Crisis Communications Preparedness Checklist

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jonathan@bernsteincrisismanagement.com ● (626) 825-3838

Situation	Self-examination Questions	Actions Necessary	Status
We don't have a crisis communications plan.	Why are we taking such a massive risk?	Have vulnerability audit conducted and crisis communications plan created immediately.	
We have a crisis communications plan.	Is it current, regularly updated based on changes in the company, as well as by periodic brainstorming sessions regarding vulnerabilities?	If not, update immediately; contact lists should be updated at least twice annually, rest of plan at least annually.	
	Was it prepared by someone who is as qualified in his or her field as experienced specialty group attorneys are in theirs?	If not, have plan reviewed immediately by qualified individual. A crisis communications plan "off the shelf" or created by someone not experienced in this area is not likely to suffice and could, in fact, be dangerous to the company's welfare.	
	Was the plan based on a comprehensive audit of your potential vulnerabilities that included input from all levels of the company, relevant consultants and key outside contacts?	If it was based on "the best thinking of senior management and the plan's creator" versus a vulnerability audit, consider the potential cost of what's been overlooked. Have audit conducted and revise plan	

		accordingly.	
	Do your crisis-response messages deal with feelings, not just facts?	If not, consider that, in times of crisis, expressing reassurance and concern, first and foremost, will make your audience more receptive to communication of facts.	
	Does your crisis plan consider the "ripple" effect of crises that may affect other organizations or audiences first, but then affect you as a result?	It is not uncommon for otherwise very good crisis plans to omit this type of analysis, but this possibility was dramatically demonstrated on September 11, 2001. Revisit your plan in this context.	
	Do you rehearse crisis response? Do you compile and review the "lessons learned" from such drills? Are lessons learned compared to existing plans and are necessary revisions made? Are revised plans regularly "exercised" in subsequent drills?	If not, note that most people either panic or are immobilized by shock during real crises; rehearsal improves reaction speed and appropriateness. Conduct regular "mock crisis" drills to make sure the system works.	
	Does your plan recognize and take into account time pressures inherent in crisis	If you can't set aside most or all of what you do day-to-day to participate in crisis	

	response and make the resources available to address time demands of crisis response.	management, then establish a system, now, that will allow you to either do that or assign the primary crisis management legal responsibilities to someone who can. This is true for every role in the crisis management team – legal, comms, etc.	
We try to prevent or minimize the chances of damage from future crises, both predictable and unexpected.	Are your in-house or consulting PR staff trained and/or experienced in crisis prevention and response?	If not, note that having untrained personnel responsible for critical tasks results in "accidents." Get them trained.	
	Are your crisis-savvy PR staff and/or consultants kept informed of legal threats to the company as soon as you know of them?	If not, note that damage minimization is VASTLY improved if they have a chance to consider the PR implications of legal threats well in advance of any public knowledge. Consider briefing at least one senior-level PR rep as soon as threats appear.	
	Do we monitor social media/the Internet for warning signs of crises?	If not, there are many free and low-cost tools available.	
	Are we pre-positioned to use social media quickly and effectively during a crisis?	The time to build an online presence is before a crisis occurs or else delays can result in negative information	

		spreading widely, unbalanced.	
	Are the appropriateness of legal decisions evaluated in terms of marketing/PR impact on all audiences important to the company?	If not, note that every significant legal and operational decision has a potential impact, for better or worse, on your important audiences. Consider including senior-level PR reps in your deliberations before finalizing your decision.	
	Do your crisis-savvy PR staff and/or consultants get a chance to review legal documents regarding sensitive matters that are going into the public record?	If not, consider that a document may look perfect, legally, but you don't realize that para 2, on page 3, could easily be taken out of context and misconstrued by the media or general public. Consider involving PR reps in key document review; sometimes a few changed words can prevent a crisis without changing the legal picture at all.	
	Does the company conduct ongoing proactive community relations and public relations to create a cushion of goodwill that will soften the impact of crises when they happen?	If not, consider a change in policy. Every crisis, big or small, will cause more damage if the cushion of goodwill does not exist.	

	Do you fully assess, and appropriately respond to, the potential for crisis inherent in loose cannons and disgruntled employees?	Realize that disgruntled employees and loose cannons are two of the most common sources of negative media coverage about a company.	
	Do you know, with certainty, that managers at all levels of the company are letting senior management know when there are "situations" brewing that could become crises?	If you think you know, with certainty, how do you know? Has it been independently verified either by the vulnerability audit process or confidential employee surveys? If not, your vulnerability to being blindsided is high.	
	Have managers at all levels been trained on how to spot potential crises well in advance?	While spotting certain types of crises may be inherent in the manager's routine training, spotting others may not. Review training to ensure that managers know how to spot most or all types of crises to which your company is vulnerable.	
	Do you have a rumor-control system?	Rumors cause immeasurable damage amongst all of a company's key audiences on a daily basis even when you're not in crisis. If you don't have	

		a rumor-control system, establish one.	
	Do your important audiences, internally and externally, find it easy to communicate with you, to ask questions and get them answered?	If not, note that without a mechanism for easy two-way communication, your audiences will regard you as insensitive or uncaring, particularly during crises.	
	Are your various offices, departments, etc. communicating regularly about potential crises, problem areas, and effective solutions?	If not, realize that operating in "silos" will severely hinder all aspects of crisis management. Institute formal policies and procedures to open up communications.	
	Are you an obstacle or a facilitator? Ask yourself:		
	Can press releases be approved in less than 15 minutes, if necessary?	If not, remember that speed of response is critical to crisis communications; in the absence of communication, rumor and innuendo fill the gap.	

	Can you, or your backup, be reached 24 hours a day? What about the rest of your crisis team?	There should be a 24-hour contact list for all individuals essential to crisis management.	
	Have you researched, in advance, legal considerations pertaining to crises that can already be anticipated?	It is possible to anticipate most, not all, crises that you may encounter and create draft responses, in advance, for each, that are appropriate from both a legal and PR perspective. Do your homework now, pre-crisis.	