Crisis Communication Manual

Introduction

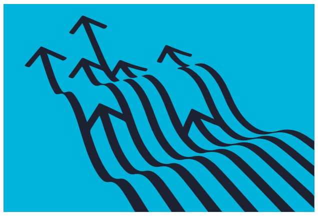
Let's address the matter head on. Despite our best intentions, sometimes incidents occur. History tells us, however, that not all situations are equal. Many can be anticipated and planned for because, after all, they've happened before. Not all damage is avoidable, but measures can be taken to diminish potential damage after a crisis begins.

As your risk management partners, Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM) recognizes that most church employees and volunteers are not formally trained in issues-management and/or crisis communications. With this in mind, we are offering this manual to help you more effectively reduce risk by planning ahead.

This crisis communication manual, provides a broad perspective, recommending action steps and tips to help guide you through the process of effective preparation. And, if you are in the throes of a crisis that could not have been anticipated, there's guidance here for that type of situation too.

When "bad things happen to good organizations," please know that ARM is here to help you right the ship and find smooth sailing. A copy of this document is available on our website at **adventistrisk.org/safetyresources**.

The Difference Between an Issue and a Crisis



An issue is a topic (or set of topics) that can be reasonably identified in advance and, at least to some extent, prepared for and managed. Issues can build slowly and can often be anticipated. However, an issue that goes un-managed may result in a crisis.

Crises, on the other hand, are unpredictable, pose a serious threat, and require an immediate response. Considering these differences, “issue” and “crisis” are not interchangeable terms. The necessary skill sets are different.

Understanding the difference between these situations is important.

Faith-based Institutions: Common Issues and Crises

Religious organizations are not immune to potential issues and crises that can affect both nonprofit and for-profit organizations. In addition, there are certain potential challenges unique to faith-based institutions. Examples include:

PASTORAL (OR ADMINISTRATIVE) MISCONDUCT

Workplace miscuduct is a serious matter in all contexts. However, church leaders are entrusted with great moral responsibility and power. When a moral failure occurs, the consequences are magnified and communal trust suffers.

FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT

Misappropriation of freely given tithe and offerings demonstrates a terrible breach of trust and is likely to devastate a reputation.

THEOLOGICAL DISPUTES

Different biblical interpretations that spill out on social media or manifest itself via other means can not only damage perceptions of the church externally, but severely strain relationships internally as well.

EDUCATION

Education is a fundamental service provided by faith-based institutions. Student behavior, classroom situations, abuse, violence, bullying, shooter lockdown, and cyber and data crimes are all challenges that can confront educational institutions.

HOSPITAL PRACTICE LIABILITY

Examples can fall into the realms of malpractice, billing, Medicaid, healthcare policy, and healthcare insurance.

MISSION TRIPS

Consider possible issues related to security, travel, medical, lodging, and local customs.

CHURCH SECURITY

Protecting attendees from gun violence, abuse, and issues related to supervision and protection of youth groups, etc.

Not every problem becomes a crisis, but many have the potential to develop into one. Managing issues proactively helps reduce risk, reducing the damage an organization can incur if unprepared.

OTHER COMMON ISSUES AND CRISES

The above examples are particularly relevant to faith-based institutions. A variety of other scenarios should be planned for and managed to blunt potential reputational and operational damage to the fullest extent possible. Below are examples of different situations. Additional guidance and resources from Adventist Risk Management on these scenarios and more can be found at adventistrisk.org/safetyresources.

FIRE	
▪ Were there injuries or deaths? ▪ Where did the fire start? ▪ What was the extent of the damage?	▪ How can a fire affect the organization? ▪ Are proper evacuation plans in place? ▪ Have there been recent safety inspections?
ACCIDENT	
▪ Were there injuries or deaths? ▪ What are the details about the accident? ▪ Where did the accident occur? ▪ Were there witnesses ▪ What was the extent of the damage?	▪ Is the organization responsible for transporting people or goods? ▪ Could people be injured at the facility? ▪ How?
SEXUAL ASSAULT/HARASSMENT	
▪ Who is the victim? ▪ What is the nature of the crime? ▪ Who is the perpetrator?	▪ What is the policy on sexual assault/harassment? ▪ Is staff trained to recognize and report allegations?
CYBERSECURITY	
▪ What information was stolen? How many people were affected? ▪ Who stole the information? Was the organization the only one affected or were others targeted as well?	▪ What is the policy on cybersecurity? ▪ How is the organization's information and the information of others secured from hackers?
CYBERSECURITY	
▪ What files are being held? ▪ How many backups are stored? Where are the backups stored?	▪ Is law enforcement involved in ransomware plans? ▪ What prevention plans are in place for ransomware?

