



Crisis Management and Recovery

- Steps to build an effective strategy
- Clear communication guidelines
- Important questions to consider

Being prepared and communicative is essential during a time of crisis. Please reach out to our team of experts at ClearVoice to assist with planning, creating, and writing a plan that you can effectively implement and apply to your content strategy.

Introduction



At ClearVoice, we are here to help you get through your crisis management and recovery process. We help some of the world's largest and best-known companies communicate effectively to their staff, the world, and their consumers. It is through our experience that during moments of crisis we can provide guidance and support to our clients to ensure they have the resources to be prepared with a game plan.

Many of our clients have the opportunity to effectively communicate through multiple platforms during times of crisis. And when they arise, companies can either build positive or negative bonds with stakeholders that will long outlast a crisis and will determine their future.

We created this Crisis Management and Recovery guide to inform clients, companies, and business owners on the importance and need for crisis management and recovery guidance. For individuals who are faced with a crisis, internally or externally, it is essential to effectively communicate with your team, customers, and stakeholders about how you, as a company, are addressing the issue.



What is crisis management and recovery?



To begin, let's first define what it means to have a crisis management plan (CMP) in place. Crisis management is the task of creating, implementing, and working diligently with all staff members to quickly address and recover while in the face of a crisis. An effective plan incorporates an emergency response, who to communicate directly to, outward and inward reputation management plan, disaster recovery, contingency communications, business continuity, and a clear delineation of key personnel and their list(s) of responsibilities.



What are the steps for effective crisis management and recovery?



Begin with building an effective crisis and recovery strategy. A crisis management plan (CMP) is a reference tool that provides lists of key contact information, reminders of what typically should be done in a crisis, and forms to be used to document the crisis response.



1. Ensure your company has a plan.

A CMP saves time during a crisis by pre-assigning tasks, assigning appropriate call-to-actions to particular individuals within the company, pre-collecting information, and serving as a reference source. After creating the CMP, don't forget to use, maintain, and update it. Many companies create a CMP and then lose it, buried in a drive folder and forgotten.



2. Get your legal team involved.

Discuss the CMP with your legal team and ensure that all external copy is approved and up to standards with business and legal guidelines. When your legal team is informed of your crisis management plan, then they can be part of the team of experts that can assist with recovery.



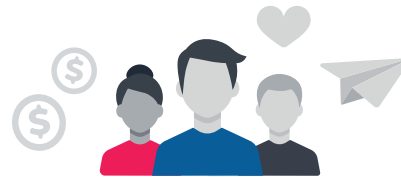
3. Consider departments that may be affected.

When a crisis occurs, consider all parties affected:



Internal:

employees, stakeholders, patients,
partners, et al.



External:

community, customers, generic public,
potential candidates, et al.

Both internal and external parties require effective communication to inform them of the steps you are taking to support them and provide them the answers they might need. For instance, employees might be concerned about layoffs during a crisis, so how do you address questions around this topic, while making sure that you have HR (human resources), legal team, and finance team all on board?



4. Determine which departments to include.

Whether it is the Public Relations, Marketing & Communications, Digital and Social, Human Resources, Hiring Managers, Legal, etc., walk through the importance of involvement for each department. This is just a brief list of individuals that are usually directly impacted after a crisis. The more advanced preparation they receive, the more they can work together as a team to address.



5. Have a trained crisis management team.

Pre-assigned tasks presume there is a designated crisis team. The team member(s) should know what tasks and responsibilities they have during a crisis. Through following the CMP, they will have a list of contact information to inform which individual(s), pre-drafted and approved copy that can be utilized on social platforms and news outlets, and what to say and what not to say during the crisis.

Please note, the composition will vary based on the nature of the crisis. For instance, if your website is hacked and there is a security breach, you need to inform your followers and users immediately with an informative, urgent, and appropriate call-to-action that you are implementing. Through timely communication, you can diminish panic and showcase the steps you are taking to recover from this crisis.



6. Prepare for physical and on-site needs.

Something to consider when dealing with crisis management is what resources you might have during an emergency. Understand that crises can come in different forms (i.e., viral tweet, natural disaster, company-wide lockdown, security breach). Your company should be prepared with both online and offline situations.

Therefore, make sure you have the physical resources you need to provide for your staff and ensure their safety, to ensure protection of your company's assets, or to facilitate business continuity and recovery.



7. Conduct a Crisis Management and Recovery exercise at least annually.

Update your CMP at least annually. Why might you ask? Many things can change in a year or even in a matter of seconds. A negative social post can go viral immediately, and it is important to implement this crisis management plan, while continuously improving it through different situations. The more prepared you are, the most efficient you can be during a time of crisis. To understand whether or not the CMP and your team are well equipped during a crisis, you should conduct the exercise annually.

Create an online module that all employees need to review, and require them to take an assessment where they need to pass. Provide different crisis management scenarios, which will make sure that your team is fully prepared for different crises when they arise. An informed team makes for an efficient team. Having a game plan and conducting exercises is more proactive than dealing with the crisis first-hand while it's occurring in real-time.

Our team of experts at ClearVoice can assist you in creating a crisis management plan that will inform your crisis management team on what to do and how to implement the plan.



What are effective guidelines for communication online and offline?

Make sure to review and implement effective communication for multiple scenarios. Whether the crisis is online or offline, be prepared for both. If it occurs offline, most people will end up posting about it online; therefore, both go hand-in-hand and require a CMP.

