



CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of this crisis communication plan for _____, a crisis is defined as a “decisive or critical moment that could harm the reputation of the company and brand beyond repair.” If handled correctly a crisis could be beneficial to the company in the long run. The difference between a public relations disaster and a public relations victory could be the amount of time and effort the company puts into its crisis communication preparedness.

When a crisis strikes the company must communicate effectively with employees, customers, consumers, interest groups, media, and public safety officials or risk long-term – even fatal – damage to the business.

Once a crisis occurs, the media and the public are going to want answers as to why it happened, who was involved, when it happened, and perhaps who was to blame. **Years of dedicated, reliable operation will be quickly forgotten if the answers to these and other questions are not immediately and truthfully answered.**

Every company, regardless of size, needs a crisis communication plan. This document provides a guideline. Using it, employees are prepared if a crisis occurs.

Preparedness is the Plan

ESTABLISHING A CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN — AN OVERVIEW OF THE BASICS

Essential to creating a crisis communication plan is establishing the principles, policies, and goals that will govern it.

A policy of full disclosure and cooperation with the media is in management’s best interests.

Here are some necessary steps when establishing a crisis communication plan that demonstrates **responsibility, competence, and cooperation during a crisis**:

- The number one priority is the protection, privacy, and safety of employees.
- All company employees refer all questions to the designated spokesperson.
- All public statements must be truthful.
- All facts released will be disseminated through the designated spokesperson.
- Information will be disclosed quickly as it becomes available and is confirmed.
- A reasonable attempt will be made to answer all questions.
- The media will be allowed access to the company's headquarters or factory, except:
 - When the safety of reporters or employees would be compromised.
 - When the security of valuables, proprietary information could be jeopardized.
 - When declared off-limits by investigators, police, fire, or public safety officials.
- All public statements and information disclosed to the media will be shared with employees.

Important note: Timing is critical, as every effort should be made to inform employees prior to media/public distribution.

- Management will publicly acknowledge its intention to cooperate with all investigating authorities and if necessary, conduct its own study of the incident.
- Management and employees will cooperate with the authorities
- Management and employees will refer the media to the proper authorities.
- Never, never ever speculate.
- Never, never ever speculate on behalf of others.

Remember, the strategy is to make the most out of a negative situation by taking the information initiative.

SPOKESPERSON RESPONSIBILITIES AND PREPARATION

Fundamental to any successful crisis communication plan is the designation of the people who will serve as spokespersons during a crisis.

Spokesperson:

Ideally, this will be a high-level corporate staff member (i.e., Vice President of Operations, Director of Communications, Owner/CEO,) who can be relieved of operational duties while acting as the spokesperson, as necessary. This person will coordinate with the director of public relations. The corporate director of public relations may designate an additional expert as spokesperson in certain situations.

Qualified spokespeople are to be identified and prepared in advance and confirmed at the time of crisis by crisis managers and CEO. Secondary/alternate spokespeople act as primary spokespeople during a crisis when the primary spokesperson (key executives) are required to focus 100-percent on remedying the crisis and are therefore unavailable for the duty.

The duties of the spokesperson during a crisis include, but are not limited to management of the following:

- Collecting information and confirming facts.
- Preparing statements.
- Responding to press inquiries.
- Ensuring employees, management, partners, and customers are kept informed.
- Conducting follow-up media relations to emphasize the crisis is over.

Coverage by the spokesperson will be arranged 24-hours-a-day, 7 days a week.

A plan to contact all designated spokespeople is arranged, should a crisis arise while they are away from the facility/headquarters.

Coverage by other key executives may be necessary until the designed spokesperson arrives to the scene or is available by phone. The media probably won't wait until the spokesperson arrives before they start covering the incident.

It must be abundantly clear to all employees that EVERY question from the media (or outside interest groups/individuals) is to be referred to the designated spokesperson. That person alone is to speak with the media/outside during a crisis. Other points of in-bound contact, like customer service or sales managers, will be provided with approved statements to use during a crisis.