Global Health Crisis

In the event of a crisis that the organization has little to no control over, it is wise to be understanding and accommodating. Each year, tens of thousands of people die due to flu-related illnesses. It is important to understand that during outbreaks, domestic or foreign, adhering to advice given by public health experts is vital. While it may be inconvenient to cancel travel-plans related to important activities or to consider working with reduced in-person staff, it's best to think of the bigger picture. The key is to manage given the circumstances as best as possible, and like any other crises, to avoid making it worse. Just as in the medical profession, the first rule is to do no harm!

What Can be Done in Advance?

Too often, a team can be completely focused on monitoring the outside landscape, neglecting the problem at the root of an organization. Even if the core issue is coming from the outside, the primary focus should be on what is in the organization's control: preparation and response.

In some cases, leaders may not be empowered to take the necessary steps to ward off potential damage in advance or in the early stages. It is paramount to gain leadership buy-in ahead of time, engaging the right stakeholders and subject matter experts before crisis strikes. However, additional steps must be taken in order to buttress an organization against unnecessary damage.

REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

The author of Ecclesiastes wrote "A good name is better than precious ointment" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). If a positive reputation is essential for corporations in a secular world, organizations that profess the teachings of Jesus Christ are entrusted with an even greater burden. It is critical to adhere to the highest standards. Like individuals, organizations are evaluated by their fruits.

When a faith-based entity does not "practice what it preaches," this entity risks driving people away from the organization, and in the worst case, may drive potential followers away from Christ. Furthermore, a good reputation doesn't just happen. Thoughtful, sustained effort is required.

Key steps to maintaining a good reputation include:

- Understanding how the organization is thought of today internally and externally
- Determining the desired perception
- Assessing assets and liabilities to help prioritize your time and resources
- Recognizing the tools in the toolkit
- Crafting a plan to strengthen reputation

Once the previous steps have been completed, it is time to think through the channels that may be available for increasing visibility and developing reputation:

- **Storytelling:** What are the compelling ways to be relevant and engaging?

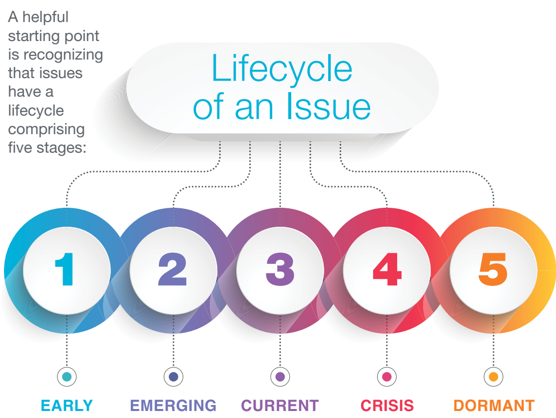
- **Messages:** What are the 3 to 5 key points stakeholders need to know?
- **Networking:** Where is the best place to meet neighbors and inform them about what the organization believes and does? What are the best speaking opportunities?
- **Media:** What are local media interested in and how can the organization's message be inserted in that context?
- **Social Media:** How best to translate a message for social media to cultivate and reinforce positive reputation?
- **Communication with members:** What are the timeliest and most effective ways to help keep members engaged and supportive (*e.g.* newsletters, email, website)?

