate fully which potential messages uncovered in the focus groups are the most powerful in presenting its story and to determine the impact of the crisis

on its reputation. Quantitative research answers the who, what and where; who feels a certain way, what do they know or feel; and where you can find allies, opponents and persuadable stakeholders. A survey can show the strength of emotional and rational appeals, confirming the most efficient and effective course of action.

A crisis management baseline survey can combine the establishment of pre- or early crisis measures of awareness and situation knowledge with a message study that isolates the most powerful communications points. The survey is again conducted among a sampling of relevant stakeholders.

A key component of the survey is an initial message assessment designed to determine the impact of the enterprise’s messages and to isolate the most powerful and persuasive ones. Conceptually, this study simulates the give-and-take inherent in crisis communications, bringing survey respondents from little awareness to full awareness while measuring the impact of information as it is introduced.

To isolate the most powerful and persuasive messages, APCO Insight uses advanced analytics such as regression or correlation. Comparing pre-message reputation metrics with post-message measures enables the research firm to determine how many stakeholders change their opinion.

Using regression analysis the researcher is able to determine the messages that are responsible for changing their opinion. Cross-tabulations enable the researcher to profile supporters, opponents and those who can be persuaded by the messaging.

Conducting tracking research further enables the enterprise to monitor any changes in opinion or story lines as the crisis situation evolves and the media engage, so that it can modify tactics and response as necessary. In a tracking survey, the questionnaire can change to reflect the

increased importance of monitoring awareness and knowledge of the issue while retaining the most powerful messages to ensure they are still persuasive.

The primary purpose of this tracking survey work is to enable the enterprise to respond strategically and tactically to changes in opinion elites' attitudes toward it, arming its communicators with the information necessary to defend its reputation.

Opinion research is just one more tool in the crisis communicator's toolkit. If employed early, it can assist you in preparing for and navigating your crisis situation, making the trip smoother and enabling you to reach your destination with your reputation intact. **PRN**

Bill Dalbec is a senior vice president at APCO Insight, a global opinion research firm headquartered in Washington, D.C. He leads its issue management practice.

All the World's a Stage: Take Your Crisis Plan Off the Written Page and Act It Out

By David Walter

"The reputation which the world bestows is like the wind that shifts, now here now there," wrote the poet Dante. Reputation is the most precious asset which any organization possesses. It can take years to establish but can be destroyed in seconds. Rebuilding is enormously fraught and sometimes impossible.

Corporate history records many gusts of wind that have swept businesses away. The most famous example is Gerald Ratner, who destroyed his jewelry business with a joke which went, "People say, 'How can you sell this for such a low price?' I say 'Because it's total crap.'"

So the first rule of crisis communications is to avoid getting yourself in an unnecessary crisis with an unguarded remark where there may be journalists around. Journalists are never off duty. In 2005, an unmarried parliamentary candidate was at a party with friends during his campaign. One of them asked him if he planned to find a bride in his constituency. "Good grief, no," he said. "All the women there are incredibly ugly." The story found its way to the front page of his local paper the next week via a journalist who happened to overhear him, causing considerable damage to his prospects of both election and marriage.

Similarly, if there is a microphone or a camera anywhere in the vicinity, whether it appears to be switched on or off, it is safe to assume that it might be picking up what you say. Gordon Brown's campaign in the 2010 British General Election received its most fatal blow when he forgot a neck mic was still live and described a supporter whom he had just met as a "bigoted woman."

However, even the most cautious of organizations can hit a crisis and run the risk of adverse publicity. A wise maxim is to hope for the best but to prepare for the worst.

Good organizations will not only have a well-thought-out crisis plan but will also regularly rehearse it, using a plausible scenario which is sprung on the participants on the day of the exercise.



A good crisis plan will set out clearly defined roles for the key players. It is worth training several senior people to act as spokespersons.

On paper, it may look as if every eventuality is covered, but often a realistic rehearsal will expose gaps and flaws. A paper document will not always convey the sense of urgency which is required in a crisis, when several tasks have to be performed at the same time. The CEO could have the chairman of the parent company, the international media, a government leader, the local trade union leader and a couple of regulators all clamoring for his or her attention simultaneously.

A good crisis plan will set out clearly defined roles for the key players. It is worth training several senior people to act as spokespersons. A crisis can easily break when the number one is sick, the number two is on a plane half way across the Atlantic and the number three has just resigned leaving a vacancy.

The media does not necessarily require the top person in the organization to front for it, provided the spokesperson conveys genuine authority. It is better to pick the most media-friendly executive than the most senior one. A senior American

The Six R's – A Mantra for Crisis Communications

- Rehearse
- Assign clear-cut **R**oles to your crisis team
- **R**eact quickly
- Express **R**egret
- Offer **R**eassurance
- Produce a **R**emedy

working for BP would have been a much better choice than the British CEO Tony Hayward during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill crisis. It is also worth considering in any case whether the CEO might be too busy managing the crisis to deal with a spate of media demands. It is vital, however, that whoever is the spokesperson is kept in the loop at all times.

An equally vital role is that of media coordinator. This might well be your head of communications. The role here is to prepare press statements, organize your responses to the media, brief the spokespeople and advise on overall media strategy. It is very important that internal and external communications are properly coordinated so that staff are not hearing about developments from the media before they are told by the management.

Depending on the level of media interest, you may need separate groups of people on the one hand to man the phones and take bids from journalists, and on the other to phone back responses and organize interviews. If TV crews are to be allowed on the premises, they will need minders. You will also need staff to monitor the media and the Internet, to make sure that you can respond rapidly to any exaggeration, misinformation or adverse spin being peddled by your critics.

It is almost always best to react publicly to a crisis as soon as possible. This will make your lawyers nervous. Do not let them put you off. There is nearly always something that you can say, even if it is only that you are concerned to hear the reports about what may have happened, that you are doing your best to find out the truth and that you will come back to the journalists as soon as you have more to say.

If you try to duck the media, you will immediately arouse suspicions that you have something to hide. One of the many mistakes which BP made during the Gulf of Mexico crisis was to keep their heads down for far too long. Toyota did the same thing when stories started appearing about the faults which eventually led to the recall of thousands of cars.

As soon as possible, it is important to express regret for what has happened. This is completely different from admitting any liability or responsibility. If you are a construction company and a contractor has injured himself falling off a roof, it may well be because of his own negligence rather than due to any fault of yours. If you express concern for his health nonetheless, that will simply make you seem more human and caring. It will not imply that your company was responsible for the accident.



As soon as possible, it is important to express regret for what has happened.

Next, you should try to offer some reassurance. Often this is a question of putting the crisis in context. Appropriate lines could be: "We have been in business for thirty years and this is the first time an accident like this has happened," or "We have the highest safety standards in the industry and we are doing our utmost to find out why this happened and to change our procedures accordingly."

You need to think carefully, however, about whether your reassurance is plausible. When Tony Hayward suggested that the sea was very big compared to the amount of oil spilling out, that was rightly seen as one of his many own goals. It is a big mistake to try to play down a crisis when you are uncertain of its outcome. It is far better to come clean about the extent of the problem and to under-promise and over-perform.

The final imperative is to provide a remedy. It may not be possible to offer this immediately, but as soon as you are sure that you have solved the problem you need to communicate the fact as effectively as possible: "We have now

cleaned up the damage and taken steps to stop anything like this happening again." Be careful again, however, about overpromising. It is always dangerous to say that you can guarantee that a problem will never reoccur. In life, we cannot guarantee anything. You can, however, reasonably say that you have taken every possible precaution to prevent it reoccurring. **PRN**

A longtime senior broadcast journalist, David Walter has been a media, crisis and presentation trainer since 1999. He was political correspondent for the BBC, ITN and Channel Four News, BBC Paris correspondent and a newscaster and program presenter.

Tackling a Crisis via a 12-Step Recovery Plan

By Laurence P. Gottlieb

Bill Wilson, cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous, said, “Through failure, we learn a lesson in humility which is probably needed, painful though it is.” Man-made crises occur to corporations because of some employees’ addictions to habitually poor business practices and an inability to face inalienable truths about themselves and their organization.

Therefore, handling a crisis requires implementing a classic 12-step recovery model, as if you were treating alcoholism or another form of addiction. From taking the precarious and often difficult first steps toward Honesty, to embracing complete change by providing Service to Others, it only takes 12 steps to lead a business through their darkest days. Think of each step as equal parts overcoming a challenge and seizing upon an opportunity by establishing platforms upon which you will build a stronger organization for the future.

Ultimately, the purpose of this 12-step model is to provide you with overarching goals at each stage of a crisis, rather than focusing in on the mechanics—e.g. press releases, social media outreach, etc. Too often, public relations professionals get caught up in the moment—selecting tools for outreach rather than questioning what lead to the crisis and what will lead them out.

Remember, given the particular crisis at hand, you may have months, days or hours to climb your 12 steps; however, every step must be taken—whether running or slowly building toward a successful completion of your journey.

1. Honesty – Adhere to the facts, conduct yourself in a straightforward manner, but, ultimately, the most difficult task is getting those individuals either responsible for initiating the crisis, or those

senior managers accountable for others’ actions, to admit there is a problem. In a fast-moving crisis, given the incredible swift speed of social media’s court of public opinion, there is little time for deliberation and discussion. Like an internal affairs detective, make sure you have your CEO’s full authority for conducting a fast initial investigation.



Establish a “Crisis Morale Officer”—a well-respected senior executive responsible for pumping positive messages and crisis updates to internal audiences.

This is the most critical time period for assessing the full scope of the damage incurred and what’s coming down the road. This is also the time when process—not people—is on trial, so concentrate on gathering facts, crafting potential solutions and keeping the organization moving rapidly toward a resolution.

