

Steps to manage a PR crisis

Public relations crisis management aims to prevent or lessen the damage from unexpected events that may threaten the company's operations or reputation. But how do you know you are facing a PR crisis and what measures should you undertake to cope with it?

Ask yourself these three questions:

- Question #1. Will this spoil your brand's image?
- Question #2. Are there any threats to the safety and health of your workers or customers?
- Question #3. Can it lead to the loss of trust (inside or outside the company)?

If you answer "Yes" to any of the following questions, it's time to act. Below are several steps you can take to manage a PR crisis effectively:

Prepare for a crisis

Planning for negative scenarios is crucial. With a solid crisis plan in place, you can efficiently navigate challenging situations. Saving valuable time, avoiding confusion, and minimizing stress.

Time is a precious resource. You should be able to quickly address issues without scrambling for contact information or social media credentials. Preparation is key.

To ensure effective crisis communication, it is wise to establish a social media crisis protocol within your PR plan.

Take a moment to evaluate the appropriateness of your planned social posts. Restrict your social calendar and focus on sharing messages that specifically address the crisis.

Engage with your audience by providing genuine and empathetic responses to their comments.

Maintaining composure is key.

Build a crisis response team

To ensure effective crisis management, it is crucial to have a democratic approach with shared responsibilities. Assemble a crisis PR response team and listen to them. This group must be as diverse as your audience. Include different races, genders, ages, perspectives, and political beliefs, among other factors.

By embracing diversity, you can better address the needs and concerns of your audience with empathy and understanding.

Remember, a diverse team will offer varied perspectives. Could your messages be prone to misinterpretation? Do they risk adding fuel to the crisis fire? What might resonate with some could offend or confuse others.

Run all your future communication by the team. Use them as a focus group to obtain valuable feedback. Trust in their insights and make informed decisions. With this approach, you will be better equipped to navigate crises and uphold your brand's reputation.

Your PR crisis response team strategy should include...

- Details of who to notify when a crisis hits. This will depend on the level of severity.
- Ideally, your CEO should lead your crisis team, along with your head of PR and legal.
- Establish a chain of command and an approval process - CEO, marketing manager, legal, HR, etc.
- Before a crisis strikes, nominate who will speak on behalf of your company - your

media spokesperson. Reacting quickly with a unified voice is essential, as multiple voices can lead to confusion and worsen the situation.

Identifying the right spokespeople

Your spokespeople must have...

- Skills that fit

Online comms? A strong wordsmith? Experience being in front of the camera? Strong under pressure?

- Level of authority

The nature of the crisis will dictate the level of authority required. National disaster, loss of life - demands your CEO or senior leader at the helm. Along with external communicators - TV, public meetings, radio, press - you'll need someone internally to update the team.

- Appropriate training

This keeps you prepared, and ready to respond. This isn't a marketing opportunity. It's about protecting your reputation. Ensure your spokespeople are up to speed by hiring training consultants if the skills aren't available internally.

Assigning dedicated individuals for each communication channel can greatly enhance the effectiveness of your crisis management efforts.

Create your PR crisis management plan

When facing a crisis, the influx of information requests can be overwhelming. To demonstrate your control and competence, preparation is crucial. This is where your crisis communication plan truly excels. It should encompass the following key components:

- A to-do checklist - It can be challenging to keep up when everyone is in a rush.
- Contact details of key people - aaargh... the head of support is on holiday and I don't have the deputy's mobile number.
- Who are you going to call? Experts, friendly journalists, influencers, lawyers.
- Draft messages - templates for press releases, social media posts, interview Q&As, etc.

To develop a preliminary plan, engage in brainstorming sessions with your PR crisis team. Seek input from various customer-facing departments such as support, product, sales, legal, and others. Explore and where possible role-play all potential crisis scenarios that could arise.

You can easily predict some crises, such as mass redundancies, acquiring a competitor, or C-level termination. Let's face these challenges head-on and navigate through them with confidence.

Brainstorming brings benefits...

- By changing an existing process, you might discover you can resolve a potential crisis before it hits.
- Pre-written responses can give you a head start if/when a real PR crisis strikes

While it may be challenging to anticipate or acknowledge certain crises, it is crucial to maintain an honest approach. Claiming that your product is flawless and immune to recalls is unrealistic. Things will go wrong if you're not transparent.

Roleplay

To prepare for crises, it is crucial to simulate and diligently practice your response strategies. Certain industries may be more predictable. For example, the food industry should consider issues like food poisoning, rodent infestation, or contaminated products.

By compiling a comprehensive list of potential crises, you can showcase your ability to effectively address them. Whether that means well-crafted messaging, adept media responses, skillful interviews, or impactful press releases.

You can customize these communication templates to suit any future crisis scenario. Ensuring a confident and persuasive approach when navigating challenging circumstances.

Create holding statement templates

To effectively handle a crisis, it is crucial to develop holding statements ahead of potential scenarios. These statements serve as adjustable templates ready to address unforeseen crises as well.

For instance, imagine an airline impacted by a natural disaster. In the absence of concrete information, it is prudent to limit official messages. However, a well-crafted holding statement can provide reassurance:

"Our top priority is the safety of our passengers and team, and we've activated our crisis response plan. We are actively working to gather all the necessary details. These will be promptly communicated through our website and social media channels."

Regular review of holding statements is imperative. Make updates and introduce new ones as needed to ensure preparedness.

