

## **PUTTING TOGETHER A BASIC CRISIS PLAN**

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Effective crisis management can not work without the presence of a detailed yet simple to implement crisis management plan. Often viewed as complex to create, the best crisis management plans are simple to roll out, flexible enough to change according to the situations at hand and offer a great deal of reassurance to those responsible for crisis management.

### **Where do you start?**

Before you can plan for a crisis you need to know what issues and events you are going to be planning for. The best way to do this is to look at your company and its products and services it offers and ask yourself the following questions:

- What issues does my company face on a daily basis?
- What events would I consider as a crisis?
- What crises have happened in the past?

Typically these questions need to be asked to a group of employees that are gathered from across the company representing all different departments. Each one will have a solid grasp as to what is a crisis for their particular department.

### **Who should be on a crisis management team?**

Now that you know which crises you could be facing you need to select a crisis management team. Typically it includes the MD, and the various heads of the following departments: IT, finance, legal affairs, marketing, HR, customer relations and if necessary, selected client facing staff. Many companies also choose to have their board directors or a selection of them on the crisis management team. Allowance must be made to bring in external consultants and specialists like the police, fire department, utility companies and insurance advisors etc.

### **Designated spokesperson**

The crisis team will need to have a spokesperson who will address all interested parties on behalf of the company. The spokesperson must be well versed in all aspects of the company and have full knowledge of its day to day functioning, products, solutions and supply chain.

### **How will the team prepare for a crisis?**

Once the spokesperson is selected and you have a crisis management team and know what potential crises you will face, the crisis management team needs to get itself crisis ready. This is accomplished in five steps:

#### **1. Identified crises**

A brainstorming session needs to be held to identify all particular crisis types that could face a company. Particular care must be taken to ensure the likely and unlikely crises are identified.

#### **2. Prepared statements**

Once the different crisis types have been identified, a series of "pre-prepared statements" need to be developed that can be issued to the media should any of the range of identified crises occur. Be very careful not to use these statements as marketing opportunities.

#### **3. Collateral materials**

A detailed collateral file needs to be created. This needs to include a series of company specific documents, photographs of spokespeople and ready made press packs that can be sent out to any journalist or interested party.

#### **4. Roles and responsibilities**

Each person on the crisis team needs to have particular roles and responsibilities that they have to take ownership of. Typically it should be in their area of competency. Most importantly, each person must be able to work independently as well as part of an integrated team.

#### **5. Contact list**

The whole objective of having a contact log is to be able to get hold of any crisis team member anytime and anywhere. Therefore, a list of all people directly and indirectly related to crisis

management needs to be maintained. This must include all home, work, fax and mobile numbers. Relevant e-mail addresses, both home, work and web based (yahoo etc). In certain circumstances we also recommend that the contact details of crisis team members' spouses are included.

### **Put together the actual crisis plan**

The crisis plan needs to exist as a complete document in both soft and hard copy. A crisis plan is never deemed as 'final,' it must be continuously updated as situations and the environment in which the organisation operates undergoes particular changes. Consistent monitoring of these market issues and conditions will allow the crisis team to prepare for almost any eventuality.

### **Media training**

The spokesperson needs to communicate consistently for the duration of the crisis and needs to be intensely media trained. Having the 'gift of the gab' does not mean someone is able to talk to the media, particularly in a crisis. The spokesperson needs to understand how to deliver targeted messages for radio, TV and print. He/she needs to understand the difference between talking to daily newspapers compared to industry specific newspapers.

A very important part of media training is knowing how to deal with difficult reporters and questions. Once a spokesperson has been media trained it does not mean they can face the media anytime, consistent practice is necessary and it is recommended that the crisis team attend a refresher course once every six months.

It is also recommended that the entire crisis management team is also media trained as a contingency should the spokesperson be in a situation where he/she can not be interviewed immediately.

### **Last but not least**

Practice, practice, practice! All crisis teams need to practice regularly for all the incidences that they have identified. Typically we advise that a crisis exercise should be held twice to three times per year. Being well prepared includes being well drilled and focused.

### **Further media information:**

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