2. Hope – As the crisis envelops your organization, despair and hopelessness quickly turn into bitterness and blame. Therefore, even when the light at the end of the tunnel seems miles away, your leadership must offer a clear and concise vision for seeing this crisis through to the end. Establish a “Crisis Morale Officer”—a well-respected senior executive responsible for pumping positive messages and crisis updates to internal audiences. You are not looking for sugar-coating, but rather someone who is adept at communications and will keep your employees’ focus on the job at hand.

3. Faith – Putting religious doctrines aside, faith in a crisis is about maintaining strong convictions, establishing a set of beliefs and most importantly,

trust. Your key crisis audiences—e.g. employees, media, government officials, etc. —must believe the company is honestly and transparently moving toward a crisis resolution, guided by a powerful moral compass. Public confidence and trust in an organization's capabilities to handle extraordinary challenges only comes when the company is conducting itself based upon a set of core beliefs shared with the community at large rather than a selfish means to self-interested end.

4. Courage – Are you willing to place a giant mirror in front of your organization and reflect back an honest and blunt assessment of those attitudes and arcane business practices which lead to this crisis? You may not like what you see, but it takes true audacity and nerve for self-reflection. Stripping away the callous layers of poor decisions made over years—if not decades—requires leadership that is unafraid to push aside the dark clouds of legal action in order for the sunlight of self-discovery to penetrate deep into the bones of your company. If this requires outside assistance—hiring a team of independent experts who will be the mirrors for the company—so be it. Customers reward courage; only fools reward complacency.

5. Integrity – We have now met the enemy, and it is us. Employing a questioning attitude about their own role in the drama unfolding around their company will require employees—backed by a dedicated leadership—to equally accept responsibility for past actions, instituting immediate changes and being aware of future opportunities. Just as the honesty and veracity of multiple people built your organization, the dishonesty of one employee can destroy it. Those who are unwilling to admit failures and change for the sake of the organization should no longer be part of the solution. Let Human Resources take responsibility for shepherding this process, because you must keep climbing.

6. Willingness – Changing old behaviors and destroying an organization's core beliefs during a time of crisis—on the surface—sounds ridiculous,

and yet, it is only through your employees' collective enthusiasm for seizing upon this moment as an opportunity for moving the company into a new, more positive direction will you avoid similar situations down the road. Support your "Army of the Willing" with a clear set of new goals and directions—matched with the appropriate financial resources—for laying the groundwork toward a stronger, sustainable future for their firm.

7. Humility – Organizations love internal public floggings of the guilty and revel in the relief which only comes from punishing those responsible, but this grueling, cathartic process leads to little that is positive. In fact, this is when we must wipe away the arrogance and humbly engage the public's assistance in providing pathways to greater stability and growth. This is when you present the public with a communications portal into—and out of—your company, offering a clear picture of the crisis-at-hand and welcoming opinions and suggestions for positive change and implementation. This portal should include Web-based communications, face-to-face meetings, advertising, etc.

8. Discipline and Action – In every crisis, there are victims—those who have suffered at the hands of an organization, because of the company's utter lack of dedication to implementing (and continuously monitoring) best practices; inaction which ultimately lead to others being harmed. These victims (whether a few or a stadium's worth) deserve recognition and a plan for distinct actions that will rectify and remedy the situation; whereby, you infuse public input garnered through the implementation of step 7.

9. Forgiveness – As part of initiating those actions which will directly address compensating—either through activity or financially (or both)—your victims, comes the opportunity for seeking a pardon for what has transpired. Only if you have appropriately taken steps 1 through 8 is the opportunity for seeking forgiveness warranted.

Depending upon the nature of the crisis, this may happen privately or publicly, but either way, the process of receiving absolution is not a given, but rather a gift to your company you should cherish and use as a reminder of what brought you to this point.

10. Acceptance – No organization is perfect and there are always detours on the road toward success. A good company provides an active learning environment, challenging employees to do better for themselves, their fellow workers and their community. This crisis revealed your dark underbelly, but publicly baring your company's faults and setting a precedent for being unafraid to be proactive in dealing head-on with critical issues means you are recognizing this will be a normal business practice moving forward. Therefore, in this step, you—and every employee—must accept being comfortable with being uncomfortable.

11. Knowledge and Awareness – This crisis has been a journey of self-awareness, and throughout the process, your organization gained the knowledge from analyzing past mistakes. Let your employees take comfort in knowing the crisis was a course-correction, and each and every person on your team helped establish a new set of rules and goals for ensuring every day from this point

forward is better than the days left behind. Taking responsibility for one's own fate, and empowering your own future, means the organization is on the right track.

12. Service to Others – You entered the crisis dirty and emerged on the other side clean. Now is the moment when you share with others your experiences, because, through this process of educating the uninformed, you help establish a broader sphere of knowledge; thereby, directly assisting in the potential elimination and eradication of similar issues and their negative impacts on the world around us.

AA's Bill W. clearly understood the value of a crisis by once noting, "Years ago, I used to commiserate with all people who suffered. Now I commiserate only with those who suffer in ignorance, who don't understand the purpose and ultimate utility of pain."

A crisis is the result of an addiction, and a proper course of action will reveal itself only to those who realize it will take one step at a time—12 in all—to steer an organization through to the other side.

PRN

Laurence P. Gottlieb is the director of economic development for Westchester County, N.Y. Previously, he was a managing director and market leader for Burson-Marsteller.

Emergency Rx: 10 Steps to Building Your Healthcare Crisis Communications Plan

By Tori Vogt

H1N1. Sept. 11. Katrina. Haiti. Massive oil spills. Miles away from the scene, disaster strikes a terrorizing chord of fear in everyone. Whether your organization is the center of the crisis or is just remotely involved with the situation, people are looking to you and your organization for answers. That's why a crisis communications plan is a must-have in every healthcare communicator's toolkit.

No matter if you work for a small, rural hospital or a large, urban medical center with multiple inpatient and outpatient facilities, creating a crisis communications plan from scratch or even updating your existing document can be a daunting task. You may wonder, "Where do I begin?"

We'll explore 10 essential elements to a healthcare crisis communications plan, and how to create a plan to prepare you for any crisis. By the time you finish working through each of these key areas, you'll have building blocks to create a crisis communication plan for your organization. It may also bring you a sigh of relief to remind yourself of this: As a marketing plan is one component of a company's business plan, a crisis communications plan is also an integral brick in your company's disaster plan structure. What's more, unless you're solely in charge of business continuity for your organization, you won't work in a silo but rather in partnership with your operations and administrative teams to produce a crisis communication plan.

Here are 10 tasks that will help prepare you for any crisis:

1. Compile and refresh your contacts list.

Assemble your lists of key contacts in the media, government officials, school district personnel,

medical association leaders and any other people who'll need to be in the loop should a disaster arise.

If you're not already doing so, make it a point to network with each of these people, whether that's an email or phone call once or twice a year to say hello and see what's new.



The standard delay in getting press releases and other content approved just won't do in an emergency.

2. Identify your spokesperson.

The rule of thumb in crisis communication is to have the top leader in an organization—like the president or CEO—be the voice of the company. But with medical and health matters, people want to hear from a physician. The 2010 Edelman Trust Barometer reveals that although the general public trusts a company CEO (43%) more than a government official (35%) or "regular" employee (32%), academics and experts rank highest (64%) of all. Prepare your chief medical officer/ chief of medical staff to be the spokesperson for your organization in the event of a crisis or disaster. In addition to having a grasp of the issues, he or she should communicate well and receive media training well in advance of a crisis.

3. Conduct disaster drills.

Like fire drills, disaster drills are standard procedure for obvious reasons. Your organization's compliance or governance department will likely be in charge of holding emergency management drills, and this is where you and your corporate communications team will get

Recommended Reading:

► Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Emergency Preparedness & Response Site

www.bt.cdc.gov

► The Hertford County Public Health Authority
(Download the crisis communications plan)

www.hertfordpublichealth.com

► National Hospice and Palliative Care
Organization

(Download the crisis guide)

www.nhpco.org

to test your crisis communication plan. It's also wise to hold your own disaster drill, just for your communications crew to test the plan and make necessary adjustments.

4. Prepare your people.

In a disaster, it's often the small things that make a huge difference. Make sure your communications team is ready to deploy at a moment's notice. Task each person with devising his or her own child/pet/elder-care plans and alternate routes to work as well as stocking an emergency overnight bag containing toiletries, a two-day supply of prescription and over-the-counter medications, a spare cell phone charger, and an extra set of clothing.

5. Formulate the messaging process.

Since each crisis calls for its own unique set of issues that must be addressed, you'll craft your three to five key messages once the emergency has materialized. Having the process down pat will make producing effective, relevant messaging and related strategy and tactics less stressful. In your crisis communication plan, document your messaging process. Remain focused on delivering consistent, honest, to-the-point, reassuring information with a focus on patient and employee safety. Be sure your messaging

addresses the potential needs of the immediate community, and those of the region and nation, where applicable. Dispel fear and worry by ensuring consistency; your messaging should support the goals of your partner organizations.

6. Create a rapid approval process.

The standard delay in getting press releases and other content approved just won't do in an emergency. Work with your legal team, executive leadership and possibly your board of directors to create a rapid approval process. The World Health Organization Outbreak Planning Communication Guide (2008) advises readers to dedicate a person serving in a senior leadership role to manage approvals. As with formulating your messaging process, document your rapid approval process in your crisis communication plan.

7. Make a first-response game plan.

Delaying communication with the public can damage your company's reputation, for starters. In 2004 when Merck voluntarily discontinued Vioxx, an extremely popular drug used for treating pain, stiffness and swelling caused by arthritis, the communications team enjoyed the luxury of 60 round-the-clock hours to prepare its game plan for its announcement. On the day Merck pulled Vioxx, it disseminated the press release at 8:00 a.m. and simultaneously sent an email blast to every employee, then held a press conference at 9:00 a.m., followed by a 10:00 a.m. investor relations call.

