




Preventing the Time Bomb from Exploding

Preparing for the unexpected




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**Preventing the Time Bomb
from Exploding**
Managing the Communication Role in a Crisis

DEVENEY COMMUNICATION
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cri • sis (krī' sīs) *n.*, *pl* -ses (-sēs).

1. An extraordinary occurrence with potential to harm the reputation of a business. 2. A crucial point or situation; turning point. 3. Uncontrollable. 4. Publicly scrutinized.



When crisis mishandled

- Loss of consumer, investor or outside stakeholder confidence
- Loss of employee moral and productivity
- Long-term reputation damage, irreparable harm
- Increased liability exposure



When crisis handled well

- Heroes are born
- Accelerated change, improvements
- Problems are faced
- New strategies evolve
- Market differentiation
- Increased visibility and name recognition
- Opportunity to show competency and leadership
- Improved customer and employee relations
- Lessons learned for future preparation



- Can't control crisis
- Can control company response
- Mishandling small details can hurt
- Learn to deal with crisis before one happens



Crisis is...

- Not a tornado, fire, flood, scandal
- Not being able to provide minimum level of service needed and expected
- Threatening to:
 - Growth
 - Stability
 - Employee/investor confidence
 - Reputation
 - License to operate



Don't underestimate

- A single disgruntled customer
- The Internet
- The ability of customers to detect unreasonable profit, cover ups
- Customer calls = early warning



Crisis, Step By Step

- Identification
- Alert management, team
- Implement crisis response plan
- Notify security, switchboard
- Refine key messages, response
- Monitor news media
- Inform employees
- Evaluate yourself—how did you do?

*Never assume a crisis is over until
your audience says it's over*



Goals

- Protect long term image
- Shorten lifecycle
- Make strategic decisions
- Limit negative consequences
- Show control
- Create appropriate image and reputation
- Inform employees



What to Expect

- Something you didn't expect
- Information demands
- Insufficient information
- Aggressive questioning
- Escalating flow of events
- High stress levels; anxiety, fatigue
- Severe time constraints



Pitfalls

- No action plan
- Timing
- Technology (phone, network) down: flyers, yard signs
- Media pressure before preparing
- Unprepared/overwhelmed spokesperson
- Problems with crowd control



Why do we plan

- Gives vision and equilibrium we need when...Everything Goes Wrong
- Defines roles and responsibilities
- Roadmap for prioritized action
- Ensures an effective reaction
- Gives time for decision making



Plan ahead: do it today

- Existing communication program
- Key messages/goals
- Weaknesses/vulnerabilities
- Competition
- Media policy
- Media/key contacts
- Current news/industry issues
- Make deposits in the account of public good will



The plan should be

- Revised
- Rehearsed
- Timely
- Concise
- Consistent
- Credible
- Accurate
- Electronic and print
- Reflect company values



A Crisis Plan Includes

- Exposure issues
- Scope of crisis
- Composition of team
- Team roles
- Contact information/lists
- Media policy
- Locations for command posts
- Press kit template
- Web site plan
- Target audiences
- Anticipated questions/answers



Role of Counsel

- Achieve consensus
- Safeguard the public
- Ensure honesty
- Provide perspective
- Focus on goal and think long term
- Be proactive and take charge
- Think big picture, tiny detail
- Manage perceptions and expectations
- Provide analysis and feedback



Your Responsibility

- Instill confidence in your various publics
- Place the crisis in its proper perspective
- Develop themes to tell the story:
 - How has your organization prepared for the crisis
 - How has your organization helped others in previous similar situations
 - What advances have you made in preparation for situations like this
 - What are some of the successes you've achieved
 - What have you done to prevent this crisis
 - Are you perceived as the "leader" in this area



Team Positions/Responsibilities*

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| • Crisis coordinator | • Media center manager |
| • Strategist(s) | • Log keeper(s)/ administrative support |
| • Lawyer(s) | • Courier(s) |
| • Spokesperson(s) | • Multimedia support |
| • Info gatherer(s) | • Victim group manager |
| • Writer(s) | • Security |
| • Web manager | |
| • Command post manager | |



Who should be spokesperson?

- Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- Vice President
- Director of Communication
- A Third-Party representative
- Hired gun



Golden Rules

- Tell the truth
- Communicate quickly
- Take responsibility
- Do not attempt to cover up
- Prepare management
- Have and update a crisis plan/kit
- Practice makes perfect



Crisis Communication Fundamentals: 1.) Establish Ground Rules

- Be specific
- Be practical
- Clearly communicate consequences



Crisis Communication Fundamentals:
2.) Be consistent

- Consistent and convenient locations
- Regular press briefings
- Spokespersons
- Messaging
- Media contacts



Crisis Communication Fundamentals:
3.) Develop trusted sources

- Discern between reputable and non-reputable media, spokespeople, advocates
- Avoid going off the record



Crisis Communication Fundamentals:
4.) Develop and execute a daily plan

- Keep it simple
- Formulate with input/participation from key players
- Be prepared to respond quickly



**Crisis Communication Fundamentals:
5.) Prepare for every interview**

- Anticipate and practice questions
- Practice delivering messages
- Identify speculation



