



PR POINTERS



Handling a Public Relations Crisis

[By Nihit Aurora]

We are living in the information age. Anything that is not in tune with “normal” corporate behavior can immediately become publicly known and emerge as a full-blown crisis. Crises invariably affect organizations during their life cycles, but how they handle them is what determines their success.

Quite often, organizations face issues that threaten to turn into PR crises if not handled correctly. During such instances, organizations must step in to handle impending crises quickly and efficiently. Some companies that have faced major PR crises in the past are Firestone, Johnson & Johnson, and Pepsi Corporation.

During a PR crisis, the affected company faces negative attention from consumers, shareholders, consumer organizations, government bodies, investigation agencies, media professionals, and others. Therefore, it is crucial that organizations know how to handle PR crisis situations.

Some organizations try to conceal such situations by pretending that the crises never occurred or that they have no knowledge of them. In many cases, the situation gets out of hand and becomes unmanageable. Consequently, the company’s reputation takes a severe beating as it does more wrong than right while trying to rectify the mistake.

Despite the measures that many companies adopt to hide PR crises, the truth will eventually get out and become public, causing colossal damage. This can also result in revenue losses and plunging share prices as customers no longer trust their products and services.

What organizations and companies need are not makeshift solutions for combating crises but effective long-standing crisis management plans. Every effective crisis management plan has a predefined plan of action at its core. Every statement or action initiated should stem from this central plan.

As soon as an organization becomes aware that there is an impending crisis, it should immediately consider all of the events and details that surround the crisis. Additionally, it should draw up a plan of action that considers all possible alternatives. This plan of action will allow company executives to act rapidly and effectively.

The plan should outline what the company plans to protect. This might include the company’s ethics, philosophy, reputation, ongoing and future business, current revenue, and/or share price. Additionally, the plan should outline any difficulties the company might face in its day-to-day operations as a result of the crisis.

At the same time, the organization should immediately create a crisis management team headed by a senior manager or top management professionals who are veterans in terms of company policy and key operational areas. Individuals on the crisis team may include legal, human resources,

operations, corporate communications, and/or research personnel.

Crisis management is usually not the forte of amateurs, so companies generally should not allow junior team members to handle PR crisis situations. During the time of the crisis, the crisis team should concentrate completely on the crisis rather than day-to-day duties. At the same time, the crisis team should be in constant contact with all involved in the crisis, while taking strong coordinated action to curtail its damaging effects.

Crisis management teams also need effective communications equipment and dedicated centers to handle the situations with which they are dealing. Therefore, organizations should set aside crisis centers equipped with the latest communications technology.

ON THE NET

Planning for a Crisis
iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Spring01/Hayes

Free Management Library: Crisis Management
www.managementhelp.org/crisis/crisis.htm

12Manage: Crisis Management
www.12manage.com/methods_crisis_management_advice.html

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