Chances are you probably won't have more than a few minutes to prep a crisis management response, but you can certainly draft scenarios and corresponding timelines and place them in your crisis communication plan. For example, you'll need to talk with the news media within an hour of a crisis, and that could entail you calling reporters before they call you. Your communications team lead will then need to step away from the phones to brief with the incident commander and emergency management

team and conduct a SWOT (situation) analysis, then meet with the communications team to draft messaging strategy and tactics. Within three hours of the initial disaster, you should hold another press conference to update the media and the public on the situation and your action plan.

8. Review and update your crisis communications plan frequently.

What good is a tool if you don't know how to use it? The same goes for your crisis communication plan. Typically, updating an emergency communication plan at least once a year will suffice, but browsing through it individually every month and quarterly as a team should be minimum standards. Revise the plan accordingly to changes in and outside your organization.

9. Back up and host information off-site.

Take a cue from IT standards and backup information off-site. Have each person on your communications team place a hardcopy binder or flash drive containing your organization's crisis management plan at their home, in addition to copies at the office. Deploy a 24-hour information Web portal and/or telephone hotline for both your internal and external audiences. Have a standing toll-free or long-distance check-in phone line for employees in case phone lines in your area are down.

Invest in off-site hosting of a dedicated Internet portal with both public-facing presence for the general public and the news media and password-protected options for keeping in touch with your employees in case of a crisis. Social networking make great tools, too. Facebook and

Twitter can assist in gathering information from your stakeholders as well as helping you talk with them.

10. Engage a behavioral health professional.

During a crisis, there are a number of psychological factors to consider. Engage a behavioral health professional to assist with every step of the crisis communication plan. He or she will anticipate how people will react in emergency, particularly one involving a healthcare or medical organization.

You want to build trust in your organization, so your communication strategy and tactics must resonate with your audience(s), and your spokesperson must exude competency and compassion. A psychologist or counselor can be very instrumental in making sure your plan will provide your audience with the necessary information, and that it's conveyed effectively.

Now that you've reviewed core ingredients in a healthcare crisis communication plan, you're 10 steps closer to being ready for a natural disaster, pandemic flu or other potential crises. You've overcome the most difficult part—getting started. Go ahead and consolidate your notes; you'll then have a preliminary draft of your crisis communication plan to expand upon. Acclaimed former FEMA director James Lee Witt said, "In a crisis, you do what you have to do, but it's better to do what you planned to do." **PRN**

Tori Vogt is the media relations representative for DeKalb Medical, a nonprofit, 450-bed hospital system in Atlanta. Previously, she worked with a major health insurer, focusing on crisis communications and reputation management.

It's Crisis Time: Managing the First Four Hours

By Rose McKinney

When people ask about a typical day in public relations, most practitioners say there's no such thing. As the eyes and ears for the organizations we serve, we're always moving from one thing to another—lighting fires where we need to and putting out others that pose a threat. Sometimes our work is proactive, other times reactive. Sometimes strategic and other times tactical. Most of the time, however, it is within the realm of normal communications generally directed to well defined target audiences with a set of key messages.

Now, crisis in and of itself is an ambiguous idea. History reminds us of the Tylenol crisis and the Exxon Valdez. More recently, BP was the top-of-mind crisis. Not all of us will work through a crisis the magnitude of these. Nonetheless, our organizations do need to be prepared for a more common definition of crisis: A major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services or good name. Quite simply, a crisis is anything that interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization.

It could be a negative report about to surface in the media, a threat to unionize or move to strike, or a fire. It could also be a reputation lashing from an unexpected source that spirals off the immediacy of social media and good old word of mouth. It may or may not be based on truth.

Even if you have a well-engineered crisis communications plan ready to go, the pulse rate increases when the call, text or email comes through signaling a change in business as usual. Regardless of type of crisis or the degree of preparation, the first four hours are the most critical, and communications is pivotal

for recovery as well as being a springboard for positive reputation.

When there's a crisis, it's a team effort from the get-go.



Regardless of type of crisis or the degree of preparation, the first four hours are the most critical, and communications is pivotal for recovery as well as being a springboard for positive reputation.

► **Action first; words second.** Tend to the situation at the same time that you're formulating next steps. The operational team needs to do what it's trained to do (cease operations, treat injuries, etc.). Meanwhile, the leaders and communicators need to address what happened, express concerns and regrets, let people know what's being done about it and when to expect a return to normal. A meeting of the minds will support smart, helpful action and communication

► **Protocol counts.** If there's not a communications protocol in place, you need to quickly establish one—and stick with it—so that the crisis response team can be effective. Determine who needs to be involved, determine the facts of the situation including the timing, determine who will speak, determine the order of communications (any victims, employees, board, customers, media) and the channels available to reach fundamental audiences. Agree to the protocol and then share it with everyone so there is no confusion about who's doing what and who's talking to whom. This is especially helpful for front-line employees who may not know how to handle a phone inquiry, reporter in the lobby or even an email that they get from a friend.

Your Emergency Toolkit

The following items are key to immediate crisis response:

- Laptop and power cord, access to a printer and paper
- Mobile phone with list of contacts (numbers and emails for 24-hour access)
- Document templates (media protocol, Q&A)
- Media lists and wire distribution log in data

Calling the team:

- Include the following roles in the initial briefing and planning: CEO, CFO, COO, marketing/sales, PR, HR, IT, legal counsel and any involved plant/product managers.
- Provide electronic and hard copy documents with contact information.
- Be clear about spokesperson responsibilities, roles and expectations.
- Bring along an extra PR person to take notes, manage tasks and make copy changes on the fly.

► **The team matters.** You need the CEO, the COO, the CFO, the CCO, IT, HR, legal and a host of others. You're not trying to gather a large number of people, yet each operational leader brings an important perspective to a crisis and it's indispensable to have early input and involvement to arrange expedient action. For example, IT will need to prepare for Web site and telephone needs—this is not the time to crash the server or call center. HR needs to connect with any victims and their families. Legal needs to review actions and messages, not to squelch communications,

but to protect the organization and ensure it acts within the law.

Likely, the CEO will be the spokesperson, but may also require technical expertise and input from subject-matter experts. The VP of sales and marketing needs to know what to tell customers about product/service availability. And the functional role holding everything together is yours—communications, which needs to facilitate the flow, craft content and have mediums ready to go. You're probably going to need to provide on-the-spot message training, too. Consider the main touch points and include these leaders on the response team.

► **Monitoring needs to begin ASAP.** From the first inkling and continuing forward, your organization needs to comb conversations to determine what's being said, by whom, and how it's being interpreted and responded to by others. In addition to Google and clipping services, there are social media monitoring tools such as Radian6. If it's error-laden, you must jump in and correct it. If it's malicious, you need to take it offline. If it's positive, you need to thank and acknowledge it. In any case, if there are comments about the situation you need to turn it into a conversation, and keep others apprised so it doesn't blindsides a spokesperson. Customer-service call reports and email tracking also yields important feedback.

► **Authentic, transparent messaging works.** This is not the time for gloss. This is the time for honesty and sincerity. You may not know all the answers, and that's OK, as long as you're upfront about what you do know and what's being done. The public, especially your employees and customers, want to know how it will affect them and what you're doing. Acknowledge their concerns.

► **Good manners have never been more important.** News travels faster and farther than ever before, so keep in mind that public you never dreamed of communicating with may in fact find your situation of interest—you may gain

allies, you may also incite foes. In either case, you may be establishing a relationship in the heat of a crisis, rather than in a more concerted way so “please” and “thank you” really count with external audiences. Your teammates will appreciate the cordiality, too, since tension and emotion are a volatile combination and contribute to misunderstandings.

Prevention, Preparation or Total Surprise?

Sometimes there is ample preparation. For example, if you’re part of a regulated industry, you may in fact know in advance if negative findings are about to be reported. For example, in Minnesota, there is an annual adverse events report that comes out each year by the hospital association. This provides an opportunity to work with your industry group to provide context for the data and to describe what your organization is doing to comply or improve the situation.

Consider another situation: a large, specialized residential senior care center that was cited in a report about patients who had fallen. Knowing news media and family members would be concerned, the communications director worked with the facility, staff, patients and families to address the problem directly and, in speaking with the reporter, she provided research data that the facility actually contributed in establishing best practices for the industry—procedures and monitoring guidelines developed represented best practices. In the end, the media coverage—a week-long series—was fair and balanced without any mention of this particular care center. The facility maintained patient and family satisfaction, and privacy laws protected the individuals involved. This had to come together quickly since there was no control over when the story would surface.

Surprises, however, mean thinking on your feet. We all know that these things could happen, but

take comfort in believing that prevention is in place—until these things do happen.

The Boy Scout motto “be prepared” is often the premise of proactive crisis communications planning. And, as much as organizations agree with the idea, it frequently gets put on the back burner until a potential crisis becomes a real one.

Sometimes these are fire drills. A situation with Vision-Ease Lens, in November 2009, was anything but a drill. Its 80,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in Jakarta, Indonesia, which employed 500 people and produced 1.2 million pieces of product annually, burned to the ground. Fortunately, it occurred in the evening and workers were asleep at home.

However, the impact of the fire was broad and within the first few hours, the company needed to address the situation, communicate about it and set the tone for recovery. With quick, clear-headed thinking and action by a collaborative, integrated crisis-response team, the plan was underway in less than four hours. Here’s how it unfolded.