Communication & intelligence analysis

Through social listening, you can find early warning signs of possible PR issues. Make a list of key things to monitor. These include your brand, trending topics, key personnel, influencers, hashtags, products, competitors, and industry news.

Communication channels

In today's digital age, effective communication is key to reaching your audience. It's crucial to leverage social media for its unparalleled speed and efficiency.

During times of crisis, social media plays a pivotal role, as it allows information to spread rapidly. By not being present on these platforms, you risk losing control over the narrative.

Intelligence gathering

Monitoring what consumers say about you is crucial for identifying and addressing negative trends in real time. This includes keeping an eye on social media, the press, review sites, blog posts, employees, customers, influencers, and competitors. During a crisis, monitoring feedback is vital for adapting your response strategy effectively.

Regular trend analysis ensures that you stay informed about consumer discussions, pain points, preferences, and competitor activities. Remember, a monitoring system isn't just for crises.

A robust social listening strategy not only helps identify negative trends. It also captures positive user-generated content, product feedback, audience sentiment, and trending topics. Utilizing social data is essential for shaping your marketing, communication strategy, and messaging with confidence.

Identify influencers & brand ambassadors

Influencers are not only valuable for marketing campaigns and product launches but can also influence opinions during a crisis. The selection of appropriate individuals depends on the nature of the crisis at hand. expertise and capabilities could help you navigate any situation with confidence.

Get the facts before you speak

In times of panic, it is crucial to stay composed. Take decisive action by following your crisis procedure and gathering all the necessary facts before speaking. Remember to maintain a factual approach and avoid speculation.

Accept responsibility & apologize

Recognize your error, offer a sincere apology, and take ownership. Be genuine, show empathy, and be authentic. Emphasize the importance of apologizing without fear. It's the correct course of action and has the potential to swiftly alter the dynamics of the situation.

Hiding your mistakes will ultimately result in exposure, a tarnished brand reputation, and diminished value. Transparency is paramount, as consumers gravitate towards trustworthy and dependable companies.

Refusing to acknowledge negative situations, disregarding issues, or shifting blame will only exacerbate the problem when the truth inevitably emerges. Instead, take charge by openly communicating your plans to rectify the situation and outlining steps to prevent its recurrence.

Write your PR crisis messages

Having all the facts readily available empowers you to effectively shape your crisis response strategy. Address what occurred, outline your solution, and demonstrate your commitment to future improvements.

Be open, be honest

By promptly conveying your apology, explanation, and solution, you can expedite the process of restoring your brand's reputation. The sooner you take action, the sooner you can put an end to any negative commentary.

Don't make false promises

This will worsen the situation. You should consistently prioritize factual accuracy. Recognize and seek support from those inside and outside your business who can bring vital knowledge.

Be reactive

Lyft faced a crisis when a passenger's cat vanished after a journey. The company responded by providing investigators to find the cat. They also provided real-time updates for their consumers.

Empathize

Ensuring the survival of your business goes beyond just preserving the value of your stock. It includes the well-being of the public and your employees. By prioritizing their needs, you can build a stronger, more resilient organization.

Don't flood with messages

Three to four is an optimal number, tailored to the specific platform you're posting on. For example, a tweet should include a link to your website statement. This approach ensures maximum impact and engagement with your audience.

Provide clarity

Everyone should fully understand the situation and understand the necessary actions. Instead of causing panic, it's important to demonstrate an understanding of the crisis. Then outline the steps needed to prevent future incidents.

Choose your channels of distribution

The choice will depend on your typical corporate positioning and overall communications strategy. Consider the channels that resonate most effectively with

your brand when engaging your audience. These can include blogs, social media, TV, press, and more. Take into account the unique characteristics of each platform as you make informed decisions.

- Social media involves conversation - be ready to talk and control your messages
- Press releases are broadcast globally and are accessible to news agencies
- Blog posts give you greater control, plus you're talking with your company voice
- Television needs experience, training, and an agreed script - great for talking to a wider audience

Social media is an incredible platform that empowers us with a strong voice. We can express our enthusiasm, voice concerns, engage in discussions, and share our thoughts freely. Yet, some brands feel apprehensive about this freedom of expression. They hesitate, hold back, or even ignore the potential impact.

However, it's important to understand that consumers are indifferent to whether brands choose to participate or not. If they have complaints, they will voice them.

This necessitates brands to actively monitor and be prepared to engage. They should proactively post messages, respond to negative comments, and establish a strong presence. By doing so, brands can effectively connect with their audience and foster meaningful relationships.

Post-crisis review

Monitoring. Updating. Analyzing. Learning.

Consumers are reading, ignoring, or commenting on your messages. It's crucial to continue monitoring the situation. Is the PR crisis still lingering?

Recovering from a crisis takes time, and there's a chance it could resurface. You must be prepared to provide additional statements, interviews, press releases, and social media responses if necessary.

How is your brand reputation faring after the PR crisis? Utilize sentiment analysis to gauge consumer sentiment towards the incident, your response, and the current state of affairs.

Experiencing a PR crisis can be tough, but it's also an opportunity for growth. You will learn from this experience. Helping you prevent future crises, address issues, improve company operations, and deliver better products. Embrace the lessons learned and emerge stronger than before.

After the crisis, answer these questions...

- How did your team manage the PR crisis?
- What should you improve in your crisis plan?
- What should you change to avoid it happening again?
- How will you recover your credibility, and repair your reputation?