ASSESSING VULNERABILITIES

Once a strategic reputation management plan is in place, assess all the types of problems or issues that could arise and harm the organization. To help limit damage later, recognize which ones can be planned for in advance to. Here are some steps to work through:

- Consider what can go wrong
- Conduct online research to see problems that have arisen with comparable faith based-based organizations
- Assess the operational workings of the organization
- Survey all assets, structures, human interactions, programming, employees, students, members, etc.
- Where is the organization vulnerable?
- Talk with leadership about what "keeps them up at night"

INTEGRATING ISSUES MANAGEMENT INTO OPERATIONS



An issues or crisis communication plan should not be developed in a vacuum. For it to work, even the best plan needs to be properly integrated into the organization's operational strategy. Without comprehensive planning, a crisis plan will be ineffective. Without defining clear decision points and linkages, unnecessary hours will be wasted getting people on the same page. It is essential to know how to manage an issue at each stage of its lifecycle.

Each member of the leadership team should be aware of how a minor issue can turn into a full-blown crisis, monitoring issues before they develop into crisis. This is a mindset, an awareness, that safeguards an organization. For example, water on the basement floor may just be a spill. However, it also may be seepage destroying the structural integrity of the building. Something that may appear innocuous could be a sign of something much more damaging. In order to be prepared, each entity within the organization must practice vigilance, looking both outward and inward to better understand the current situation. Without proper intervention, minor challenges today can be tomorrow's crisis.

CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM

A foundational step for many organizations is the establishment of a crisis management team. Typically, this group should consist of key members from leadership, security, legal, and communication. You'll want to involve your conference in this process. This key team then works in concert with other departments (finance, human resources, and operations) to properly handle the crisis. These members should be knowledgeable about their respective roles and able to communicate complex information to the rest of the team quickly and clearly.

There is no such thing as a "standard crisis," so members from other teams may need to be consulted. For example, in a financial crisis that originated as a data hack, information technology team members might be required to rapidly supplement the core crisis management team.

No matter the composition of the team, its members should meet regularly to go over crisis protocol. Disciplined attendance and attention to these matters will ensure adequate response. These meetings should include proceedings such as: discussing looming threats, maintaining a watchful perspective about challenges confronting the organization and sister institutions, and reviewing key learnings.

In order to successfully maneuver through a real-life crisis, the crisis management conversation needs to be ongoing and regular. However, a crisis management plan will not work if the team and plans have never been tested. In order to ensure a higher level of preparedness, periodic training exercises can help sharpen response skills. With practice, these skills will become internalized and second nature to the team.

ON SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS AND MORE

Beyond the core crisis management team, it is vital to identify the subject matter experts within the organization who can help identify "mission-critical" issues.

Key considerations include:

- Catalog and understand who in the organization can be considered an expert in each area.
- When a certain type of crisis hits, know who to turn to in order to provide accurate information and helpful advice.
- Designate a person who can inform decisions in a variety of situations.

Issues/Crisis Management Principles

PLANNING FOR A CRISIS

How you respond in the first moments of a crisis will often define how the crisis will impact the organization and its people long term. Knowing what to do and where to go in the event of a crisis will make the response faster and lead to fewer opportunities for error along the way. The following are all steps to be taken both before and during a crisis event.

Create Contact List

Name	Title	Emergency Number	Additional Number	Email Address
Police Dept	-	911	(555)123-4567	-
Fire Dept	-	911	(555)123-7890	-
John Smith	Lead Pastor	(555) 456-1234	(555) 285-5309	John_smith@ email.com
Michelle Hendrick	Church Safety Officer	(555) 456-1267	(555) 567-2345	michelle. hendrick@email. com
Nancy Philmont	Conference Communication Director	(555) 412-3322	(555) 469-3321	nphilmont@ sdaconference.org

The above chart is an example of how to set up a contact list to use in the event of an emergency, issue or crisis. It is important to keep accurate contact records so that when an issue or crisis develops, information can be shared quickly. Name, title, organization, phone number, cell number, email, social media handles and website should be kept together in a database. It is recommended that there also be one or two copies printed out and kept in easy-to-find locations. Everyone should be aware of the contact list and where to find it. You may also want to consider setting up a group chat using text, social media, or another platform to communicate with this group rapidly from your mobile device.

Potential Audiences

- Law Enforcement: Local, regional, state and federal authorities.
- Church Leadership: Understand who needs to be contacted with what types

of information within the church and other entities. This will begin with your local conference, but may also include the union or ARM.