Noon on Wednesday

After a call from the general manager, the U.S. team convened to map out a plan and included its public relations agency. We were alerted just before noon on Wednesday and determined it best to be on-site at the company’s headquarters in Ramsey, Minn., about a 30-minute drive. We assembled background information and crisis planning documents. On the car ride, we talked through the order and timeline.

1 p.m.

The PR team showed up with a draft communications protocol, potential key message points, and an audience-by-audience grid of messages and tools to use. We also started online monitoring right away and via our mobile devices had real-time updates from colleagues back at the agency including an article and photo that was

running in the morning edition of the local paper in Jakarta.

2 to 4 p.m.

With laptops, flash drives and on-the-fly writing, we punched out a release, employee announcement, sales force initiative, media protocol and audience-by-audience communications grid—with real-time editing provided by the CFO, CEO, head of Sales and director of communications.

The CEO met face-to-face with employees at the Ramsey facility and then conducted a teleconference with its facility located an hour away in St. Cloud, Minn. We met with the district sales managers, who then organized a calling initiative with all primary customers, which was completed before close of business that day. Meanwhile, a cast of other directors and managers tended to operational needs. It was calm, thorough and effective even though our pulses were beating a tad fast.

After the First Four Hours

The next morning, we spoke with trade and business editors who had received the news release. Over the next days, weeks and months, especially as the impact of product availability limitations loomed, we worked together on a multi-phased, multi-stakeholder communications program to address immediate needs and to highlight the rebuilding of the manufacturing plant.

Ongoing Communication in the Months That Followed

The company's Web site features updates and is part of a social media strategy including Facebook with photos of the rebuild. Customers receive regular updates via letters and trade

show events. The resulting employee response has been focused and committed; customer needs have been on-target and supportive, media coverage has been consistent and fair, and even competitors have expressed support. Vision-Ease Lens looks forward to reopening its Jakarta facility introducing a number of technology enhancements and safety improvements in fall 2010—less than a year after the fire.

It Could Happen to You

From bankruptcy speculation to labor negotiations and moldy food packages to reports of falls in nursing homes, organizations need to be aware of the potential for crisis. In all these situations, the first four hours prove most critical to surviving and recovering from a crisis, and really underscore the importance of a coordinated response team, a protocol, an all-encompassing outreach to all audiences, and a commitment to implementing an ongoing communications program “once the fire is put out.”

Research also shows that companies with ongoing two-way communication programs often avoid crises altogether or endure crises of shorter duration and lesser magnitude. Recent indications also show that how an organization responds to crisis has a lot to do with whether and how quickly it repairs its reputation—some even come back stronger.

Heed warning signs. Be ready to act. Make the most of the first four hours. And, tell the truth—there's no such thing as a typical day when it comes to crisis communications. **PRN**

Rose McKinney, APR, is president of Risdall McKinney Public Relations in Minneapolis. She plays an ongoing, lead role in the firm's work with Vision-Ease Lens, and provides crisis communications planning and counsel to companies preparing for and responding to crisis.

The Crisis Process Template: A Roadmap for Team-Oriented Quick Response Time

By Julie Livingston

The nature of global competition has increased pressure on industry—as a result of terrorism, the media, non-governmental organizations, watchdog groups, lawmakers and the general public—to deal with crises on a regular basis. Experts agree that organizations can leverage crisis situations, including the intense media scrutiny and criticism, by assuming a leadership position, as often the results of crisis management have more to do with the response to the crisis than the nature of the crisis itself.

Since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the role of industry in times of crisis has changed, including crisis management and communication begs the question, “How effective are organizations in mitigating crisis and how does public relations contribute?” In this realm, it can be challenging to gain clarity and consensus on issues when executives with varying perspectives and political power are involved.

Interestingly, although crises are often associated with negative events, they are not intrinsically so. Crisis scholars call this the “silver lining effect,” although its positive value might not be immediately evident and may be far outweighed by intense negative consequences. Among the many positive outcomes: acts of heroism and heroes identified, accelerated change, latent problems rise to the surface, people are changed, new strategies evolve, new warning systems develop, and new competitive edges appear.

Sometimes, situations can provide opportunities to bolster an organization’s reputation and legitimacy and provide a platform for a fresh start leading toward transformative change for the

greater good, which would not have come about without pressure. If managers accept the inevitability of a crisis as a reality, then they cannot only plan to respond to the crisis but also find the opportunities that are contained in the crisis.



Different from a crisis plan, the crisis communications process template provides a customizable format that organizations of any size can take and adapt to suit their individual needs.

Crisis scholars believe the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, had a profound effect on organizations large and small. Prior to 9/11, crisis management was driven by what might happen in an organization’s own backyard. However, the attacks of 9/11 proved that events at other locations such as the World Trade Center or a tsunami in Myanmar could have widespread, even global impact.

The advent of Web 2.0 technology and other advances in communication technology continue to shape crisis management and crisis communication. Stakeholders now have, at their fingertips, the ability to generate crises bypassing traditional media channels and expressing concerns as well as discontent on the Web. The 24/7 news cycle, including the ability to post editorial on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and other online outlets have the potential to cause deep collateral and reputational damage as even local news is put on the world stage for all to see.

As Paul Holmes, editor of *The Holmes Report*, insightfully notes, “There was a time when a dissatisfied customer would go home and tell half a dozen of his closest friends; today he can blog,

tweet or post a YouTube video and tell thousands, many of whom will go on to tell thousands more, creating a community of critics capable of seriously damaging the brand.”

The following sample crisis communications response process template for Toy State was adapted from research conducted toward a capstone professional project (leading to a master of science degree in communications management from Syracuse University, Newhouse School of Public Communications). After studying how trade associations leverage crises, I concluded that the semblance of a crisis process and framework are key factors in how effective organizations handle crises of varying degrees.

Different from a crisis plan, the crisis communications process template provides a customizable format that organizations of any size can take and adapt to suit their individual needs. The findings indicated that a traditional crisis communications plan with its extensive checklists can be too rigid for many organizations; the crisis communications process outlines all of the key information points and lists a series of questions to serve as prompts for further thought and consideration.

Sample Crisis Process Template

A crisis situation, whether an accident, government or legal action, death or other unplanned event, presents the greatest threat to a privately held company, reputation and leadership. Such events may lead to intense focus from the media, government or regulatory agencies, and draw public attention to the company at its most vulnerable. During such times, it is common for the media and other key stakeholders to misconstrue facts and information, or play up the negative aspects of a crisis.

The goal of any crisis communications response process is not necessarily to turn a negative story into a positive one. Rather, it is to contain

and control any collateral damage by quickly, accurately and assertively presenting information that places the event in context, while demonstrating that appropriate action has been taken to address and alleviate public concern. The response of a company to a crisis, particularly from a communications perspective, may positively affect the depth and impact of the event, help restore company and brand reputation, provide useful solutions and secure the organization’s leadership position.

Since crises are often unexpected, it is critical to have a sound, logical process in place, to include a “communications cascade”—a series of potential solutions to common crises which allow for some flexibility. When a situation does occur, it results in intense pressure and extreme time compression; the need to respond professionally and pragmatically is immediate. A well-prepared crisis communications response is an indispensable tool for Toy State executives to have at the ready. The time put into customizing a crisis communications process today will help preserve the company bottom line and ultimately, its credibility, reputation and leadership.

The following crisis communications response process was devised to help Toy State pre-plan and organize around duress to the extent possible. This plan should supplement an overall organizational crisis management plan to include other logistical and organizational concerns to include a business continuity plan.

The objectives of a crisis communications response process template are to:

- Provide easy-to-use, customizable materials for a range of crises
- Provide staff with a how-to process that supports team work and identifies specific roles and responsibilities

- Help staff act in a unified, professional manner that reinforces industry leadership and creates loyalty
- Strategically enhance the organization's leadership role
- Manage the timely dissemination of important, time-sensitive information to the media, regulatory agencies, government and other stakeholders

10 Guiding Principles

These 10 guiding principles were developed for Toy State employees to know who to report to and how to respond in the event of a crisis small or large.

1. Crises should be reported to a senior executive as well as the Toy State senior vice president, product development & marketing as well as the president and CEO at once.
2. Designated Crisis Response Team will assess the potential threat risk and respond appropriately with a sense of urgency.
3. There should be one designated Crisis Commander-in-Chief, directing and coordinating all aspects of the company's response including managing the messages and the media.
4. All comments should be guided by professionalism and transparency, and serve to mitigate the crisis while reinforcing Toy State's leadership role.
5. Communicate early and as often as possible; try to avoid information lapses as even a few hours can make a difference.
6. Tell what you know and only what you know. Avoid speculation.
7. Avoid "no comment." If the company is not talking, someone else will speak for you.
8. Document everything using all available tools including cell phones, video equipment and social media.
9. Personnel matters remain confidential.
10. Maintain a sense of humanity and express concern for any personal loss.

Crisis Response Team

It is wise to form a central, top-level Crisis Response Team. This is a designated group of senior level, skilled individuals representing the multiple departments of the organization who carry the lead responsibility in crisis management. Such individuals must agree to be available to the company 24/7 if necessary, should a crisis situation occur. Each individual should also name a backup person in case he/she is unable to serve.

Every Crisis Is Unique

Every crisis presents a different set of challenges and requires a customized response. It is important to remember that while Crisis Response Team members have been assigned specific responsibilities, each member should be cognizant of everyone's role, in case a member is unable to serve.

Assessing the Situation

As a member of the Crisis Response Team, each individual's responsibility will vary, depending on the type of crisis. Ultimately, the Crisis Commander-in-Chief/president/CEO is responsible for deciding what level of Crisis Response Team involvement is needed. Throughout the crisis, the Crisis Response Team must stay in close touch; the more the team is disconnected, the greater the risk of miscommunication.

