



Public Relations

TOP TEN PR CONCERNS FOR CRISIS

Remember always that you will be tried first in the court of public opinion. In today's world of instant, online communication and 24-hour news channels, your first concern must be surviving long enough to have to worry about potential litigation. That means a rapid response to any crisis.

Triangular strategy. Use a triangular structure for decision-making. The points on your triangle - the members on your team - must include an executive with absolute decision-making power, in-house *and* outside legal counsel, and in-house (if available) *and* outside public relations counsel. *Outside PR and legal counsel provides expertise that is unfettered by internal organization dynamics and conflicts.*

Get your story out fast, first, and fully. First to market has greater credibility and retention. If you don't tell your story someone else will tell it for you. Empathize with any damaged parties.

Every story needs a hero and a villain. Choose who you want to be and behave accordingly. Careful strategy can move you from villain to hero status. Take the high road in all matters.

Turn talking points into action points. By focusing on a solution, you direct the story away from the crisis, moving it from bad news to good.

The media is a conduit, not the enemy. Use it. When you're speaking to the media, you're not just talking to the reporter in front of you. Over his or her shoulder are all of your stakeholders: stockholders, directors, employees, customers, competitors, regulators, vendors and others that need to know you are in control of the situation.

Investigate publicly. In a severe situation it may be necessary to conduct internal and external investigations to prevent the appearance of a cover up or other impropriety. Hire independent, outside experts and provide them *carte blanche* to conduct their investigations. Announce this publicly and pledge to reveal the outcome of these investigations.

Control the story. You can run but you can't hide. The best defense is a good offense. You can control the story by *taking* control, putting the story out in public yourself and inviting the media to return for regularly scheduled updates from - you.

Control the message. A single spokesperson and lots of team organization is needed to ensure a consistent message across all communication fronts.

Don't delegate leadership and visibility. Senior management must be out in front for credibility.

Plan for your crisis. Only two types of organizations exist in today's world. Those that have a crisis communication plan and those that wish they had one. Sooner or later something will hit the fan. The biggest mistake is in thinking "It can't happen here." Consult with an outside public relations expert with practical media experience and an understanding of crisis situations.

Purchase "goodwill capital." Organizations that have a good public image to start with are less prone to damage when crisis strikes. That image - "good will capital" - is "purchased" through a comprehensive public relations plan, developed over time and regularly maintained.

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