



CTA-046-Communications Plan

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STEP GUIDE: BUILDING YOUR CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Organizations want to avoid negative media or public attention that will harm their reputation and brand. One way to minimize damage from an incident is to have a crisis communications plan in place. When an incident occurs, the need to communicate is immediate. If business operations are disrupted, customers will want to know how they will be impacted. Regulators may need to be notified and local government officials will want to know what is going on in their community. Employees and their families will be concerned and want information. All of these “audiences” will want information before the business has a chance to begin communicating. It is crucial to plan ahead;

1. Anticipate a Crisis Every single organization is vulnerable to crises. The days of sticking your head in the sand and playing ostrich are long gone. New media spreads the news now like never before. You can play ostrich, but your stakeholders will not be understanding or forgiving. Your stakeholders will forgive an accident but they will not forgive a poor response.

2. Assemble a Crisis Team Before a crisis strikes, think through who needs to have a seat at the table. Consider all the aspects of your company, during the crisis, this team bears the responsibility for making decisions and spearheading communication.

3. Identify and Prepare Spokespeople A crisis situation should not be the first time any spokesperson speaks to the media. Identify the people who will officially communicate for your organization should a crisis develop and make sure these people are trained accordingly.

4. Identify and Know Your Stakeholders If a crisis occurs, you will want to reach out to key stakeholders personally before they hear about any bad news in the media. Make sure the crisis communications plan identifies these audiences. They might include employees, clients, customers, board members, business partners or regulatory bodies that might have an interest

5. Develop Information Management Processes and Protocols There is no need to keep multiple hard copies of your crisis plans in binders in multiple locations, at home, vacation homes, work, multiple offices, or anywhere else. For many years spreadsheets have been used as an aid for compiling crisis information. However, the evolution of technology has allowed organizations to capture, store, and analyze their data in a structured way, adding real value to compiled information.

6. Establish Media Policies Crisis communication today is very different than crisis communication of years past. Everyone with a phone is a potential reporter with the ability to record video or take photos that may influence the situation. Make sure the company understands that no one except the spokesperson is authorized to speak to reporters or members of the media. Write specific policies into the plan that address what employees are and are not permitted to say about the situation or the organization.

7. Develop Holding Statements, Finalize and Adapt Key Messages While full message development must await the outbreak of an actual crisis, “holding statements,” messages designed for use immediately after a crisis breaks, can be developed in advance to be used for a wide variety of scenarios to which the organization is perceived to be vulnerable. Another important element of the crisis communications plan is the need to coordinate the release of information. When there is an emergency or a major impact on the business, there may be limited information about the incident or its potential impacts.



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8. Test the Plan and Analyze Assess what crisis situations are the most likely to strike your company. Have a practice drill and run through the plan to make sure you have not ignored any challenges or opportunities. After the test, evaluate the plan and make any changes deemed necessary. It's important to remember, when you can't get your hands on the information you need in a crisis, or when the information you have isn't appropriate, you can miss opportunities and your performance drops. As it happens, the information management ability organisations need to succeed is already within their grasp. [Thanks to Robin Blandford of D4H Technologies <http://www.d4h.org/>]

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*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"....**Edmund Burke***