The Crisis Response Team members are required to keep two copies of this plan: one for the office and one to keep at home. In addition, all Crisis

21 Questions: Gauge Your Team's Preparedness

To assist in the development of an appropriate response as well as messaging, pose the following questions to the Crisis Response Team:

1. Who is the Crisis Commander-in-Chief?
2. What is the situation? What is expected to happen next?
3. Who on staff needs to be involved?
4. What immediate steps need to be implemented?
5. What information is already in the public domain and who knows it?
6. Is there potential public interest? Is this a news story?
7. What is the public's assessment of the situation?
8. Who will be affected by the crisis?
9. What is the emotional tenor?
10. What information is needed and who, beyond the company staff, needs to get it? When will information be available?
11. Should the company be proactive or reactive?
12. What can and can't be said?
13. Is legal counsel needed?
14. Is outside public relations counsel needed?
15. Who is the company's lead spokesperson? Backup?
16. What is the most effective response? What communications channel(s) will be used to reach the media? Other constituents?
17. Are other outside spokespersons needed? (example: third-party experts)
18. What media outlets will be contacted?
19. What government and regulatory officials will be contacted?
20. Are there alliance organizations, including suppliers that should be contacted?
21. Who will initiate the staff and board phone trees?

Response Team members are required to keep a "crisis card" (containing important phone numbers) in their wallets at all times.

An outline of suggested Crisis Response Team representatives follows as does a description of individual responsibilities.

Crisis Response Team

President/CEO

Role: Directs Crisis Response Team and acts as Crisis Commander-in-Chief; lead spokesperson;

consults as necessary with the chair of the board of directors and or executive committee; grants final approval on all company statements, news releases, internal/external communications related to the crisis.

Senior Vice President, Product Development & Marketing

Role: Performs the president's duties if he/she is unavailable. Evaluates the scope of the crisis and recommends appropriate corrective action to the Crisis Response Team. Confers with building

management, local fire, police or utilities crews as appropriate.

Chief Financial Officer (if appropriate)

Role: Supports president/CEO; directs emergency-related financial matters

Other Important Contacts: Public relations agency, board of directors, office or human resources manager, office building security, local

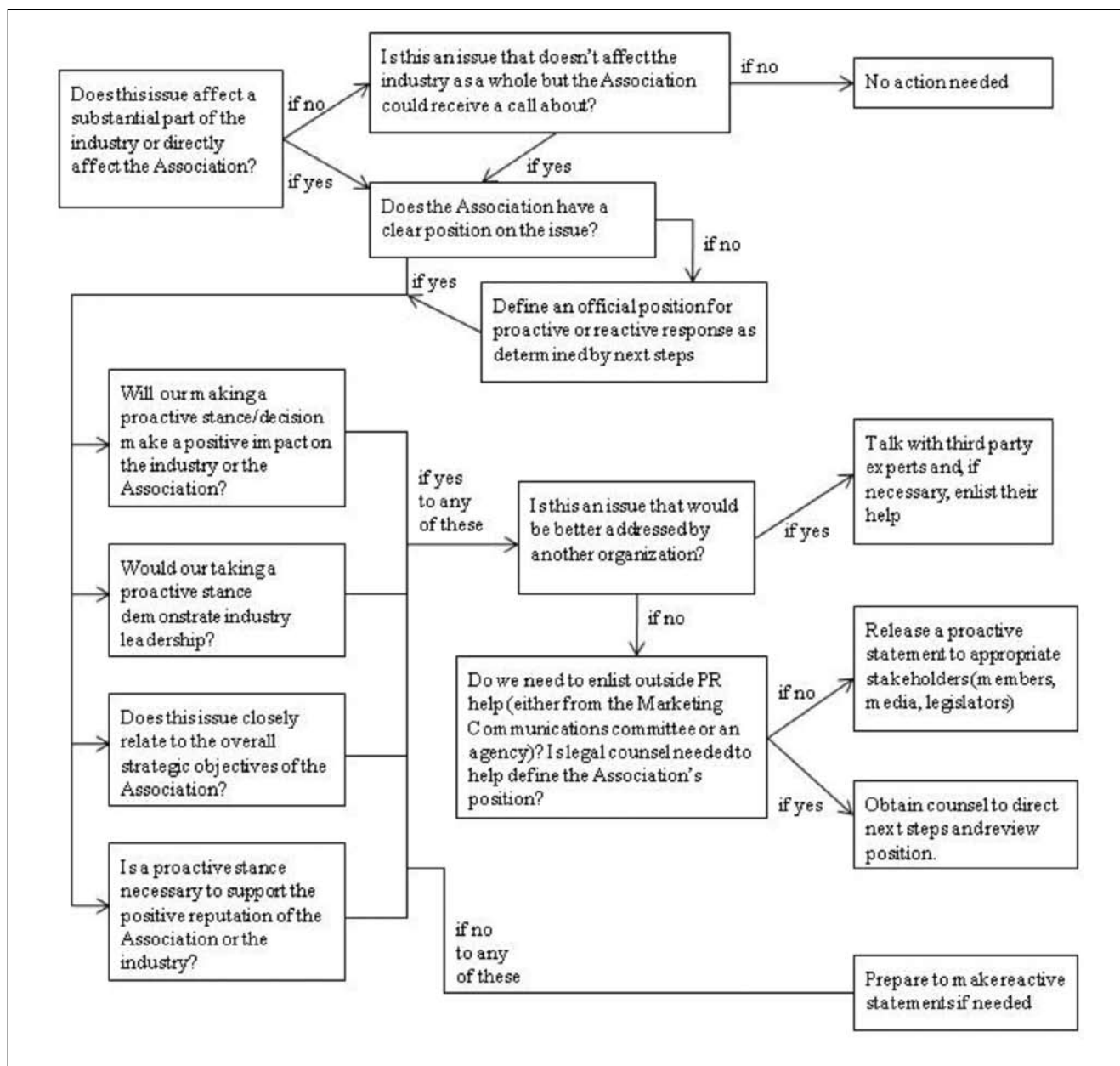
fire/police, Webmaster or managed hosting service, alliance associations, news service contacts and employees who speak foreign languages (should include Spanish).

Post-Crisis Follow-Up

- Make sure information regarding how the situation was resolved is available to key stakeholders.

Crisis Response Process Decision Tree

The following illustrates how crisis response decisions are made within an association.



- If changed, voicemail and Web site should be updated.
- All media contacts should be double checked for complete follow through, with contact information added to the Toy State database for future reference.
- The Crisis Commander-in-Chief should appropriately recognize the efforts of all staff.
- Conduct a post-crisis audit to include media clippings for share and quality of message replay; check for any issues which require further clarification or follow-up.
- Conduct a post-crisis information technology audit. Are there procedures which could have run more smoothly? Is the current information technology sufficient? Is an upgrade necessary?
- Conduct an informal phone audit of key stakeholders including suppliers and retailers to elicit feedback on how Toy State handled the crisis, with an eye toward future improvement.
- Establish a crisis response archive to serve as future reference to include case studies.
- Plan a crisis enactment session with the Crisis Response Team so that crisis management stays top-of-mind. **PRN**

Julie Livingston is director, business development and accounts, for NYC-based Child Play Communications. Previously, she was senior director, public relations, for the Toy Industry Association (TIA), the trade association for the North American toy industry.

Everybody Into the Fire: Why the First 48 Hours of a Crisis Mean Everything

By Lee Echols

A business or professional crisis awaits all of us. Once you accept this inevitability, you are halfway to successful crisis management. And, most importantly, you can begin to organize a simple crisis management program that will douse the flames, no matter how intense.

Be sure that you and your colleagues understand this: The first 48 hours of crisis response are the most critical—by far. What you think, what you say, what you don't say—and when—must be carefully and thoughtfully considered.

The first 48 hours of a crisis not only are the most critical, but they also can be the easiest hours to manage. Why? Because most crises start from the inside and then work their way to the outside. This means that fewer external forces are at work trying to complicate your crisis management efforts. It also means your organization can buy a little time—but maybe just enough—to steer the situation in the best possible direction before others grab the wheel.

Think about the kind of crisis that usually catches your attention. Product recalls, white collar crime, worker discrimination, financial shenanigans, sexual harassment, illicit relationship, celebrity scandals—all are internally created. Crises that feature external causes, such as factory explosions and natural disasters, occur far less frequently (although they are likely to generate broader media coverage).

Yet, crisis management for any kind of difficult event requires planning and training. It also requires cool heads and steady hands because the first 48 hours of the crisis, and how you handle it, will make the difference in the event's evolution. Here are some steps to help you make it through.

► **Verify the problem.** Collect the facts, and the rumors, that seem to be fueling your problem. Determine the source of the facts and rumors. Conduct a quick online scan for news sites or blogs that have picked up the story. Then, prioritize the issues that need immediate attention.

The nature of the crisis often dictates who leads the management effort. If your boss is indicted for corruption, the crisis manager should a lawyer.

In the first 48 hours, how important is this step? It may be the very most important step.

The separation of fact from fiction always has been a big part of crisis management, but never bigger than in today's information environment. Your organization must conduct a thoughtful, practical and quick assessment of the crisis situation.

Your initial assessment will not be a complete one, but it doesn't have to be. The main objective is to determine the pressure points: Are they primarily media-driven?... are they being fired by a competitor, an opposing political candidate, a disgruntled former employee?... are they being leaked by a government agency?... or, are they coming from inside your own organization?