- Parents: When youth/students are involved, it is necessary to keep parents informed and up to date on all developments.
- Faculty/Staff: Employees need information but must also understand why sharing information outside of the organization may pose risks.
- Church members: Any information shared with these members should be considered public.
- Media: The media database should include name, outlet, position, phone, email, website, twitter handle, frequency of publication. Local and national media should be included.
- Community leaders/members: For local issues, remember that key officials may need to be engaged, or at least informed.

CRISIS PROTOCOL

Before a Crisis Begins

Identifying Possible Crises
What can go wrong? Start by looking at all operations of the organization: assets, structures, human interactions, programming, employees, students, members, clients, etc. Where is the organization vulnerable?

Connecting Communications and Operations
It is vital that the people who handle communications and operations be active participants in planning and executing the crisis plan. These professionals can provide much needed skills and information.

Establish a Leader
Designate a person who will manage the crisis. All information must be sent to this person. They will be the source of information and point of contact for everyone inside and outside the organization. This is the designated Crisis Manager.

The First Sixty Minutes—The Clock Is Ticking

Once a crisis breaks, the first 60 minutes will often foretell how the crisis will affect the organization and its constituents long term. This is when the hours spent planning in advance will make all difference. Below are tips on what to do when confronted with a crisis situation:

- **Take a deep breath:** Remember that by reviewing this manual and taking steps in advance, the organization is better prepared for when a crisis arises.
- **Contact Authorities:** If the crisis requires immediate attention—extreme weather, fire, medical emergency, structural damage, or someone broke the law—contact the proper authorities (fire department, ambulance, police, etc.)
- **Involve Counsel:** Work side by side with your conference officials, legal counsel, and—if appropriate—the Adventist Risk Management team to begin to investigate the crisis and collect the facts involved. This will help simplify later communications with targeted audiences/stakeholders and, if needed, the news media.

For all intents and purposes, the internet provides a permanent record. What gets reported in those early minutes and hours sets the tone of everything that follows. If a member of the organization speaks carelessly or erroneously to a reporter or other stakeholders, the organization risks suffering needless, additional damage. If any information has to be shared "in the moment," the organization's spokesperson must be clear about what is not clear yet. In other words, when some facts are still under investigation, the individual should be candid and ensure that any additional information will be shared as soon as the organization is able. This is far preferable to misstating "facts" that can cause problems once included in the permanent record.

INFORMATION GATHERING

- **Assess the facts, making sure to ask thorough questions.** How many people are involved? What damage occurred? When will more information be available? Regardless of who is answering these questions, "some" and "soon" are not correct answers.
- **Interview those involved:** It is important to find out not what a person thinks, but what they know. This is paramount to a proper assessment of the situation. Those in charge should collect as many details as possible and urge everyone to be specific when recounting the crisis.
- **Contact appropriate crisis team members:** What type of crises occurred? Identify which experts and departments are needed to help investigate the specific subject matter. Use the team's expertise to your advantage.

AS A CRISIS UNFOLDS

Clear communication is a crucial aspect of crisis management and the beginning stages of a crisis is certainly no exception. In fact, it is a key aspect of every step in the process of responding to a crisis. First off, it is best to involve your conference officials, legal counsel, and risk management representatives from the beginning, as their expertise is extremely valuable. A crisis situation requires a thorough and exhaustive investigation. Interviews with all involved is a necessity. Any and all documentation must be gathered and reviewed by the team. All materials must be stored in a central place accessible by the crisis manager. There are certain steps that should be taken immediately at the onset of a crisis, and they are listed below:

Contact Legal and Insurance Representatives
They are important and valuable to an organization, especially in a crisis situation. They are there to protect the people and assets of the organization and should be made aware of any potentially harmful situations.

Gather Information and Support Investigation
Ask questions! Find out the who, what, when, where, why, and how about the situation. Locate and secure any documentation which could be related to the crisis. Start any necessary investigation, working in conjunction with your contact.

Inform the Organization
Let members of the organization know that all questions/inquiries must be directed to the Crisis Manager. Anyone other than the Crisis Manager is not to speak to the media or any other person about the crisis without authorization.

Identify Audiences
Identify the different groups that will need to receive communications and briefings containing information and details about the crisis. This may include: the news media, parents, parishioners, clients, donors, stakeholders, etc.