SPOKESPERSON RESPONSIBILITIES AND PREPARATION CONTINUED...

All designated spokespeople should familiarize themselves with Spokesperson Dos and Don'ts (following). In addition, spokespeople should be comfortable with general company messaging and facts. Formal media training is available for all company spokespeople, upon request.

Designated Spokespeople [list them below]:

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SPOKESPERSON DO's AND DON'Ts

The success of the public relations effort depends on the ability of spokespeople to deal with the media – it's the most vital role. Through one-on-one interviews, on-site at or remotely, the spokesperson is the single source for all information. Following are some **DO's** and **DON'Ts** for those who will act as spokespeople:

DO's:

- Introduce yourself by name and title; provide a business card.
- Provide factual information on the *who, where, why, what* and *how* of the situation.
- Keep detailed notes of information disclosed; record the interaction if legal. Ask permission first.
- Speak calmly and deliberately; reinforcing that professional staff is in control.
- Review notes with any other person who acted/or will act as spokesperson, to ensure continuity.
- Initiate information updates regularly. Contact reporters who were on-site earlier, but left to file reports or previously inquired about the situation.
- Monitor press coverage of the incident and advise a reporter when something inaccurate is reported.
- Stress your concern for employees, customers, affected parties and the community/locality at large (if warranted).
- Suspend all advertising and promotion until a comfortable time after the crisis.
- Keeps a file of all news coverage regarding the crisis.

DON'Ts:

- Don't ever offer to speak "off the record." There is no such thing!
- Don't ever offer possible causes or other speculation, such as monetary, property, product or customer loss.
- Don't ever speak in technical jargon or lexicon, rather present information in a comprehensible fashion.
- Don't ever provide lurid descriptions of the situation.
- Don't ever release names of people harmed. Refer inquires to the proper authorities.
- Don't ever answer any question with "no comment." Always explain why you can't answer (example: legal questions pending, not enough information yet). If you don't have the answer, tell the reporter that and promise to get back to him/her when you have the information – and do so.
- Don't ever ask to review the reporter's notes. If you think there is an error, discuss it with the reporter or editor.
- Don't ever favor some reporters over others; give all media equal access.
- Don't ever fail to respond to any negative impressions left by the crisis.

CRISIS MANAGERS AND CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

The following plan outlines the staffing, roles, and responsibilities of crisis managers and crisis response teams, who will work in concert with the spokespeople. Crisis managers are responsible for organizational readiness and the successful execution of the plan during a crisis, assisted by a crisis response team. Like spokespeople, crisis managers and response team members are selected and prepared – in advance – by the executive team. Regular briefings conducted by managers and/or crisis managers should take place to review responsibilities and make necessary updates to the crisis plan.

Key roles, crisis response teams, and individual responsibilities, beginning with the crisis managers, follow.

Crisis Managers:

Crisis managers are the director of public relations.

Duties of crisis manager include, but are not limited to:

- Developing and updating crisis communication plan.
- Conducting drills to test the crisis communication plan.
- At the time of crisis enact the crisis communication plan and see it is carried out.
- Coaching the CEO, vice president, managers and mobilizing the crisis response teams.
- Keep crisis preparedness top of mind.
- Ensure overall organizational readiness.

Media Relations:

Made up of key executives and corporate director of public relations, (CEO and legal counsel may be added, as needed) it is their job to:

- Establish the situation room and media center if the crisis warrants.
- Staff the situation room and media center.
- Answer all media questions regarding the crisis via telephone, e-mail, or in person.
- Prepare statements about the situation; distribute internally.
- Brief reporters about the crisis.
- Dispatch team members and other staff to secure information.
- Keep TroT owner/CEO, vice president of operations, corporate officers, and appropriate internal constituencies informed of the situation.

Fact Gathering / Situation Assessment:

Team members should determine:

- Nature and extent of the emergency.
- Number and extent of injuries, loss, effect on employees, customers, or interest groups.
- Report what is being done to correct the situation if internal or vendor-related.

This group, assembled in advance by the crisis managers, reports updates to the Media Relations group regularly.

