

THE MCINTYRE GROUP
INSURANCE BROKERS & CONSULTANTS

For Your Safety



Workplace Safety Update: Crisis Communication Plans

Do you have a plan for the crisis moments? In today's world of instant information and Internet rumors that spread faster than wildfire, every small business must have an emergency communication plan in place - before disaster strikes.

A plan designates who will speak for the company, to whom and what entities, how the communication will occur, and, to some extent, what will be said. This provides a clear template to follow when stress and emotions are running as high as the demand for immediate response. A planned response will present as calm, informed, and in control, providing an opportunity for fair treatment in the media and helping to mitigate any damage to the company's reputation that may occur as a result of the crisis.

What constitutes a crisis?

A crisis is anything that threatens to damage the operation of your business, including ruining its reputation. Many of them will involve workplace injuries or deaths. Recall, for example, the Sago mining disaster of 2006. Twelve miners were trapped in an underground explosion. After two days of frantic rescue attempts, word leaked out to the families - and subsequently to the media - that the miners had been found. Families gathered at the mine to await their loved ones. It was only then that their hopes were dashed by devastating news: Eleven of them were dead.

This is a major communications error, and put a black mark on the management team for years.

Frequency

Hopefully you will never have an incident that kills a dozen employees. But workplace injuries and deaths are a fact

of life in many industries. A crisis preparedness study done in 2011 by Penn Schoen Berland found that 66% of the businesses it surveyed had suffered a crisis, with the number even higher in manufacturing and technology-based businesses. And if your company has a computer or a website, it is vulnerable to problems from cyberspace - from your employees doing things they shouldn't, to breaches within your email or internet service provider or banking institutions. These aren't life threatening, but they still require an organized and thoughtful response to both internal communications - to employees and their families - and external communications, to the community, emergency responders and the news media.

A checklist

1. Designate a single spokesperson and ensure they are prepared. No matter the nature of the crisis or the method of response, there should be one "face" that is addressing the issue. Get key individuals some media training or, at the very least, a group of colleagues and practice.
2. Define the top five mostly likely calamities to strike your business and its reputation.
3. Formulate 1-2 key messages for each of these calamities, building in flexibility for specifics. What information is most important? What message needs to be heard? Make sure the message is simple enough to be understood across all media.
4. Identify and connect with other people you may need to contact in the event of an emergency. These are people who either have information you will need before you respond, or can help you manage the response. You may have someone already performing these roles for you,

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or you may have to seek out consultants. Either way, do it ahead of time. Establish the relationship now, define their role in an emergency, and go over your plans with them. These may include:

- Marketing/Public Relations professional (See #6 for more)
- Safety/security expert
- Regulatory agencies
- Legal counsel
- Insurance agents
- Accountant
- Internet service provider
- Relevant media
- Local police department

5. Identify your communication target audiences in each of your top five most likely scenarios. These might be internal (employees, families of employees, stakeholders, clients, vendors) or external (general public, media agencies, regulatory agencies, law enforcement) contacts.
6. Specify what channels of communication you will use. It is essential that your message be consistent across all media. If you are not comfortable with new media, such as blogs, Facebook and Twitter, you are not alone; according to the same PSB study mentioned above, 54% of business decision makers do not feel confident in this area. If you need to consult with a PR firm, do so, looking for expertise in social media and crisis management.

- Email
- Telephone
- Your business' voicemail message
- Local media - print, radio, television, online
- Website
- Text messaging
- Social media: Even if you don't already have social media channels in place, you will need to use it to

monitor what folks are saying about you, and to immediately respond to questions and concerns. Remember that in today's world you are expected to communicate WITH people, not just TO them.

7. Practice! Put each of your top five scenarios in action and practice. Prepare the people involved in each situation, and identify specifically what you are likely to need from them.

After the crisis has passed

When the dust has settled, take a deep breath and review. Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are there any business or safety practices that need to change to prevent recurrence? Start making those changes.
2. How effective was our message during the crisis? What might have worked better?
3. Are we continuing to manage our reputation online? Have your PR person continue to monitor - and respond to - what is being said on social media, review sites, etc.
4. How might we turn this situation into something that will work for the company? Consider developing a seminar on "What we learned," or writing a news story or presentation.
5. What contacts were most useful? Maintain those relationships.

Insurance

Companies with a plan for handling crises before they occur handle situations more effectively and recover far more rapidly than companies without a plan. Remember: The crisis itself is less likely to put you out of business than how you handle the situation. Having a plan ahead of time is akin to having insurance for your reputation. Putting in the time to develop a solid plan before anything actually happens pays multiple dividends when it does.



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