Monitor News and Social Media
Check the news and social media sites to see if news or comments about the crisis are being reported or posted. Catalog any incoming calls from the media and inform them that a response will be coming soon. (More on this step in the upcoming section "Media Response Protocol.")

Prepare the Response
The Crisis Manager gathers key leaders, legal counsel, and insurance representatives. With the help of input from your conference communication team, this group prepares an official response. The response must include: a public statement, internal communications, talking points for spokespeople, possible questions and answers, etc.

Deliver the Response
Decide how the response will be delivered and who will be the best spokesperson, if not the Crisis Manager. It can be delivered in a variety of ways including: a press conference, distribution of a written statement, posting on social media, etc.

Analyze the reaction
Gauge the reaction among the targeted audiences. Anticipate what additional challenges and developments in the crisis could arise. Confer with organizational leadership, legal and insurance representatives. Develop a course of action.

MANAGING THE CRISIS

As the crisis evolves, there are three important, ongoing steps:

Observe
As the crisis develops, more information will become available. Watch news coverage, follow social media, and listen to people involved in the crisis. Keep engaged with all audiences to fully understand the situation.

Re-evaluate
Review information as it continues to gather. Look for ways details can assist in solving or improving the crisis.

Communicate
Continue to share information with target audiences. Remember communication is still a two-way exchange. Keep listening and asking questions. Make sure information is reaching the targeted audiences.

It is important to keep track of the crisis and the effect it has on the organization's reputation, even after the crisis passes. Just because the initial difficulty is over with, it doesn't mean that the potential for it to cause damage has passed. Also be sure to use the crisis as a learning experience for the organization and its Crisis Management Team. This would include what was done correctly and what could have been improved on; including alternate actions.

Media Primer

WHEN (AND WHEN NOT) TO RESPOND

The designated spokesperson(s) should only respond to the news when the facts have been gathered and anticipated questions can be answered. Consult with your conference communication team, legal counsel, an experienced crisis communication professional, and ARM if necessary. The following protocol will assist in handling incoming media calls.

MEDIA RESPONSE PROTOCOL

When a reporter, editor, producer or anyone from the news media calls the organization, the following steps must be taken.

- Ask the caller for the following information:

  - ☐ Name
  - ☐ Media Outlet Name (television station, publication, etc.)
  - ☐ Contact information (direct line, cell phone, email address)
  - ☐ When is their deadline? (It is vital to provide needed information in a timely way so a story will include the facts the organization wants represented.)
  - ☐ What would they like to talk about? (A reporter should be glad to provide this information so whoever responds will be fully prepared to answer the inquiries.)

- If the designated spokesperson is unavailable, explain that someone will call back soon.

- Deliver the message to the Crisis Manager who will gather the needed background information and prepare the appropriate response. They will then determine who will be the spokesperson and will practice with the designated person, or by themselves if they are the spokesperson.

- Make the necessary arrangements in order to conduct the interview and to guide the spokesperson through the process.

DEFINING THE MESSAGE

Every communication to a targeted audience begins by defining a message. A message in a crisis is more than the facts and figures. It is meant to convey that the situation is under control and win people's confidence in your response. Those two principles should guide all communication activities and serve as the subtext at all times.

Writing Talking Points

Each situation requires the spokesperson has clearly defined talking points and that they use these points in conversations/written materials about the crisis. The talking points should be factual and true to the message, conveying the reality of the crisis and how it will be remedied. They should also be simple and straightforward because short and concise language is more likely to put others at ease.

Writing Q and A

Each crisis raises many questions. The first step is to list them all out. Then, working with input from legal and insurance representatives, prepare answers. Like the talking points, the answers should be short and succinct. Keep it simple.

Writing the Statement

As soon as there is a handle on the crisis, a statement must be prepared. The same statement will be used for the media and other targeted audiences. More than one statement will confuse the audience. The statement should follow the same ideas as above. It should stay true to the message and be about three to five sentences in length, depending on the crisis situation. Below is an example of what is often referred to as a "holding statement," which is the first external communication about a crisis:

First, our thoughts and prayers are with the people involved in the *[DESCRIBE THE SITUATION IN JUST A FEW WORDS]*. We are *[DESCRIBE ACTIONS TAKEN].* Additionally, we are assisting *[NAME PUBLIC SAFETY OR GOVERNMENTAL BODY]. [NAME OF STAFF CRISIS MANAGER]* who will be sharing updates.