Customer Service and Switchboard:

The switchboard is perhaps the single most important position on the crisis response team because the majority of calls concerning any situation will go there first. Operators, customer service agents, and others, must:

- Be instructed which calls to accept (media, public safety agencies, government services, and management).
- Direct all such calls to the situation room at once.
- Be given basic information and written and approved statements for callers.
- Be directed to answer no questions from the media or public about the extent or nature of the crisis (again refer to written, approved statements).
- Log all calls, especially from the media, that will be returned later.

Clerical:

This team will:

- Type facts and statements.
- Fact checks details.
- Act as messengers.
- Assist in escorting reporters to the media center.
- Perform other office duties to keep information flowing smoothly.
- Serve as an evacuation team for employees if necessary.
- Arrange for off-site facilities, as needed.

This group, assembled in advance by the vice president of operations, reports to the Media Relations Team. They may also work closely with the Fact Gathering Team.

Website/IT:

This team will:

- Secure and protect critical technology systems, as needed.
- Monitor all social media channels (with Media Relations). Usually, refrain from posting any content to social channels apart from acknowledging the crisis and that it is of critical importance and all hands are on deck.
- Provide general technical support to employees and public safety officers, as needed.
- Oversee phones and Internet access; issues due to increased call volume/website traffic.
- Distribute messages/statements via electronic channels.
 - Keep all electronic channels update-to-date and accurate.
- Outfit Situation Room and Media Center; provide audio/visual support.

CRISIS COMMUNICATION TEAM OUTLINE

CRISIS MANAGER(S)

[detail them here]

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PRIMARY SPOKESPERSON BRAND / OVERALL / ON-SITE: [detail them here]

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SECONDARY SPOKESPERSON

[detail them here]

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MEDIA RELATIONS TEAM

[detail them here]

SWITCHBOARD TEAM

[detail them here]

FACT GATHERING/ASSESSMENT TEAM

[detail them here]

CLERICAL TEAM

[detail them here]

PREPARING YOUR FACILITY FOR A CRISIS

Situation Room:

A situation room should be designated. Depending on the crisis, multiple situation rooms may be necessary. At least two telephone lines – one to receive calls, one to make calls – should be available. Those staff members answering telephones should be advised to transfer all calls concerning the crisis to the situation room.

Media Center:

It is possible many reporters will arrive to cover the story. Arrangements should be made to meet them and escort them to a media center. This room should be able to be equipped at short notice with work spaces, a podium, and public address system,

internet access, and an easel or whiteboard. Signs directing reporters to the media center should be prepared, if necessary. A staff person should be at the media center at all times, not as a spokesperson, but to assist the media.

WHAT TO DO WHEN A CRISIS OCCUR-- A STEP-BY-STEP GENERAL GUIDE

- Remain calm.
- Use your best judgment.
- First employee learning of crisis *immediately* contacts designated PR resources.

If the situation warrants, call 9-1-1 directly and bypass all other steps.

WHAT TO DO WHEN A CRISIS OCCURS - STEP-BY-STEP

1. **Conduct situation assessment with relevant managers.**
2. **Based on the level of crisis, assemble appropriate crisis teams.**
3. **Consult internal and external experts, as needed.**
4. **Develop necessary messages.**
 - General statement(s)
 - Media release
 - Talking points
 - Web statement(s) / blog post / Twitter / Facebook / Instagram
5. **Gain approval of select message(s) from relevant managers.**
6. **Internal Distribution of Messages**
7. **External Distribution of Messages**

CRISIS COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

1. Confirm Crisis Communication Teams; ensure proper, regular training.
2. Confirm local emergency contact numbers.
3. Confirm locations for situation room on-and-off site.
4. Confirm location for media center on-and-off site.
5. Confirm in-coming telephone line/number and out-going telephone line.

6. Confirm spokespeople and ensure each is well prepared.
7. Ensure Crisis Communication is regularly updated and the actions practiced.
8. Provide all staff with a wallet-sized cards with key individuals' contact details.