

For Immediate Release **The Top 15 Mistakes In Crisis Management**

With a wide variety of crises regularly occurring in South Africa and around the world, it has become apparent that there are numerous basic mistakes companies continue to make when it comes to crisis management.

“The reality is that companies and organisations do not follow the basic rules and often land up in trouble when a crisis strikes,” says Evan Bloom, managing director of Crisis Communications Consultancy. “There are dozens of political and business crises that occur around the world on a weekly basis, but organisations simply refuse to learn how to handle them effectively.”

Bloom has identified the following as the top 15 mistakes companies make when dealing with a crisis:

1. Not running vulnerability audits

Companies are not running vulnerability audits and are, in essence, ignoring the value these audits bring in identifying areas of potential risk. Because these areas of risk may result in a PR crisis, companies are advised to take steps to close all potential gaps identified by a vulnerability audit.

2. Poor scenario planning

How do you know if you can manage crises if you have not examined the various scenarios you need to plan for? Most companies ignore planning for various scenarios before they happen because it is assumed that it can be ‘sorted out when it happens’. They soon realise that scenario preparation takes time and resources and it is too late to start preparing when a critical event happens.

3. No PR crisis plan

This is the biggest mistake companies make. They do not realise that a PR crisis plan gives them a crisis management framework and the various strategies they need to deal with the disaster and communicate with all relevant parties. When a crisis breaks, they spend more time trying to work out what happened, what to do and who should be doing it. By the time they have a basic framework in place, the media may well have started reporting the news, staff

are speculating and clients are feeling uneasy with the company's inability to deal with the issues at hand.

4. No crisis exercises

Very few companies hold mock exercises and drills to test their crisis communications and readiness plans. Companies need to learn from businesses that regularly test their business continuity plans. These test exercises help prepare the company to deal with a crisis and also test all the processes that they have put in place to ensure they are able to recover to as near perfect operations as possible with minimal disturbances.

5. Poor internal communications

Many companies forget that their first port of communication must be their staff. As soon as something happens, the staff must receive communication from management. Not only will this reassure employees, but it will also position employees to answer questions from their friends and family, possibly increasing the credibility of the information they communicate. In addition, they must have a strictly enforceable policy that does not allow employees to speak to the media. Some companies think that a simple e-mail or letter on the notice board suffices. Staff must have an opportunity to ask questions if they are not clear on something or seek reassurance. Where possible, communication must occur in a face-to-face environment.

6. Poor external communications

Companies must ensure they proactively communicate with their entire external value, supplier and partner chain. They must communicate with all their customers, partners, shareholders, service providers and contractors and ensure they are fully informed and briefed about the situation at hand. All of these entities must receive consistent updates and must also have the opportunity to contact the company for additional information.

7. Treating the media like the enemy

Adopting a combative attitude towards the media and treating it as the enemy does nothing for an organisation in crisis. If anything, it irritates the media and can create the perception that there is something to hide. Companies must start to see the media as a crucial part of their communications value chain. Fostering good media relations before a crisis occurs will offer immense value to a company when it is in trouble.

8. Initiating ostrich management strategies

Ignoring the media, staff, partners and customers and hoping everything will go away is a common and stubborn mistake that many organisations make. The reality is that crises do not go away because they are ignored, many pick up momentum and progress

into major events that could have been contained with a simple communications strategy.

9. Not communicating frequently

Unfortunately, many companies think that if they issue a press release or grant an interview then their media communications are complete. Many fail to realise that they need to communicate frequently for the duration of the crisis. More serious crises may require numerous updates each day.

10. Poor use of messaging

Some companies initiate messaging that adds no value to the crisis situation, it does not keep people informed, and it does not communicate company empathy or provide the general public with any evidence that the company is concerned and doing something to contain the situation. Many companies still roll out product advertising and continue as normal.

11. No crisis team

In many, but not all crises, depending on the situation, the company needs to continue operating as near to normal as possible. The crisis team is responsible for managing the crisis and allowing the company to continue with regular business. Not having a crisis team in place will create the perception that management is in crisis and that the company is rudderless and has no strategic direction. A core member of the crisis team is the spokesperson who needs to regularly speak to all audiences for the duration of the situation.

12. Poor use of the company website

In a crisis, the company website is one of the most crucial communication mediums available. Many companies do not realise that as soon as something happens, the media and members of the public will access the website to see 'what the company says'. Not placing some form of communication on the company website is a wasted opportunity and companies need to realise that as soon as something happens they need to place a statement with relevant information on the website and then continue to provide updates as events change.

13. Downplaying the severity of the crisis

Companies sometimes think that if they downplay the magnitude of the crisis it will not appear to be 'that bad'. What they do not realise is that the media, the public and the company's employees may view the company as cold and uncaring if the crisis is seen as 'not such a big thing'. The company must come across as concerned and empathetic.

14. Not reconnecting with staff and customers after the crisis

Many companies simply go back to 'business as usual' after the crisis has ended. They fail to reconnect with staff and customers to ensure that unanswered questions and doubts are dealt with, and that there is still belief in the company, its brand and the products, goods and services it has on offer. Reconnection is critical, it strengthens brand loyalty and gives the company a human face. Companies need to be open to communication from all stakeholders, allowing them to ask all types of questions until they feel satisfied that 'everything is ok'.

15. Not holding a crisis post-mortem

As soon as a crisis is deemed over, many companies go back to work. Few sit down and run through the entire event to identify why the crisis occurred, where its origins lay, how it could have been avoided and what the company needs to put in place to ensure it never happens again. The crisis post-mortem is not a blaming exercise, but rather a learning exercise that is both a critical and objective look at all events that transpired, how the company responded and how the same crisis can be prevented from reoccurring in the future.

---ENDS---