**Crisis Communication Fundamentals:
6.) Treat the media equally**

- Maintain a business relationship with media
- Don't burn bridges
- Avoid tabloid media
- Don't give breaking news an exclusive



10 Points to Remember

1. Ensure all managers and employees know the organization's goals, objectives, roles and mission
2. Conduct a vulnerability audit
3. Identify, recruit and train a crisis management team
4. Allocate resources for a crisis operations room
5. Develop a crisis management/communication plan based upon vulnerability audit



10 Points to Remember

- 6. Identify your:
 - target audiences
 - your messengers
 - the appropriate message
 - your delivery systems
- 7. Conduct crisis management exercises
- 8. Adjust your plan
- 9. Designate a spokesperson for each situation
- 10. Only crisis management can lead to crisis prevention



Crisis Communication and the Internet

- Internet can increase and decrease your vulnerability
- Internet is a maturing news source
- Internet supplements TV and plays a global role
- Internet transcends the telephone
- Unlike newspapers, Internet has no space or time limitation
- Internet is non discriminatory
- Can quickly spread rumors but can also quickly extinguish them



Minimize the Risk

- Go out of your way to take care of employees
- Make deposits in bank of good will
- Monitor industry news coverage, conditions and situations
- Set up systems for early detection and warnings about crises
- Identification and/or reduction of eventual risks
- Establish good contacts with media and community
- Conduct a vulnerability audit



Damage evaluation

- Don't rush back to normal operations
- Critical to come to terms with the possible damage
- How to measure damage*?
- Publish an after-action report*, distribute to key players



Katrina experience

- Recreate entire organization
- Individual evacuation plans
- Remote office resources
- Web-based client, project, firm management systems
- Employees as first priority
- Payroll uninterrupted
- Mobile work environment



Technology

- Learn from case studies: cell v. satellite v. text messaging
- Phone system: voice activated, 800 #, forwarding, online voicemail
- Remote-access e-mail server
- DC TimeTracker™
- Transition to virtual office



Lessons Learned

- Research, plan, tap your resources
- Triage media inquiries
- Partnerships, collaboration
- Secure a proactive control position
- Time management
- Technology
- Be compassionate



Proactive Control Position

- Manage discussion, make the story or frame the story:
proactive plan with rapid response systems
- Partnerships
- Daily updates in coverage issues, talking points
- Message management
- Third-party advocates
- Be the go to resource; deliver content



Manage discussion, frame the story


Police brutality; Mardi Gras; potable water; "Chocolate City"; health and safety

- Create context
- Third-party advocates
- Message management




Crisis Response, Reputation Management

1. Communicate
 - Accurate information
 - Candor and respect
2. Put in context
3. Learn, improve
4. Follow Through




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Additional resource

Additional resources including case studies, articles and presentations, are located at www.deveney.com

To learn more, check out:

"Communication & Lawyers: Winning in both courts", and "Lessons Learned: Creating a Comprehensive Crisis Response Plan Post-Sept. 11"

<http://www.deveney.com/publications/publications.asp>



**Responsibilities:
Crisis Manager**

- Oversee all communication during the crisis
- Report directly to senior management
- Direct the command post
- Should be a highly skilled communication professional
- Should delegate “normal” responsibilities during the crisis
- Understand organization and its capabilities
- Thorough understanding of the corporate culture



**Responsibilities:
Crisis Coordinator**

- Coordinate care for injured/displaced persons
- Coordinate care of other damaged persons/companies
- Contact appropriate authorities
- Report directly to the Crisis Manager



**Responsibilities:
Strategist(s)**

- Internal employees or external consultants
- Counsel crisis team and senior management
- Sees big picture, anticipate internal and external demands
- Should not be tied down implementing tasks, just advise and observe
- Should be privy to all information



**Responsibilities:
Lawyer(s)**

- Define who is at fault
- Advise on likelihood of future litigation
- Should be privy to all information
- Conduct investigation
- Retain experts
- Handle court orders
- Handle regulatory agencies
- Report directly to senior management
- Work closely with strategists
- Should be media trained



**Responsibilities:
Spokesperson(s)**

- Should be media trained
- Articulate and level headed under stress
- Should not have any other responsibilities during crisis
- Oversee all communication during the crisis
- Conduct follow up to designated audiences and evaluation
- Direct the media center



**Responsibilities:
Information Gatherer(s)**

- Media trained
- Understand what media needs and wants
- Liaison with other responders and agencies
- Gather information about the crisis
- Monitor all news coverage
- Monitor attitudes/moral of all identified audiences
- Can condense gathered info into concise points



**Responsibilities:
Writer(s)**

- Quickly comprehend facts and key data
- Perform under pressure and on deadline
- Understand legal ramifications of public comment
- Work closely with strategists and lawyers



**Responsibilities:
Web Manager**

- Monitor
- Engage phantom site
- Identify rogue sites, list serves, bulletin board threats
- Maintain Web site



How to measure damage?

- Intensity of public response:
- Public opinion surveys
- Employee moral
- Response of regulators and government officials
- Legal action against you
- Duration of media coverage



After-action report

- Summary of crisis
- Action taken
- What worked
- What didn't
- Discussion of results
- Lessons learned
- Summary and/or copy of media coverage
