

In today's 24/7 media cycle, when a crisis hits, it can spread and negatively impact a brand in the blink of an eye. If you begin developing a response plan once you're in the midst of a crisis, you're already too late. It's essential for every company to implement a crisis management plan well in advance of a possible negative event to ensure you're prepared if the unexpected occurs.

Affect outlines 10 steps for effectively managing a crisis:



- 1 Be prepared.** The first step when developing a Crisis Management Response Plan is determining all potential crisis scenarios that could occur and prioritizing the events based on the likelihood of their occurrence. This way, you'll be able to develop effective, customized responses for crises that could potentially impact your brand.
- 2 Establish a response team.** This team should include key company spokespeople, as well as human resources, public relations and select management teams. Clearly identify each person's role during a crisis.
- 3 Develop materials.** Develop messaging materials for each potential scenario, each target audience and each media platform, including traditional media, social media and your website.
- 4 Keep it fresh.** Establish regular meetings to review scenarios, guidelines, roles and responsibilities. Update your messaging documents based on changes in the media landscape, new product developments, employee changes and environmental updates.
- 5 Establish a social media presence.** When a crisis breaks, being able to respond through social media is critical in order to provide stakeholders with information quickly. Additionally, social media channels allow you to respond with your own messages and convey exactly what you want to communicate without the filter of a reporter. In order to effectively communicate through social media during a time of crisis, however, your brand must already have an established presence there and be prepared to start communicating quickly.
- 6 Assess internal readiness.** Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of your crisis communication plan and procedures. Conducting yearly simulation exercises will help you calculate the effectiveness of your response team and media messages.
- 7 Conduct message training.** Conduct regular message training workshops with company spokespeople. Studies show that most people do not retain information long-term, so often times one media training session is not enough. The more practice management receives on message delivery, the better they will communicate under pressure.
- 8 Train internal employees.** Regularly review the crisis plan with employees and ensure employees are up to date on protocols, messaging and the company's social media usage policy.
- 9 Monitor the landscape.** Be sure you have a dedicated news monitoring team and Google Alert system in place to monitor your brand (and competitors) for potential crises that may arise.
- 10 Evaluate other companies.** There are inevitably key takeaways from crises other companies have experienced. Observe how other companies handle crises and determine what worked for them and what didn't. As appropriate, update your messaging documents and response plans accordingly.

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