Using Your Media Database

Review your media database and identify the news outlets that may be interested in the actions and mission of the organization. These outlets include local newspapers, television, radio, websites, wire services (e.g. Associated Press,) regional media, national media, digital media, and subject matter journalists (e.g. religion, education, healthcare, etc.). Gather all contact information: name, outlet, email, phone, address, social media handles, etc.

MEDIA LOGISTICS

During the crisis, the organization will most likely communicate with the media in a few different ways, including, but not limited to, the following:

Press Conference
Media will be invited to a location to hear from the organization and then take questions.

Email Exchange
Emails will be exchanged with journalists to answer questions. Remember anything written in an email, even a casual greeting or exchange, is on the record.

Interview (in-person, online, or by phone)
An interview will be conducted/recorded either in-person or over the phone.

Identifying and Preparing the Spokesperson
The ideal spokesperson should be a high-level member of the organization who is comfortable speaking in public and has considerable institutional knowledge. They should have complete and total access to all information and people in the given situation. Please take ample time to rehearse and practice answering tough questions.

How to Respond if Not the Spokesperson(s)
No one except the designated spokesperson should speak with the news media unless authorized. All questions must be referred to the crisis management team. Simply stating that another individual is "in the best position to answer questions" should suffice, followed by providing contact information or passing along a message.

SPOKESPERSON TRAINING

Always have something to say and stick to the facts.

- **Support comments** with references and examples.
- **If the answer to a question is not known, say so** and offer to get the answer. Never make up information or take a "best guess" at an answer.

- **Simplify the message.** The more that is said, the less people will remember.
- **Stick to three primary points.** Re-direct answers to these key messages.
- **Simplify the language.** Don't try to impress people with complicated terms. The goal is not to impress them, but to impress upon them key messages. **Don't use "expert talk"**; speak in plain terms.
- **Speak clearly.** It is never a good idea to rush through an interview. Take a breath and enunciate. Use a short pause between hard-to-understand words.
- **Speak visually.** Create images in the minds of the audience, painting an image in people's heads. Use examples, metaphors, or examples.
- **Feel free to tell a story.** Stories are memorable ways to communicate information.

Repetition is crucial to success. Find different ways to say the same thing. By repeating the key points, the message being conveyed will hit home. By adding additional information that is not in line with key points (as referenced above), information will likely become confusing, possibly contradictory, and more forgettable to the target audience.

Social Media Management

Social media has the incredible ability to circulate information very quickly to a broad audience. Information goes everywhere, is permanently available online and can be shared widely. For an organization, this can be both a good thing and bad thing. While it may be possible to spread news of a wonderful event that had a great outcome, that same platform can also be used to share private information not ready or meant for the public. Social media is a double-edged sword. The same things that make it good for an organization can be used to the detriment of an organization. Treat it as seriously as traditional media.

Advantages:

- Uses a personal voice
- Tells the organization's story
- Can be accessed by almost anyone
- Can reach a broad audience quickly

Disadvantages:

- No editor (no fact checking provided)
- Can be used by almost anyone
- Can reach a broad audience quickly

CURRENT MAJOR PLATFORMS: STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

There are many social media platforms available that can make it easy to share information with an organization's members and/or followers. Unfortunately, they also make it easy to share inappropriate or potentially harmful information. There are good and bad aspects to all of them; below are some of the strengths and weaknesses that are specific to each platform.

Facebook

Facebook is an ongoing conversation. It offers the ability to invite people to events and even raise money.

Strengths

- Can recruit followers
- Tracking followers/comments
- Ability to monitor posts
- Option to invite non-followers to become followers of your page

Weaknesses

- Ease of promulgating rumors
- Requires proper format and content editing
- As with almost all social media, an algorithm determines reach

Twitter

Twitter provides a quick forum to comment on breaking issues

Strengths
- Global reach
- Ease of posting
- Speed of response

Weaknesses
- Limited number of characters
- Not editable after posting
- Difficulty in increasing follower base

Instagram

Instagram communicates through pictures and video along with an option for additional text.

