All Kinds of Fun:
Crisis Communications in 2020

October 13, 2020

Roger M. Friedensen, MA, APR
roger@forgecommunications.com

Bryant Haskins, APR
bryanthaskins@gmail.com
Why is crisis communication planning and management important?
REPUTATION

A reputation that took decades to build can be threatened by a single event.
“If you lose money for the firm by a bad decision, I will be understanding. If you lose reputation for the firm, I will be ruthless.”

Warren Buffet
53% of consumers expect brands to respond to a crisis within one hour

59% of consumers want brand responses to come from the CEO

90% of consumers say they are likely to shop with a brand that responds well to crises

2019 Survey, Crisp Thinking
What is a “crisis”?
Attributes

• Unexpected
• Out of the ordinary
• Unpredictable, disruptive
• Potential to undermine confidence and damage reputation
• Affects or involves multiple audiences
• Draws attention of internal and external stakeholders
And once it starts . . .
Types of crises

- Natural disasters
- Accidents (mechanical, scientific, human error)
- Legal or financial issues
- Government actions
- Criminal activities
- Employee incidents
- Environmental, health issues
- High-profile events
- Rumors
- Cyber attacks
- Social media attacks/fake news
But it can happen, and it **will** happen.

It’s not a question of if, it’s a matter of when.
Not every crisis is like this
(though it may feel like it)
Planning helps avert disaster at tank farm

Workers, firefighters knew what to do when lightning hit gasoline storage tank

Colonial Pipeline | June 2010
Start in the future and work back
Quite simply, this changed – and is still changing – everything.

>50% of people get breaking news from social media before traditional media.
2020 This Is What Happens In An Internet Minute

- Facebook
  - 1.3 Million Logins
  - 19 Million Texts Sent
- YouTube
  - 4.7 Million Videos Viewed
- Netflix
  - 764,000 Hours Watched
- Google
  - 4.1 Million Search Queries
- Instagram
  - 694,444 Scrolling Instagram
- Airbnb
  - $1.1 Million Spent Online
- Snapchat
  - 2.5 Million Snaps Created
- Tinder
  - 194,444 People Tweeting
- Twitter
  - 1.6 Million Swipes
- Reddit
  - 190 Million Emails Sent
- Twitch
  - 1,400 Downloads
- TikTok
  - 1.2 Million Views
- Amazon
  - 305 Smart Speakers Shipped
- Messenger
  - 59 Million Messages Sent
- Imgur
  - 2.5 Million Images Viewed
- Google Home
  - 1,400 Downloads

Created By:
- @LoriLewis
- @OfficiallyChadd
“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

Benjamin Franklin
The first rule

You can’t manage a crisis, but you can – and you **must** – manage your reaction.
Before a crisis

• Think about it
• Think about it some more
• Predict the worst (fun brainstorming!)
• Create crisis team, assign responsibilities, collect all contact information (crises aren’t just 9-5)
• Build consistent, compelling foundation with stakeholders through media, social media and more
• Think about it some more
Before a crisis

- **Build a crisis communication plan**
  - Choose monitoring and content systems
    - Social media + news media
    - Emails, texts, phone calls
    - Consider AI-powered sentiment analysis tools
  - Agree on the strategy, tactics and general approach
  - Update employee handbook, on-boarding, social media policy, internal procedures, etc.
  - Develop key contact lists and distribute
Before a crisis

• Build a crisis communication plan
  – Create messaging matrix by stakeholder groups
    • Employees and their families
    • Regulatory officials
    • Investors, shareholders, analysts, influencers
    • Patients, patient advocacy groups, customers, partners, vendors
    • Etc., etc., ad infinitum
Before a crisis

• Build a crisis communication plan
  – Choose monitoring and content systems
    • Social media + news media
    • Relevant hashtags and followers
    • Skilled staff
    • Emails, texts, phone calls
    • Consider AI-powered sentiment analysis tools
  – Determine social media guidelines for interaction
Before a crisis

• **Build a crisis communication plan**
  - Develop templates for statements, social posts, news releases, emails, Q&As, videos, web page, etc.
  - Identify spokespersons (consider training)
  - Assign access for social/news media accounts
  - Assess multilingual needs
  - Identify business and marketing PR metrics to monitor
  - Assess SEO status (e.g., domain authority)
  - Solidify approval process (with back-ups)
Before a crisis

• Conduct crisis simulations
  – Stress-test the plan and people
  – Stress-test the process and platforms
  – Identify gaps
When it hits

