



CRISIS COMMUNICATING

Ready, React!

Is that your company? Your management?

Despite 9/11 and repeated warnings of corporate turbulence, many companies have yet to establish a protocol for communicating in the event of a crisis. Sure, many “say” that they have a crisis communications plan in place. But what we’ve discovered over the past couple of years is that many of those plans are lacking.

While some companies are buttoned up with strategies, protocols, trained management, and more, others have a single sheet of paper with an organization chart. It is intended to show the individuals and job titles that would be responsible for managing crisis communications in the event of an incident.

There are many incidents in our memory banks that should serve as constant reminders about how important it is for every business to have a crisis communications strategy in place.

- *Enron, Exxon Valdez, Firestone.*
- *Perrier and Tylenol.*
- *And, the latest: Merck’s Vioxx, Pfizer’s Celebrex*

The news is rife with corporate recalls, ethical violations and operational snafus. You only have to visit Consumer Reports to see which products are on the warning lists. <http://www.consumerreports.org/main/search/recalls.jsp>

Do All Companies Need a Crisis Communications Plan?

Ask yourself: Could an incident or accusation could damage your revenue, customer relationships or jeopardize your company’s existence. If the answer to any of these questions is “yes”, then you need to prepare a crisis communications strategy. And, it is your fiduciary obligation to your shareholders.

All companies do not have to have staff-up in-house for crisis communication implementation. What is essential, is that the company has a plan, has identified the personnel: internal and external to implement it, and that the company is ready to enact the plan at any time without any notice.

Communications Nerve Center

Do you have the “A” team lined up to manage communications in a crisis? e.g. do you have an experienced communications executive who has a strong background in crisis prevention and preparedness? Have you retained an effective public relations firm or consultant with experience managing the media and internal communications in corporate or political issues or man-made and natural disasters?

If you don’t have this fundamental talent lined up, then it is time to get moving.

- Identify who among your senior management team will be the team leader for directing implementation of your crisis communications plan
- Select the best senior executive(s) who will serve as spokesperson to communicate with external and internal audiences in the event of a crisis
- Retain outside counsel with expertise managing media relations and other company communications in crises. Have a relationship that enables you to have the flexibility to staff-up and access experienced resources upon need, but doesn’t burden you with heavy expenses during normal business periods.
- Select which other executives and experts are important to have on the team, such as legal counsel, insurance experts, operations, human resources, etc.
- Establish roles and guidelines for how these professionals will take action in the event of an incident
- Create a flow chart to depict everyone in the organization’s reporting lines during a crisis, if they are different in any way from the daily organization reporting relationships
- Be sure that all of the key players know how to reach each other both during and after business hours

Marketing Coach is a publication of Ivy Cohen Corporate Communications, Inc. ICCC helps companies build reputations and differentiate in a competitive market. For information contact ivy@ivycohen.com or call 212-399-0026.