Strengths
- Image and video based
- Growing popularity

Weaknesses
- Posting always requires a picture/video
- Lacks gravitas
- Requires understanding of hashtags and algorithm to maximize reach

LinkedIn

LinkedIn connects its community by essentially creating a web of similar professionals.

Strengths
- Business-focused
- Controlled message
- Strong reputation

Weaknesses
- Limited targeting of ads
- Low audience engagement
- Reach difficult to measure

Tik Tok and Snapchat

Often best suited for interpersonal communication. It is, however, suspected to be used to capture data from devices, so use with caution.

Strengths
- Reaches young demographic
- Visually orientated
- Posts quickly

Weaknesses
- Limited posting time span
- Best suited for communicating with a familiar audience
- Bad reputation amongst professionals

UNDERSTANDING AN AUDIENCE

Each audience uses social media differently. It is well understood that certain social media platforms have wider use among certain demographics. This can be used advantageously.For example, Instagram is much more popular among young adults while Facebook is more popular among an older demographic. When crafting social media posts, keep this in mind.

Another difference to consider is the reach of each social media platform. A message in a closed Facebook Group will reach only people that currently follow the organization while a message sent via Twitter can be shared widely, even among non-followers. One audience is people who already follow the organization; other audiences are groups that are yet to be attracted and persuaded by the content. While social media is often targeted to existing followers, remember that it can also be shared by others, receive engagement from non-followers, or even be used to gain followers.

COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

It is not enough to have social media accounts. Your social media presence needs to be managed, and in order to drive engagement, the relationships with your followers need to be nurtured. Some things to consider when managing your social media presence:

- Actively participate in social media communities, through engaging posts and interacting through comments
- Post on a regular basis
- Edit and delete as necessary. Know which platforms allow editing and which do not
- Protect pages from abuse and trolling
- Have clear guidelines and standards for online behavior in any groups that are managed
- Use the algorithms as an advantage (i.e. Early morning Instagram posts have a wider reach than, say, a 10:30 am post. Post content when people will be using social media: before work, during lunch, after work or evenings.)

PROTECTING A REPUTATION

In certain situations, social media should not be used. More engagement may amplify a negative issue. Make sure social media postings reflect and enhance the brand. Always assume everything posted online is public and anybody can screenshot the post. Posting is similar to talking with a journalist in that you are always "on the record."

SOCIAL MEDIA: HOW AN ISSUE CAN BECOME A CRISIS

Due to the nature of social media, its reach and speed can also exacerbate the rate at which an issue becomes a crisis via the following timeline:

Instant posting
If not careful, the immediacy of social media can be a disadvantage. Anyone can post a troublesome video, picture, or comment and that post can reach a massive audience before the organization is able to react.

Becomes viral
With how social media works, the more exposure it gets the faster it spreads. This can lead to a post crossing the globe in a short time span.

Spreads across platforms
A problematic post on one platform, for example Facebook, can be linked on Twitter, increasing the visibility of the initial negative issue.

Critical mass forms
If enough people view the content, eventually media coverage can follow suit. This may mean a small mention on a local TV news outlet, regional exposure, or massive coverage in national media.

Media coverage
Media is a positive feedback loop for the newly formed crisis. The number of clicks can increase media coverage, increasing the number of people who see the post etc.

The event is chronicled permanently
Due to the nature of the internet, the entire event will be saved for all to see. Regardless of outcome, everything from the initial issue to the conclusion of the event will be reviewable in the future by any interested parties.

When all of the above happens, what started out as an issue (negative social media content) has become a full-blown crisis for the organization. When this happens, a proper and appropriate response must take place. For details on what to do and what not to do in this situation, please refer to the case studies at the end of the section.

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

If not already done, it would be wise for the organization to develop a social media policy. Social media is the public face of the organization. Setting guidelines and standards in advance will help prevent future problems. Differentiate the social media policies for employees and for general audiences/ communities. Larger organizations may even employ social media management professionals to ensure that their content is well designed for their needs and the community is well managed to prevent negative publicity.

