

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A CRISIS? AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT IT?

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Crises come in various forms, often unpredictable, and the organization's ability to ensure operational continuity, adaptability, and prevent reputational risks is directly tied to its preparedness. Staff members must be able to make quick decisions and implement crisis management strategies effectively. Media outlets are more inclined to cover crises, especially in today's world where we're facing imminent conflicts, challenges, and the instantaneous spread of crisis through social media posts. Therefore, readiness to adapt and respond promptly is crucial.

A crisis could manifest in economic turmoil, civil unrest, political turmoil, repression, natural calamities, armed conflicts, or cyber-attacks. Digital security crises can arise from cyber-attacks, hacking incidents, or computer virus infections. Additionally, a crisis could emerge from outbreaks of infectious diseases at local, national, or global levels. Internal crises, such as scandals, criminal offenses, ethical breaches, or harm to employees or audiences, can occur without direct external influences. To be fully prepared to tackle any crisis, an organization must not only develop internal crisis management plans but also be prepared to execute them and communicate transparently with the public and stakeholders.

Preparation

Preparation is key to effective crisis management for any organization, and the level of preparedness directly correlates with the organization's ability to communicate during a crisis. It's closely related to the availability of resources in the broadest sense—finances, infrastructure, equipment, staff, partners, etc. It's crucial to note that only the resources acquired and established before the crisis will be accessible during the crisis. This factor can significantly impact the ease or difficulty of crisis communication. To aid in your preparation and readiness for a crisis, here are 20 questions to consider.

1. Has a comprehensive risk assessment been conducted?

Organizations face both external and internal crises, each with distinct consequences that may affect operations and communications differently. It's essential to be prepared for each type and conduct a thorough risk assessment. This includes evaluating the likelihood of various crises, their potential severity, the organization's readiness for these risks, and necessary preparatory measures.



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2. Have alternative methods of service delivery and infrastructure been explored?

Certain crises may impede access to the organization's usual services and infrastructure, such as internet connectivity, databases, electricity, water supply, and workspace. It's crucial to compile a list of alternative service providers and understand how to navigate situations where the organization's typical infrastructure is unavailable.

3. Have you partnered with any local media organizations for a potential collaboration in case of a crisis?

During crises, there may arise a need for mutual support or the opportunity to share resources, such as personnel, equipment, and financial resources, to ensure the organization can continue operating effectively.

4. Has there been an agreement on potential collaboration with international media organizations?

In situations where working within the country becomes difficult or impossible, partnerships with foreign counterparts can offer valuable support and resources.

5. Have all stakeholders been identified?

In a crisis scenario, it's crucial to swiftly communicate information to all stakeholders, including the organization's board, investors, audiences, and advertisers.

6. What additional equipment and facilities are necessary to sustain operations during a crisis?

In a crisis situation, routine tasks like broadcasting or publishing may become impossible from the usual premises. Essential equipment might be compromised, either physically or by cyber-attacks. Therefore, it's vital to consider additional investments in security—both cyber and physical—to protect staff during their work.





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7. Is there a contingency site available for continued operations?

Collaborating with other organizations, such as fellow media outlets, businesses, or local authorities willing to accommodate the editorial team, can ensure work continuity if the main site becomes inaccessible.

8. Are there alternative communication channels with the audience?

In the event core activities become impossible to carry out, alternative communication channels should be in place to relay information to the audience. These could include social media platforms, messaging apps, or partnerships with other media outlets to use their communication channels.

9. Are there alternative social media accounts and a secondary website for a backup created?

In the event of social media accounts or the primary website being compromised—whether due to hacking, blockage, or inability to contact administrators for restoration—it's crucial to activate pre-established alternative accounts and a secondary website.

10. Are secure and regularly updated backups of essential data and information maintained?

During a crisis, crucial files, including contact databases, may become inaccessible or destroyed. Therefore, it's essential to create and update secure copies of these files regularly.

11. Is there a comprehensive staff contact list with designated responsibilities?

A comprehensive staff contact list should include alternative phone numbers, private email addresses, home addresses, and at least one emergency contact person for each staff member. Additionally, each employee's responsibilities during a crisis should be clearly outlined.

12. Is there a comprehensive contact list of key partners and stakeholders?

Ideally, the contact list should encompass external service providers (legal, technical, financial), local emergency services, public officials at the local, regional, and national levels, local hospitals, partner organizations (such as other media outlets, fact-checking organizations, and NGOs), donor organizations, investors, and members of the organization's board.



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13. Do you have contingency plans for situations where there's no electricity and/or internet access?

Critical information needed during a crisis, such as staff contacts and responsibilities, should also be prepared and stored in physical format. Consider laminating printed materials to ensure they remain intact.

14. Is there a rotation schedule in place for on-call staff?

During crises, it's essential to disseminate information promptly. However, it's equally important to prevent fatigue, errors, and burnout among on-call staff by implementing a rotation plan.

15. Is there a protocol for handling threats for staff?

Journalists may face various threats, ranging from online harassment to physical intimidation. The organization should have clear protocols for addressing each type of threat. Additionally, resources should be available to enhance physical security (e.g., video surveillance, remote work capabilities) and provide emotional support to staff members.