The origin of the crisis pressure points gives you an early, manageable opportunity to target your first actions and responses. It may not be necessary to blare a trumpet yet, because you may not need to alert certain audiences if they have no interest in your situation. It is important, in the first 48 hours, to precisely identify your most relevant

Keys to Success in a Crisis

- Complete knowledge of your job, your company and the situation.
- Comprehensive crisis plan, including post-crisis recovery strategy.
- Well-trained management team that believes in your plan 100%.
- Full support of employees, suppliers and industry observers.
- Strong relations with news media.
- Awareness of what others think and say about you.

audience. Concentrate on them first, and begin your communications as quickly as possible.

Does audience selection mean that only they will hear your message? No, of course not. The speed with which others will receive your information is not entirely in your control; in fact, it may not be in your control at all. The social media infrastructure will decide this for you. The best approach for you and your organization is to accept the inevitability of social media sharing, and be absolutely sure that your first messages and information bundles are accurate, well-positioned and defensible.

► **Appoint a guru.** A crisis needs a coach. If you are the subject of the crisis, you should not be the coach. Select someone who has superior strategic and communications skills, as well as a cool and steady temperament. You're going to need it. The guru will organize the crisis response efforts, make assignments, and can serve as a public spokesperson.

Perhaps you have already assigned crisis management responsibilities to someone, and noted the choice in your crisis plan. Fine. But don't be reluctant to change your mind when the crisis emerges.

In the first 48 hours, a successful crisis manager can guide an organization to the crisis exit. One who fails during this period can really make things worse. Think about all the corporate executives who have gone before the cameras and either said the wrong words, expressed the wrong sentiments, fumbled their plan of action, or perspired so profusely you could hear their beads of sweat drop on the podium.

Your boss may want to talk to the public. And there will be a time for that. But early-stage crisis management means tough decisions are necessary, and your organization cannot risk rolling out a spokesperson whose TV performance, rather than leadership, will be measured. Good bosses understand their visibility shortcomings and will gladly pass on those responsibilities to other senior leaders.

The nature of the crisis often dictates who leads the management effort. If your coal mine explodes, the crisis manager must be experienced in rescue, recovery, protocols and regulations. If your boss is indicted for corruption, the crisis manager probably should be a lawyer. It's a good idea to have several thoroughly trained, readily available executives from whom to choose.

► **Pay attention.** You are not the first to experience a crisis. Nor will you be the last. Keep this in perspective at all times. There is a crisis from which you can learn—both what to do and what not to do. Read, watch and listen to news stories about companies that are mired in the muck, and assess how they are responding. You can be sure that your competitors are doing it, too.

"There but for the grace of God go I." These words mean a lot in the world of crisis management. Heeding them is one thing, but turning them into action is another and potentially much more valuable thing. Other organizations like yours have had crisis situations, some of which have been public and a few of which may have been

What Happens Internally

- Element of surprise
- Lack of answers
- Loss of control
- Knee-jerk reactions
- All eyes on you
- Siege mentality
- Conflicting information
- Snowballing events
- Confusion and uncertainty
- Escalating speculation
- Need for answers now

What Happens Externally

- Element of surprise
- Assumption of guilt
- Extreme skepticism
- Need for information
- Lip-smacking competitors
- Anticipation of your next move
- Eroding credibility
- Intense scrutiny
- Expectations for a solution
- Investigative mentality
- Show us you're not guilty

ugly. Learning from their experience is a very smart idea.

In today's first 48 hours, you can do this easily. Just Google it. Using your online resources, search

media outlets for their coverage of similar crises. You will be pleasantly surprised to see that a lot of good background is available. More importantly, you will be able to assess past crisis management efforts, compare them to your own, and make recommendations to upper management that make sense.

In the short history of professional crisis communications, there are thousands of examples of doing things the wrong way. When you read your daily newspapers or blogs, the list gets longer, right? Be sure that your organization looks at the past for instruction and guidance. It's there, and there's a lot of it.

► **Determine the scope.** Scale is a key element in most crises. The bigger it is, the more you need to separate it into manageable parts. An important note here: if lives are in danger or confirmed deaths have occurred, your primary responses should center on empathy, sympathy, emotion and thoughtfulness. And you're probably asking: "How can I possibly know how big this problem is in the first 48 hours?" That's a good question, and it has no easy answer.

The impact of an oil well leak can grow larger every day and have a generational impact. A celebrity murder suspect needs only an airtight alibi, and the crisis is minimized.

Sharing the problem with your colleagues and leadership teams is the most effective way to get a grip on the size of the crisis. It's time to assemble your team and let them know what is going on. Under no circumstances should you try to conceal the crisis from your colleagues, and especially your boss. What is happening is affecting the whole organization, or soon will be. Use the ideas and connections of those around you to assess the issues, and their breadth and depth, to develop a response.

But think about this. The manner in which you respond in the first 48 hours can definitely, and we mean most definitely, makes things much bigger

or much smaller. Scope and scale are directly affected by your words, your messages and your leadership skills.

► **Start talking.** Using the key messages as the foundation, write a news release. Disseminate to key media, and post on your Web site. Conduct a news conference only if you really, really, want to do one. Update your messages regularly and continue your stream of information. The thing above all that makes people nervous in a crisis? Lack of information.

You're going to have to talk to the public and the press, so develop a series of key messages that address the crisis. Convert them into an FAQ format that you can post on your Web site and provide to appropriate groups. Develop a holding statement that your switchboard operators can use. Make sure that your messages are bullet proof—no guessing, no what if's, no blaming. And make sure the bosses and the lawyers see them first.

In the first 48 hours in today's crisis environment, your message delivery can be expedited in many new ways. The use of social media vehicles such as Twitter is an excellent option; however, remember that your targeted recipients, whoever you have determined them to be, must be plugged in to Twitter. Or Facebook or YouTube or whatever pipeline you select. Also remember that once you hit the send button on a Twitter notification, you instantly lose a large degree of control on whom that message reaches. Sooner rather than later, it will arrive on a competitor's iPhone or on a reporter's Blackberry. You can count on it.

It also is easy to fall into another trap—shoveling out too much information. Be confident and consistent with your crisis response discussion, but be aware of its volume, its details and its minutiae. Not everyone wants to know everything

What You Must Do

- Stay calm and stay available.
- Incorporate third-party support.
- Do it in person, not on the phone.
- Cite precedents from your industry.
- Hold your CEO's hand.
- Challenge, but don't fight, your lawyers.
- Secure an outside crisis manager.
- Keep employees highly informed.
- Have good news ready to go.
- Organize a team to monitor the news.
- Follow your crisis plan, but...
- Make adjustments if it's not working.

that you know. As in most crisis situations, three expectations still ring true: people want you to be honest, people want to be quick and, most of all, people want you to fix it.

In the first 48 hours of a crisis, most organizations are paralyzed by the immediate issues. The last thing they are considering is the future.

In the first 48 hours of a crisis, most organizations are paralyzed by the immediate issues. The last thing they are considering is the future. The more action you show, the more positive reaction you will get from everyone. **PRN**

Lee Echols is founder of The Echols Group. He also is co-founder of Atlanta Reputation Management. Lee is the former press secretary for Andrew Young, who served as mayor of Atlanta and United Nations Ambassador.

Get SMART About Crisis Preparedness

By Scott Farrell

Certainly, crises are nothing new to the business world; however, crises are, by their very nature, unplanned events. The element of surprise can catch any organization off-guard, and for that reason alone, effective crisis preparedness is an essential practice for every company.

Johns Hopkins University Hospital coined the phrase “golden hour,” as the critical period of time when aid must be administered to someone who has suffered from a heart attack. The right aid and attention delivered during the first hour immeasurably enhances the patient’s chances of survival and recovery.

The same is true in a crisis. How a company responds in the first hour—or hours—of an event will determine how the organization will survive and thrive post-crisis. Add to that first-hours pressure the startling trend we’ve observed in the last several years of crisis management: an increase in the number of crises that are outside operational problems—or anything we would consider ordinary at all.

The trend we’re seeing now are crises that may involve malevolence or those that, due to a situation’s layers of connectivity with the interests of an increasingly diverse group of stakeholders, present far-reaching implications. To that end, based on years of working with companies experiencing all levels of crises, we offer a few simple guidelines for companies to follow in how to best prepare for the worst. We call it the SMART approach.

SMART stands for:

- **S**cenarios
- **M**aterials

- **A**pproach
- **R**esources
- **T**raining

Scenarios: Identifying and Evaluating Potential Events

Initially, we take our clients through a threat assessment exercise to help the company’s leaders understand where crises can originate and how urgently they need to be addressed. We take a cross-function team of executives, and use brainstorming techniques to help them identify a full range of potential events that could trigger a crisis. From there, we ask the team to review each event and score them on two scales: 1) likelihood of occurrence; and 2) potential for damaging impact on the organization.

It is always quite remarkable to see how much attention is given to the highly likely but potentially low-damage events that face an organization (i.e. normal crises), and how little attention is given to the less likely, but highly catastrophic events that every organization faces (i.e. abnormal crises). Although it may seem counterintuitive, it is these very abnormal crises that can destroy a company’s reputation, and an entire business, if not handled correctly.

Materials: Compiling Suite of Items for Fast and Accurate Response

Once scenarios are fully mapped out, we begin to prepare and compile materials corresponding to priority scenarios. Materials may include manuals, dark sites, checklists and other templates (e.g. fact sheets, press releases, incident reports, messages, call logs) to ensure

each response is conducted in the appropriate sequence by the right people.

Being ready to respond to a crisis is increasingly important in the digital age and with the rise of social media. Consumers and media share “stories,” whether factual or not, in an instant. To counteract this trend, you should be ready with a suite of materials including standby statements, position papers, Q&As and various mainstream and social media protocols to ensure a fast and accurate response to an array of situations.

Approach: Identify the Appropriate Response Based

Every organization, even within the same industry, could define a crisis differently. Thus, it is essential that you establish a common language for defining precisely what constitutes a crisis and what differentiates it from an urgent situation or an emerging issue.