When developing a social media policy, it is wise to conduct a social media audit to know where the organization currently stands:

- Which platforms are being used?
- What are the usernames and passwords?
- Who has access?
- Who edits/approves content?
- What needs to be addressed?
- Social media standards for official accounts and personal content

Once there is a clear understanding of social media needs, the pages can be tailored to best deliver the message of the organization. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram accounts can all be used together to deliver similar messages but with varying audiences and content delivery styles. Consistency is key to showcasing a coherent message across platforms.

Crisis Management Case Studies

Please take the time to consider the following real-world examples of crisis. Improper handling of a crisis can severely damage the image and reputation of an organization, whereas appropriate crisis management can truly be a boost for the organization's reputation. These facts are evident in the given scenarios.

CASE STUDY 1

On April 9, 2017, United Airlines flight number 3411 from Chicago to Louisville was overbooked. As passengers were boarding, there was an announcement requesting volunteers to be moved to a flight the next day, along with being given $400 and a free hotel room. Unfortunately, there were no volunteers. After boarding, it was announced again that volunteers were still needed to make room for the United employees, but still no one took the offer from the airline. The company then chose passengers to be removed from the flight at random. Two agreed to leave and one refused. The refusing passenger claimed to be a doctor that needed to see patients but was nonetheless dragged through the aisle of the plane for all to see. More importantly, and unfortunately for United Airlines, other passengers used their cell phones to record the debacle. A video of the event then surfaced online, quickly went viral and the situation developed into a full-blown crisis.

The CEO, Oscar Munoz, apologized via twitter for "having to re-accommodate" the customer.

> *"This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation."*—Oscar Munoz, CEO United Airlines

The apology set off a new wave of social media uproar. Instead of taking responsibility for the situation, the CEO marginalized the issue, apologizing for "inconvenience" to the passenger. This led social media users to satirize the company and the passenger with memes and GIFs, attracting lots of unwanted coverage of the unfortunate event. United ended up losing millions in revenue and had to hire a professional crisis management team to recover. All of this could have been avoided with proper handling of the event in the first place.

When an organization makes a mistake, they need to take responsibility and assure the public that the same mistake will not happen again. Apologies need to be from the heart and not sound like a matter-of-fact press release.

CASE STUDY 2

In January of 2017, a developer from Gitlab (host to clients such as IBM, Sony, NASA, Alibaba, Invincea, Jülich Research Center, and O'Reilly Media) accidentally removed clients' data from the primary database server. This led to a loss of massive amounts of data and Gitlab was unavailable for almost an entire day.

Gitlab first reached out to their clients to inform them of the event. This allowed their clients to be prepared for any media or public reaction to the data loss. Gitlab followed the good practice of being the first to inform their clients of the issue that affected them, especially since they were responsible for the issue.

Gitlab then announced to the social media audience what had occurred. They explained the issue and what they planned to do to resolve it. It became clear, unfortunately for Gitlab, that they weren't going to be able to fix the problem quickly. This is where Gitlab took a novel approach that worked out in their favor. They asked for help via their social media platforms, turning a negative situation into a large public crowdsourcing event. Professionals all over the world worked together and in time resolved the crisis.

As a follow up, Gitlab also created social media posts about the event, how it happened, how they resolved it and the lessons learned. They also made sure to inform people of the status of the poor developer who had deleted the data in the first place. Gitlab took a massive crisis and turned it into a positive event with large scale involvement from the community.

CASE STUDY TAKEAWAYS

While the strategy Gitlab employed may not be applicable to everyone, there are general takeaways for any organization to best utilize their social media platforms during a crisis. From the United Airlines mishandling to the Gitlab success story, three important takeaways are:

1. **Understand and admit the problem.** Recognize that there is a problem and give an honest admission. As seen with United, in the spotlight of social media, a cookie cutter response won't cut it.
2. **Consider your words carefully and keep emotions in mind.** When handling delicate situation, be honest, emotionally responsive, and kind. When things go wrong, make sure to take the correct tone with messaging. Personal tragedy and data loss can both be a crisis for a company, but how to communicate about these events demands a different sensibility.
3. **Engage your audience.** Take the time to listen to followers who, oftentimes, are more than willing to give advice. An organization can take better control of a situation by soliciting constructive criticism when possible. It is also possible to get in front of a crisis by reacting quickly and appropriately to an event. That way, followers see the organization's account of events first, and hopefully before any negative press can influence their opinions.

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