

IN-DEPTH SELF-ANALYSIS CAN HELP YOUR COMPANY WEATHER THE STORM

Crisis management is sorely neglected in the South African corporate world, with few organisations investing the time needed to take a hard look at their own vulnerabilities.

"A vulnerability audit is the most important component of any crisis management plan," says Evan Bloom, MD of Crisis Communications Consultancy. "It comprises a thorough self-inspection that identifies potential crises before they occur and paves the way for the creation of a crisis communications plan that will allow an organisation to avoid, or at least minimise, the negative impact of such crises."

Identifying potential risks enables an organisation to determine which factors pose the greatest threats and where the single points of failure lie in the business. "Based on these factors, the organisation must undertake an exhaustive scenario planning exercise," says Bloom, cautioning that this does not mean a quick one-hour session around the table. "It's a process that can take up to a month or more as you compile questions and answers that will provide a snapshot of how the company works, and where the threats lie. We're talking possibilities and probabilities. By integrating the results, the company will know what to plan for."

Once a vulnerability audit has been concluded, Bloom says the organisation must prepare its people. "You have to provide training and simulations for your teams, crisis leadership coaching for your corporate leaders, and seminars for your managers and employees."

Bloom says the benefits speak for themselves. "A comprehensive vulnerability audit can help an organisation prevent a crisis before it happens, reduce response times, correct operational weaknesses, and greatly reduce the cost of any crisis.

He points out that crisis management is a highly complex task that should be handled by specialists. "Just about every public relations company out there offers some form of crisis management, but crises must be handled by professionals. If you need heart surgery, you will go to a cardiologist, not a GP."

He cautions against crisis management documents that explain what a crisis is, but offer no solutions other than the issuing of a few press releases. "A crisis touches every stakeholder in the organisation, both internally and externally. In those circumstances, communicating with the media is one small part of a whole process which must include elements such as internal and external communication, customer relationship management, supply chain management and logistics. It's not just about managing bad publicity, but also about keeping the business moving forward."

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Further information:

Crisis Communications Consultancy

TEL: +27 (0)11 4871171

E-MAIL: info@crisiscomms.com

INTERNET: www.crisiscomms.com