The approach (i.e. established philosophy and definition for a crisis) distinguishes which crises require immediate attention and response and which may be best left as is or dealt with locally. By pre-establishing criteria and thresholds for a given circumstance, your management team can identify and respond appropriately to reduce the potential severity and expanse of the situation. (Note: Remember, not every event requires the attention of the CEO, nor should every event be handled at the local level of an organization.)

Let’s take the “United Breaks Guitars” case. After United Airlines broke passenger Dave Carroll’s prized guitar, Carroll took to YouTube.com, unleashing a revenge video. The United team was poorly prepared to deal with what seemed like an “unfortunate” incident. United failed to respond until the story hit national headlines, thus escalating a crisis, that could have otherwise been averted by a properly aligned approach. Even in the wake of a crisis, a solid approach

can strengthen a company’s reputation, making a strong crisis team and plan an even greater asset.

Resources: Tailor Your Message & Spokespeople to the Circumstance

To successfully manage a crisis requires ready access to the appropriate resources. Even if you have a well coordinated plan, the crisis itself (e.g. natural disaster, computer hacking, workplace violence) may hinder an organization from putting your plan into action. As a result, build alternative resources into our plans (e.g. war rooms, back-up locations, technology, dark sites), and assign a cross-functional and cross-intellectual crisis team to implement them.

In a crisis, the threat assessment exercise proves very valuable in determining who needs to be prepared to speak to each unique set of stakeholders. This can range from subject matter experts for technical or very specific situations, to the C-level leadership team for events that requires the attention or visibility of those leaders.

Train: Conduct Drills in Varied Frequencies per Scenario

After putting a tremendous amount of time and money into developing a plan, the next logical step is to run a drill; however, all too often this step goes overlooked. In order to maximize the SMART process, we have our clients conduct drills, varying each drill in frequency and involvement based on the given scenarios.

The trainings or drills could each range from half-day sessions to multi-day sessions. A strong example of an effective multi-day drill is the City of Chicago’s emergency preparedness effort, which involved simulating a commercial airplane crash, rail-car evacuation and terrorist attack. In this case, the frequency is limited due to costs; however, by involving a number of agencies

in such abnormal scenarios, the city could fully evaluate the plan from many angles and identify weaknesses in the plan before an actual emergency occurred.

Not everyone can spend the time and money on a “live” drill. Much smaller “tabletop” drills—in which the scenario is played out with the crisis management team in a conference room over the course of half or full day—can also be helpful in pressure testing the plan and reminding team members of their roles and responsibilities.

Keeping Your Plan Current

The corporate climate and technology changes rapidly and frequently. Given the considerable amount of time and money you invest in crisis communication plans, it is important to keep your plan current, as we do for our clients. Check sections that can change regularly, make sure your materials are still on message and ensure that your procedures are still appropriate. **PRN**

Scott Farrell is president of global corporate communications at GolinHarris.

In Case of Emergency: 13 Steps Toward Cool Decision Making in the Heat of Crisis

By Krista Umscheid-Ramirez

Judgment calls are necessary during a crisis, but creating emergency response policies from knee-jerk reactions puts you and your company at an immediate disadvantage as well as on the defensive. During a crisis, precious time can be wasted making decisions that should have been previously determined. Consider these steps in your crisis planning.

1. Establish guidelines for the types of events that will trigger emergency responses within your team. Will it be the mobilization of another department or is a flurry of media inquiries enough to warrant labeling an incident a crisis? These need to be kept vague so they can be adapted to most events. Anything too specific can be difficult to follow, as crises rarely occur the exact way they are rehearsed during drills.

2. As part of your crisis media plan, establish on-site staging areas for media at every facility to provide a place from which media can obtain footage while keeping reporters from wandering the grounds. Visit the facilities with the site managers and physically walk the area to determine at least one good location to use for media briefings during an extended event. Where is this location in proximity to the location of where emergency responders may be located? Will the site provide the media with a view to obtain footage without being in the way or filming anything they shouldn't be? Identify and name these areas and mark them on easily understood maps of the facilities. Make sure to share the maps with everyone who will need them and place them in your crisis media plan binder as well. It's also a good idea to have at least one sign made that says "MEDIA AREA" on it to use at the site.

3. Divide and conquer. It's important to send one person into the field to the location that is receiving the public and media attention and to leave at least one person in the office to take the media calls there. The office person can consolidate the inquiries as well as give answers over the phone, provided that both the field and office staff members are giving out identical information. The staff member back at the office also will likely be responsible for putting together short updates that will go to employees, executives and shareholders.

4. Communicate three important pieces of information to someone at the emergency site. If the site of the emergency is different than the location of your communications team, communicate these things to someone who is already on scene: 1) The designated media area to direct media toward; 2) The name of the communications staff member who will be responding on site; and 3) The estimated time of arrival for the communications staff member at the emergency scene.

5. When the communications person arrives at the scene of the incident where media is located, he or she should immediately go to the media area to let the reporters know he or she has arrived. Give the media a time (within less than 30 minutes) that you/your spokesperson will be providing them with the latest information.

6. Be consistent. Maintain a single point of contact from your emergency response team to ensure you are receiving current, accurate information. After you write media statements, verify them with your emergency management contact to check that nothing has changed. Keep your review list of internal staff very short to prevent unnecessarily holding up the release of information.

Emergency Response Checklist for Communicators

- **Critical Contacts.** These include your company's executives, board of directors, and critical internal corporate contacts as well as outside contacts for the media you work with regularly.
- **Maps.** Maps of your facilities that show where your media staging areas are located. Provide physical addresses of the facilities and their main phone numbers. Maps of how to locate the facilities are beneficial as well.
- **Company information.** Keep in your book facts that might be valuable to have in the field when answering questions. Number of employees (company-wide and by facility), short rundowns of statistics for each facility are helpful as well as a basic explanation about what the company does and to whom it answers are great to have on hand. What regulatory agencies oversee the company? The Environmental Protection Agency, for instance?
- **Emergency plans.** Your department's emergency response procedures and the company's response plans, as well, if you have them.
- **Procedural and notification checklist.** Make sure your plans include who all your communications team should be responsible for contacting during an emergency and activate that call tree as appropriate.

It's best for each communications staff member to have one emergency response book at the office and one at home or in the car. Even better, put together a small, cheap "go bag" with your book, a couple of bottled waters, a shirt with a company logo on it, a cell phone charger, a note pad, several pens, some sunscreen, and a few granola bars.

7. Keep statements short. Keep the facts you release to the media to the point and put them in context. For instance, if several employees were injured, make sure you know how many total employees work at that facility, the safety procedures in place there, and when you can release their names. Have the communications staff members who are working in the office send out via email and post online your media statements/updates so that everyone has and is using the same information. Add the information to Facebook, Twitter or any other social media pages.

8. Select your speaker carefully. The status of the interviewee speaks volumes to the company's perception of a situation. Don't send unseasoned spokespersons to live media interviews. These should be handled by staff members who respond daily to media inquiries and have talking points in their back pockets on any topic. Use subject matter experts sparingly and appropriately. They need training from the communications team and easily understood talking points (no technical jargon or acronyms) written in short sentences (for sound bite editing).

Reserve executives speaking to the media for important announcements and emergencies that question company decisions, i.e. policies. Many executives who push to talk with media later regret that decision. When it is appropriate for executives to address the public, make sure they have a communications staff member with them every step—from writing talking points, recommending attire, to the appropriate demeanor to convey.

9. Set a schedule. After providing each media statement and interviews, set the next media update time so that reporters know when they will be getting their next update with new information. It will prevent most of them from trying to interview people who are not "authorized" to talk with media about your company. If there is a void of information, reporters will find someone to interview whether or they are providing the correct information or not.

News Conference Essentials

Ideally, a communications team has a checklist of logistics and assignments for a typical media event or news conference. While you may not have the luxury of all those things in a crisis, many of them may still be useful.

1. Date, Time and Location - (If this were not an emergency, you would want to check to make sure there were no events competing for your media attention.)

2. Event Location - This may be in a place separate from your media "staging area" during a crisis. Indoors or outdoors, depending on weather?

3. Speakers - Will your company have the only speaker or will someone from an emergency response team speak as well? Are there any other specialists that should be present to answer questions?

4. Podium - You may need something to set notes on. Do you want a PA system? Do you have a "mult box" for the media to plug into?

5. Parking - Can you clear an area for more media vehicles to attend your event?

6. Notify all your people - Make sure all of your internal key contacts are aware of this news conference.

7. Signage - Do you have a specific message or logo you would like visible during the news conference?

8. Internal Coverage - Do you want someone from within your company to take photos or video of the event?

9. Talking Points - Who will need talking points and who will write them?

10. Your experts - Have your subject matter experts on hand to provide answers to questions the person addressing the media may not know.

Make sure to include your news conference event in your after-action review process. It may need to be treated as a separate critique item.

10. Make time for the next in line. When incident commanders at an emergency scene hand off their duties to the next in line, they sit down with the person and go over all the critical information and processes needed to maintain continuity from one person to the next. The same should be done for the spokesperson who is taking over media duties at an emergency scene.

11. Look ahead. Ramping up to respond to an emergency happens quickly; however, ramping down to an emergency can take much longer. Some emergencies can end abruptly while others linger for days or weeks. The faces of those emergencies change when it comes to media coverage. After the initial flurry of event "news" coverage takes place, feature stories might start to emerge, and it helps if you have your own feature stories to provide the media instead of reacting to whatever stories they come up with. For instance, maybe write a short feature story about a heroic act that one of the employees committed.

12. Follow the coverage. Have someone on your communications team keep up with and put together a document that shows the media coverage of your emergency. This should be prepared so it can be used at both the communications team review of the emergency and the larger company-wide review of the emergency.