• Stop. Think. Go.
• Get the facts
• Assess the severity and potential
• Get help, if needed (legal, communication, regulatory, etc.)
• Adapt and implement crisis plan
• Listen – carefully
• Anticipate what else could happen (good and bad)
• Don’t wait. Be proactive.
When it hits

- Stay ahead of it
- Prepare strategies, tactics, messages, emails, posts, etc.
- Speak with one voice
- Tell the truth – if you mess up, ‘fess up
- Update internal + external stakeholders
- Act quickly (and wisely)
- Monitor and pivot, as needed
Social media pros/cons in crises

Advantages
- Tool to build trust in advance
- Reinforces public alerts
- Early-warning system
- Finger on the pulse
- Additional tracking tool
- Assessment tool for recovery
- Wide array of platforms

Disadvantages
- Inept/unauthorized use can make things worse
- Not everyone uses it
- Not everyone will see posts
- Inaccuracies, hoaxes, etc.
- Resource-intensive
- Need to correct errors, misunderstandings
- Can fan negative opinions
- Can be overwhelming
Afterward

- Breathe 😄
- Assess short- and long-term impact
- Assess your process
- Adjust crisis plan
- Adjust strategy, process, tactics
- Adjust messaging and communication
  - Story archetypes can help
  - Pioneer vs. rebirth
- Think some more
Keep your eye on the horizon

• Reduce/eliminate negative impacts
• Preserve/improve reputation
• Return to normal ops ASAP
• Limit competition’s ability to take advantage of the event
• Realize your goals
Recipe for failure

Lack of focus from leadership
Lack of planning and preparation
Failure to establish a detailed strategy
Lack of agreement on roles and responsibilities
Lack of follow through on commitments
Lack of good data for decisions
Lack of employee and stakeholder involvement
Poor execution of plan
Lack of urgency
Recipe for success

Leadership sees it as a priority
Clarity of accountability, authority, responsibility
Risks have been identified and assessed
Strategies and tactics in place and practiced
Key partners are part of crisis team
Crisis plan is comprehensive and ready
Media plan in place
Spokespersons identified/trained, messaging
Process exists to train, assess, revise
When is a crisis good?

• Heroes are born
• Change is accelerated
• Latent problems are faced and solved
• New strategies and ideas evolve
• Early warning systems develop
• Lessons are learned and put to use
When it comes to communication, some things have changed, but most things haven’t
Humans haven’t changed
What persuades us?
What persuades us?

Logos  Ethos  Pathos
Trustworthiness + Expertise + Dynamism = Credibility
What motivates us?

• Pain
• Pleasure
• Fear
• Hope

And it happens one person at a time . . .
Tell me a story, ppleaseeeeeeze
Message guidelines

- Concise
  - The KISS Rule
- Consistent
  - No forked tongues allowed
- Compelling
  - Logos: Language the stakeholder can understand that is supported by facts
  - Ethos: From a source the stakeholder considers credible
  - Pathos: Trigger emotions that are pertinent, meaningful and authentic
Don’t tell me how the watch was made, just tell me what time it is
Appeal to basic human instincts

- What happened?
- Are my family and I safe?
- Is this bad for me and my family? My friends?
- Is this bad for the environment?
- Who is responsible?
- Who will be punished?
- How and when are things going to be fixed?
- What is the right thing to do?
- How can this be prevented from happening again?
Communication during and after a crisis is not about pulling strings behind the scenes to “spin” the public and media.

It’s about responding effectively to preserve and strengthen your credibility, reputation and ability to operate successfully.
Top 10 ways to trash a reputation

10. Wait till the last minute: Why prepare now if it might never happen?

9. Ignore your employees or members: It’ll just distract ‘em.

8. Ignore the media: Heck, they’ll just twist the truth anyway.

7. Play by your rules and timetable: Why give a hoot about what anyone else wants?

6. Never accept responsibility or apologize: My lawyer knows best!

6b. Don’t engage in social media: It’s just too risky.
Top 10 ways to trash a reputation

5. Ignore any and all emotions: Feelings are for wimps – facts rule!

4. Cooperate only when you have to: Keep your head down and your mouth shut.

3. Provide only the bare minimum of information: Why confuse ‘em with the details?

2. Dazzle ‘em with jargon: If a little is good, then a lot is even better!

1. Ignore it, and it will go away...
Thank you
(and may the Forge be with you!)

Roger M. Friedensen, MA, APR
roger@forgecommunications.com

Bryant Haskins, APR
bryanthaskins@gmail.com