

What Is Your Plan For When Things Hit The Fan: Creating A Crisis Management Plan



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Crisis management and crisis preparedness may not seem like pressing matters when the going is good. It can be all too easy to disregard the need for a plan. But what happens when a crisis hits and you're not prepared?

That crisis begins to spiral. Your lack of preparedness immediately sets you on the back foot. The crisis then exacerbates and your reputation

starts to degrade because your audiences now perceive you as either incapable or uncaring.

Why Have Crisis Management Plans In Place?

One badly managed crisis can be enough to cause serious long-term damage to a business. This is why having a crisis management plan in place is so important.

The adage "today's news is yesterday's chip paper" is wildly outdated. Yes, news moves fast, but crises can linger for longer than you may think. Particularly if they unfold within social media, the speed at which issues spread and gather volume is pretty staggering.

A crisis management plan helps you put systems in place to react to issues, get ahead of problems and minimize long-term damage to your brand reputation and your operations. Having these plans in place can protect your teams and assets, reassure stakeholders and, in some cases, support legal arguments.

Developing A PR Crisis Management Plan

How can you create a crisis management plan for something that you arguably can't predict? That's a question I hear a lot, and while you can't predict the exact nature of a crisis, you can anticipate situations, even if they seem unlikely, and map out your crisis response.

This is called crisis preparedness, and it is the first step in creating an effective crisis management plan.

Crisis Preparedness

To best explain crisis preparedness, let's explore a hypothetical: A motor vehicle company has a large manufacturing plant in England.

There are many potential crises that could arise in this line of work. It could be an industrial accident resulting in the injury of one or multiple

workers. There could be a case of force majeure (events that are unforeseeable and unavoidable due to a greater force) that damages or destroys the plant. Or perhaps there could be inappropriate employee behavior resulting in legal action.

These crises are all very different. So, when running a crisis preparedness session, workshop and roundtable various issues to establish responses to each.

For instance, there may be some crises that require internal reactions only. Other crises may need to go higher up the chain, resulting in written statements for the media, a public response on social media channels or, in some cases, broadcast media appearances.

A crisis roundtable is quite simply a cause-and-effect exercise; here is the issue, here is our process for response.

What's critical is establishing a crisis response team.

Establishing A Crisis Management Team

Your crisis team, when armed with a crisis response plan covering multiple scenarios, can cascade issues up the chain of command. It's about understanding and establishing who needs to know what and when.

Are your operations affected? Then the COO needs to be brought into the situation. If there are potential legal ramifications, then bringing in legal departments or outside counsel is vital.

With these cascade systems in place, your crisis management team can know exactly who to report to for any given issue. From there, you can mount a far more effective response.

It's when these systems and procedures aren't in place that further issues arise. Businesses flounder and fail to respond because they've been caught off guard. This can snowball into a much larger PR crisis.

The Importance Of Good Internal Comms And Culture

Culture and internal communications play a key role in crisis response. A company with a positive culture can inherently better manage crises than those without. Why?

Within a positive culture, people tend to care more. When people care more, they are diligent in reporting the early warning signals of a crisis brewing. People operating within a negative culture will likely not prioritize organizational misdeeds. When someone spots a potential crisis and doesn't flag it, the entire crisis communications plan falls apart.

Your crisis response capabilities are only as strong as your company culture.

Key Tips And Takeaways

What should you take away from all this? Let's look at the major pieces of the crisis management plan.

If You're At Fault, Accept Responsibility

It may seem like a bitter pill to swallow. But, if you've been hit by a crisis caused by your own making, own up to it. Be honest. Your audiences will generally be more receptive to contrition and honesty and that can help you rebuild brand trust in the wake of a crisis.

Respond To Media Requests

A crisis has hit, and you've been approached by the media for comment. You have to respond, but you don't always have to provide an immediate response to the crisis at hand. Buy yourself time and don't rush into making a media statement. But always respond.

It can be very damaging, particularly with traditional media when a business offers no comment on a situation. You may have done nothing

wrong at all. But in the eyes of the public, no comment comes across as an admission of guilt.

Plan Often

Don't just plan for a crisis as a one-off. Make your crisis preparedness a yearly thing.

Bring Your Teams Into The Discussions

Involve your teams and bring them on the journey. You may be in the C-suite, but you should never underestimate the day-to-day operational insight that your wider teams can bring.

When everyone has a stake in the game, you cover much more ground and you'll find things run much smoother as a result.

Final Thoughts

When the going is good, you can be tempted to think that you don't need crisis management plans. But it only takes one issue to undo a lot of hard-won reputations. Looking back, you'll likely regret needing a crisis management strategy and not having one far more than if you have one, but don't need it.

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