13. Review while it's fresh. Too often, staff members to get back to their offices and their routines without reviewing how the emergency unfolded and how the team responded.

As soon as the emergency looks to be ramping down, schedule an after-action review for your team as well as making sure someone from your team participates in the overall review that should involve every department involved in the emergency. **PRN**

Krista Umscheid-Ramirez is senior communications specialist with Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA).

Get Familiar With All Your Industry's Nightmare Scenarios Before Crafting Your Crisis Plan

By Mark Thomas

Don't you hate it when communications are reduced to simply labels? Terms enter a catch-all bin so complex problems can be simplified for the masses or lowest common denominator. That is where crisis communications is today.

What is a crisis and what does it look like? The accepted definition to public relations professionals is:

"Crisis communications is sometimes considered a sub-specialty of the public relations profession that is designed to protect and defend an individual, company, or organization facing a public challenge to its reputation. These challenges may come in the form of an investigation from a government agency, a criminal allegation, a media inquiry, a shareholders lawsuit, a violation of environmental regulations, or any of a number of other scenarios involving the legal, ethical, or financial standing of the entity."

What is important here is that depending on your organization, the crisis scenarios can span a wide range of possibilities, and internal audiences always seem to be forgotten. For instance, I worked for a large global transportation distribution company called Amadeus Global Travel Distribution. They provide travel related services to travel agents and travel managers. We were responsible for the communication plan when an informational system failed and put travel agents and travel managers on hold for hours, or when a product was discontinued due to product failure or a recall. The North American division was headquartered right off the runway of Miami International Airport.

We also had to develop a crisis communications plan in case of a natural disaster which



As General Patton had his Bible at his bedside, my crisis communications plan is in my office, my house and there is even a copy in my car.

threatened Amadeus every year—hurricanes. We had a finely tuned system of communication and even facilities designated to take over operations in case the company was shut down for an indefinite period of time. The real test of this plan was to fully engage and inform senior management, employees and key stakeholders of the situation when many times they were focused on the personal welfare of their own families.

Another key factor in developing a plan is to identify what type of business or issues your organization might face. I was the chief marketing officer of a conglomerate of fishing and recreational boat companies. As you might expect, the company was a highly visible and key employer of the community. Our crisis action plan had to address multiple bad situations that ranged from a product recall for lack of product performance to potential legal action in case of a boating accident to the local and regional fallout in the case of an emergency at one of the three manufacturing plants. These workers were routinely exposed to and handled many dangerous chemicals and components. My greatest fear was a plant worker getting seriously hurt or even killed in an accident.

The worst-case scenario was an explosion that affected many company and non-company people and/or facilities. Other actual situations we faced were sexual harassment lawsuits and a push to unionize our facilities. We were fortunate to contain these to local issues but these could

have easily spread nationwide since four of the five brands were category leaders at a time in the boating industry (not unlike right now) when economic times were decimating manufacturers and dealers.

It gets even dicier when you must handle emotionally or controversially charged subjects. My last two assignments have dealt with these tricky factors. Invisible Fence is an electronic behavior product to contain dogs and cats to yards through a mild electronic stimulus delivered through a collar worn by the pet. The sheer concept of shocking your pet was one of our most serious hurdles to purchase, and the acceptability that the product worked effectively was the second. In this regard, our crisis communication plan was tested on several different occasions and worked flawlessly. We had several instances where we were sued when dogs escaped the owner's yard and destroyed property or bit someone.

If these were not contained effectively, they resulted in actual city or county ordinances being proposed to outlaw the product and putting dealers out of business. To complicate this issue, many times we were forced into shifting the blame to our customer's misuse or lack of maintenance of our product. To say this was a tricky proposition is the classic understatement. My greatest fear that never materialized—but we were prepared for—was an attack from animal rights organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) or the Humane Society of the United States. The scientific facts and literally thousands of veterinarians, animal behaviorists and scientists enthusiastically supported and endorsed the product, but being right has nothing to do with crisis communications.

It gets even more challenging when you are responsible for the communications of a nationally known nonprofit organization that deals with a sensitive subject—firearm ownership.

Plan, Plan—and Plan Again

There are some basic principles to follow in developing a crisis communications plan no matter what kind of crisis hits your organization. Here are a few tips to help you develop your plan or review an existing plan.

► **Always Have A Current Plan.** If you don't have a plan, develop one today. The worst-possible situation is to have a crisis and the affected parties, stakeholders and media have no clue what is going on or know where to go for information. It compounds what normally is a serious threat to an organization's reputation, perception and sometimes even its existence. You must evaluate and review the plan annually.

► **Communicate the Plan.** Having a great plan is not enough. Ensure that everyone who has a key role in the plan and is fully versed on the checkpoints, process and authority structure. If there is lack of confidence, hesitancy or time delays in information dissemination, the perception is that no one is leading and there is chaos. While over communicating is now a cliché and widely overused term, in a crisis, there is no such thing as over-communicating.

► **Define Authority.** It is the senior staff's responsibility to clearly define and endorse the process and who has the responsibility and the authority to approve statements, actions and progress. This is many times not the CEO or president. Communications professionals must be regarded as key player and have not only an advisory role, but a decision making position. All of this must be decided and agreed upon before the crisis—not during.

► **Keep on Message.** The old adage is that when you get tired of your message it is finally being received by your audience. Keep focused and pound away on your key points.

That is where I am today. The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) is the trade organization

for the firearms and ammunition industry. As managing director of marketing communications, I oftentimes have to speak for the firearms industry on a variety of subjects that include gun control, gun safety, violence and then all the business and economic conditions of the industry. These situations crop up like wildfire and sometimes change by the hour. As General Patton had his Bible at his bedside, my crisis communications plan is in my office, my house and there is even a copy in my car.

At any given minute, we can receive a call from national or local media on a serious event that may still be taking place even as the call comes in. Many times, the reporter has more updated facts than I do and wants an immediate comment. We review our plan biannually as a team and then with the senior staff. We look at hot issues and topics to ensure our plan is always current and contact information and processes are up to date.

So this brings me back to my opening statement about labels. The term “thinking out of the box” is

now a punch line. Unfortunately, the premise of preparing for everything that might be considered a crisis, instead of just the obvious situations, whether internal or external, is just a sound business and communications practice.

There simply cannot be just one crisis situation that any organization or company would face. No crisis communications plan can be all-encompassing and address every situation. However, the astute public relations professional must craft and gain approval of a plan that addresses the basics that are common in all crisis situations. Those are, clearly: process, procedures, audiences, authority and dissemination of information.

I often joke that APR really means Always Produce Results. It is what we have dedicated our lives to and what our companies pay us to do. Crisis communications is no different. **PRN**

Mark E. Thomas is managing director of marketing communications for the National Shooting Sports Foundation, the trade association of the firearms and ammunition industry.

Index of Companies Covered by Chapter

Aflac	4	Exxon Valdez	5, 8
AIG	1	Facebook.....	4, 6
Allina Hospitals & Clinics.....	8	Fisher-Price	1
AM2PAT	1, 8	Flickr	2, 6
Amadeus	8	Ford	1, 5
American Red Cross	1, 8	GE.....	4
APCO Insight.....	1, 8	General Motors.....	1, 7
Apple.....	1, 3, 4	Gladstone International.....	3
Bausch + Lomb	4	GMAC	1
Beckerman Public Relations.....	2	Google.....	4, 6
BP.....	1, 4, 6, 8	Goldman Sachs	1
Center for Responsible Lending	5	GolinHarris	8
Cercone Brown.....	4	Greenpeace.....	6
Childplay Communications	4	Heartland Payment Systems.....	2
Cision	5	Hewlett-Packard.....	1
Colgan Air.....	4	Humane Society	5, 8
Commcore Consulting Group.....	6	Hunter Public Relations	6
Cornerstone Public Relations	4	Hynes Communications	6
Covalent Logic	4	IHOP.....	5
Cubitt Jacobs & Prosek Communications.....	2	Impact Public Affairs	5
Cygnus Business Media	7	Industrial Shipping Enterprises Corp.....	2
DeKalb Medical Center	4	Institute for Crisis Management	1
Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited,	1	Jaffe PR.....	4
Digg.....	2, 5, 6	Johnson & Johnson	1, 4, 5
Domino's.....	1, 2, 4, 5	Kellogg	1
Facebook.....	2, 4, 6	Kroger.....	1
The Echols Group	8	Lehman Brothers Holdings.....	1
Edelman	1, 5	Levick Strategic Communications.....	2
Educational Credit Management Corporation ...	3	Lower Colorado River Authority.....	8
Eli Lilly.....	1	The Lukaszewski Group.....	1, 7
Environmental Defense Fund.....	5	Maclaren	6
Esurance	3	Massey Energy.....	2
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.....	2	MasterCard.....	4

Mattel	1	Target	4
Makovsky + Company	7	Toyota.....	1, 4, 5, 8
Merck	8	Toy State	8
Nalgene	4	Twitter	6
National Shooting Sports Foundation.....	8	U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ..	5
Nestlé	1, 6	Vectren Corporation	3
Nokia.....	1	Viacom	4
NutriSystem	1	Virilion.....	5, 6
PetSmart.....	4	Vision-Ease Lens	8
Pinnacle Airlines	4	Weber Shandwick	3
Pizza Hut	1	Wallenius Wilhelmsen Logistics	6
Pfizer	4	Wikimedia Foundation	6
PG&E	4	World Health Organization	5
Pictopia	6	YouTube	1, 5
Rasky Baerlein.....	2	Zhu Zhu Pets.....	1
Royal Caribbean	1, 6	Zoo New England.....	2

PRNews[®]

prnewsonline.com