16. Are there predefined templates for crisis communication messages?

In times of crisis, preparing timely communications to audiences and stakeholders may not always be feasible. Therefore, having pre-prepared messages, both in text and visual formats if necessary, is crucial. These messages can be disseminated immediately or with slight modifications during a crisis, saving time and avoiding delays, especially when management is unavailable to coordinate the message.

17. If the crisis impacts the organization itself, has a designated spokesperson been identified?

During a crisis, standard communication channels may fail, such as the responsible person being unavailable or unacceptable to the audience. Hence, it's essential to designate and train at least one person at each level of the organizational hierarchy to deliver public announcements when needed. These individuals should receive training in media and public communication, as simply working in the media does not guarantee the necessary skills.

18. Have the principles and resources for internal communication been established?

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During a crisis, it's crucial to keep your staff informed about what's happening and the decisions being made, in addition to external audiences and partners. The organization should agree on a communication format that avoids overwhelming information overload. For instance, utilizing chat applications with segmented chat rooms can help manage information flow effectively. Moreover, it's important to designate primary and secondary information focal points.

19.

Is there a reliable notification system in place to inform all staff members of a crisis?

A notification system operational round-the-clock is essential and should undergo regular testing. This system can be as simple as an always-available pay phone. Additionally, there should be a designated person responsible for notifications, along with a system to track employees' responses to crisis alerts.

20.

Is there a notification system established to inform stakeholders about a crisis?

Stakeholders need timely updates on the crisis and its implications for your organization. Predefined notification templates can facilitate efficient communication.

Crisis Communication

During times of crisis, it's vital not only to ensure business continuity but also to promptly communicate developments to audiences, stakeholders, and the organization itself.

1.

The crisis protocol should be activated by the management

Management holds three primary responsibilities at the onset of a crisis. Firstly, they determine whether the situation constitutes a crisis. Secondly, upon recognizing the crisis, management activates the crisis operating protocol, outlining the organization's course of action. Thirdly, management promptly informs the staff of the situation and the decisions made.

2.

Identification of the decision-maker

In situations characterized by conflicting or misleading information, and operating under time and resource constraints, building consensus within the management team can be challenging.



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Therefore, it's essential to designate a decision-maker at the onset of the crisis protocol. This individual should possess the requisite knowledge, stress resilience, and appropriate authority. Additionally, the decision-maker should be capable of determining the messages to be conveyed and the timing of their dissemination to involved parties.



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3. Be the first to report the crisis

If your organization is affected by a crisis, it's crucial to be the first to report what has occurred and the measures being taken to address it. Continuous and transparent communication is key, providing updates and reporting on developments until the crisis is resolved. Failing to report on the situation allows others to take the lead, potentially spreading misinformation that you may be unable to influence or refute.

4. Incorporate your values into crisis communication

Every organization has core values that should be communicated consistently, even during crises. Prepare information for employees, audiences, and stakeholders in a manner that aligns with your organization's values.

5. Maintain communication with all stakeholders

During a crisis, maintain an ongoing flow of information to all stakeholders regarding the situation's status and the actions taken or planned to mitigate it. This helps prevent misunderstandings and panic while also allowing for additional support.

6. Monitor the available information

Monitor the information landscape to promptly address misinterpretations or misinformation. Assess whether your organization is communicating effectively and adjust your approach as needed to ensure clear, accurate, and active information dissemination.

7. Identify and prevent misinterpretation of events in a timely manner

During a crisis, there may be diverse perceptions and expectations regarding the unfolding events between you, your audiences, and stakeholders. This underscores the critical importance of continuous communication. Providing truthful, clear, and validated information to the public and staff helps avert misinterpretation and differing perspectives. Misleading or incomplete

information, whether intentional or unintentional, can exacerbate the crisis.



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8. Verify the facts

Amidst a crisis, conflicting information is prevalent. It's essential to verify the facts. Seek assistance from partner organizations, such as other media outlets and non-governmental organizations specializing in fact-checking. Additionally, consult with government officials and relevant services to ensure accuracy.

9. Keep an eye on the broader context and events at a national level

If your organization is impacted by the crisis, consider whether it's part of a broader hybrid attack. The attack on your media outlet might be just one component of a larger operation targeting the state. Inform your partners and government contacts accordingly to ensure a comprehensive response.

10. Anticipate the emergence of "Pressure Groups"

During a crisis affecting your organization, expect pressure groups to surface, leveraging the situation to call for boycotts or provoke emotional responses and hasty decisions from you. These groups often comprise of activists associated with specific organizations, that use crisis to draw attention for themselves.

11. Collaborate with partners

In times of crisis, it's crucial to amplify your messages by seeking support from partners. Don't hesitate to engage with them to reach a broader audience and receive practical assistance for maintaining business continuity.

12. Stay alert to attempts of discreditation and spreading misinformation

With today's technology, including video and audio deepfakes, there's a risk of discrediting attempts and misinformation. Your voice in a phone conversation could be recorded and manipulated to undermine you. In certain crisis scenarios, recording phone calls—perhaps through automatic functions on smartphones—might be advisable to safeguard against such threats.

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