



How to Prepare for a Crisis What's Your Plan?

You know you are a safe company that goes above and beyond to deliver your passengers safely to their destinations. But, accidents happen when you least expect it. You could be on vacation. You could be asleep and be woken up by that 12 a.m. call. Are you and your company prepared for a crisis to happen? Do you know what to do? Every company should have and needs a plan for when that call comes. Here are 10 helpful hints in creating an effective Strategic Crisis Plan.

PRE-CRISIS

1. Anticipate Crises

If you're being proactive and preparing for crises, gather your Crisis Communications Team for intensive brainstorming sessions on all the potential crises that could occur at your organization. It may not just be an accident that throws your company into a crisis. What other factors should your company prepare for?

There are at least two immediate benefits to this exercise:

- You may realize that some of the situations are preventable by simply modifying existing methods of operation.
- You can begin to think about possible responses, about best-case/worst-case scenarios, etc. Better now than when under the pressure of an actual crisis.

2. Identify Your Crisis Communications Team

A small team of senior executives should be identified to serve as your organization's Crisis Communications Team. Ideally, the company's CEO will lead the team, along with the company's safety director, COO, company lawyer and communications director. If you don't have a communications director, consider ABA filling that role. Call ABA if you have a crisis, we can handle the media relations during the crisis.

3. Identify and Train Spokespersons

Categorically, any organization should ensure, via appropriate policies and training, that only authorized spokespersons speak for it. This is particularly important during a crisis. Each crisis communications team should have people who have been pre-screened, and trained, to be the lead and/or backup spokespersons for different channels of communications. Do not let any employee speak to the media other than your designated spokesperson (or ABA).

4. Spokesperson Training

Spokesperson training teaches you to be prepared, to be ready to respond in a way that optimizes the response of all stakeholders.

5. Establish Notification and Monitoring Systems

Notification Systems

It is absolutely essential, pre-crisis, to establish notification systems that will allow you to rapidly reach your stakeholders using multiple modalities. This includes social media to alert customers (if you need to) about your situation and what you are doing about it.

Monitoring Systems

Intelligence gathering is an essential component of both crisis prevention and crisis response.

Knowing what's being said about you on social media, in traditional media, by your employees, customers, and other stakeholders often allows you to catch a negative "trend" that, if unchecked, turns into a crisis.

Likewise, monitoring feedback from all stakeholders during a crisis situation allows you to accurately adapt your strategy and tactics.

Both require monitoring systems be established in advance. For traditional and social media, Google Alerts are the no-cost favorite, but there are also free social media tracking apps such as Hootsuite. There a variety of paid monitoring services that provide not only monitoring, but also the ability to report results in a number of formats. Monitoring other stakeholders means training personnel who have front-line contact with stakeholders (e.g., Customer Service) to report what they're hearing or seeing to decision-makers on your Crisis Communications Team.

6. Identify and Know Your Stakeholders

Who are the internal and external stakeholders that matter to your company? Employees are your most important audience, because every employee is a PR representative and crisis manager for your organization whether you want them to be or not! But, ultimately, customers will be talking about you to others not on your contact list, so it's up to you to ensure that they receive the messages you would like them to repeat elsewhere.

7. Develop Holding Statements

While full message development must await the outbreak of an actual crisis, "holding statements," messages designed for use immediately after a crisis breaks, can be developed in advance to be used for a wide variety of scenarios to which the organization is perceived to be vulnerable, based on the assessment you conducted in Step 1 of this process.

"We are aware of this incident and offer thoughts and prayers to those impacted. We pledge our assistance in cooperating with the authorities in the investigation."

"Our thoughts are with those who were in harm's way, and we hope that they are well."

“We will be supplying additional information when it is available and posting it on our website.”

The organization’s Crisis Communications Team should regularly review holding statements to determine if they require revision and/or whether statements for other scenarios should be developed.

NEVER SAY NO COMMENT. ABA can help you prepare statements.

POST-CRISIS

8. Assess the Crisis Situation

Reacting without adequate information is a classic “shoot first and ask questions afterwards” situation in which you could be the primary victim. However, if you’ve done all of the above first, it’s a “simple” matter of having the Crisis Communications Team on the receiving end of information coming in from your team members, ensuring the right type of information is being provided so you can proceed with determining the appropriate response.

Assessing the crisis situation is, therefore, the first crisis communications step you can’t take in advance. If you haven’t prepared in advance, your reaction will be delayed by the time it takes your in-house staff or quickly hired consultants to run through steps 1 to 7. Furthermore, a hastily created crisis communications strategy and team are never as efficient as those planned and rehearsed in advance.

9. Finalize and Adapt Key Messages

With holding statements available as a starting point, the Crisis Communications Team must continue developing the crisis-specific messages required for any given situation. The team already knows, categorically, what type of information its stakeholders are looking for. What should those stakeholders know about this crisis? Keep it simple. Have no more than three main messages that go to all stakeholders and, as necessary, some audience-specific messages for individual groups of stakeholders. You’ll need to adapt your messaging to different forms of media as well. For example, crisis messaging on Twitter often relies on sharing links to an outside page where a longer message is displayed, a must because of the platform’s 140-character limit.

Remember: ABA is here to help you!

10. Post-Crisis Analysis

After the crisis has passed, the question must be asked, “What did we learn from this?”

A formal analysis of what was done right, what was done wrong, what could be done better next time and how to improve various elements of crisis preparedness is another must-do activity for any Crisis Communications Team.