Please note that in the occurrence of any crisis, the safety of you and your personnel is of the utmost importance.



1. Address online comments

When addressing comments online, understand that there will be “trolls” online who will share things on social media platforms that might not be true. An online “troll” is an individual who posts inflammatory and extraneous topics to upset individuals online. Their main intent is to provoke readers and intentionally urge them to respond to their messages negatively; therefore, painting them as being aggressive in public.

Do not engage with “trolls” because their main intent is to create hostility around the crisis. If profanity is used, you can make an executive decision on whether or not you would like to “block” the individual. However, make it a key point within the CMP on how to address online “trolls” before, during, and after a crisis.





2. Develop a social strategy.

Create a step-by-step process on how to address concerns online and on all social platforms that you are currently on. Implement a document where it appropriately addresses concerns on social platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Inform individuals that you have acknowledged their post(s) and take the issue offline when possible. Utilize your legal team's pre-drafted and pre-approved messaging.



3. Include clarity in your communication.

When responding to individuals online and offline, make sure to be clear with how you are conveying your message.

- **Avoid the phrase “no comment”** because people think it means the organization is guilty and trying to hide something.
- **Present information clearly by avoiding jargon or technical terms.** Lack of clarity makes people think the organization is purposefully being confusing to hide something.
- **Appear pleasant by avoiding nervous habits that people interpret as deception.** A spokesperson needs to have strong eye contact, limited disfluencies such as “uhms” or “uhs”, and avoid distracting nervous gestures such as fidgeting or pacing. Remember to be communicative, informative, and direct.



4. Prepare your communications team.

When briefing all potential spokespersons on the latest crisis information, be sure to inform them of the key message points the organization is trying to convey. Publicly facing content can play a critical role in preparing team members for handling questions. The media relations element of public relations is a highly valued skill in crisis management.



5. Prepare your public relations team.

Your PR team should be well-equipped with information from your CMP on how to move forward during a crisis. Therefore, they can address all external communication when it comes to crisis management



6. Pre-draft select messages.

Make sure to have pre-drafted and approved copy, including content for websites and templates for crisis statements. Have the legal department review and pre-approve these messages. Have a partner in place that can help identify proper channels and messaging strategies.



7. Take the conversation offline.

If individuals are “trolling” online, then ask them to direct message you to better understand what their questions might be. This showcases that you are acknowledging their concern while taking the necessary precautions to address them offline. Try to avoid ignoring, hiding, or deleting comments, unless there is profanity or violates social/online policies of hurtful and inappropriate messaging.

What are some questions to consider to better prepare for a crisis?

The following questions should be addressed before, after, and even during your crisis management exercise. It is to help inform all designated departments, spokespersons, and stakeholders, on how, why, and what.



1. Was the problem beyond your control or a result of negligence?

Could this issue have been prevented? What were the main reasons why this crisis occurred? If it was out of your control, and the public is diligently watching for your response and recovery, it is important to implement a CMP to shorten and eliminate the negative impact on the company.

Was it avoidable to some degree? Was it due to the lack of preparation? The more well-informed and prepared you are, the quicker you can respond and hopefully recover. Allow our team of experts at ClearVoice to assist you in creating a crisis management and recovery strategy to put out fires more quickly and efficiently — and eliminate the negative impact on the company.





2. What are your competitors doing?

Keep an eye on what your competitors are doing, and make sure your own company's needs for support are well-informed and prepared. Sometimes you might find blindspots your competitors have seen, and adapting quickly can help you avoid an appearance of bad management or poor planning.

3. What does your leadership say and what commitments do they make?



Nothing puts a leadership team under more scrutiny than an ill-prepared CMP. From executive compensation to business actions, every decision will be under the microscope and closely scrutinized.

The public has limited tolerance for corporate executives who appear out of touch with the circumstances or have been ill-prepared during a time of crisis. This is where your business persona will matter, as customers begin to come back, evaluate, or decide to stick with you after the crisis.



4. What are you doing for your consumers, stakeholders, and communities?

The public believes large companies have an obligation to support their employees and the community. There might be even more demand for signs of reciprocity, especially if your company is a non-profit or in healthcare, government, or any other industry that directly influences the community.

Be thoughtful and meaningful in your approach to communicating with your community. You do not want to sever ties or create panic. Instead, be informative, communicative, and sincere about the approaches you are taking to remedy the crisis with your consumers, stakeholders, and communities.



5. How are you treating your employees?

Similar to how you are treating and communicating to your consumers, stakeholders, and communities, apply the same thoughtfulness in communication with your employees. During a time of crisis, morale will be affected, and there will be anxiousness around their longevity or the uncertainty of the business.

- Provide reoccurring, transparent dialogue about how the company is serving their interest and the greater national interest during the crisis.
- Inform your employees of what they can and cannot share online and offline for the privacy and security of the company.
- Work with your talent acquisition team to put together a FAQ (frequently asked questions) document that can be shared internally with employees to inform them of what the crisis is, where to address questions, and provide answers during the crisis.



6. Are you indispensable?

So much of the long-term reputational impact will boil down to that question for your company and your category. Have you built up long-term reputation capital to be viewed as essential to both individuals' and society's future? This is a key question for a brand in good times and is critical under these circumstances.



Key Takeaways

Don't wait until a crisis occurs to create a plan. With the information that has been provided, here are the key takeaways when it comes to crisis management preparation and recovery:



1. Be prepared.

Start planning for the possibility of a crisis tomorrow. As mentioned previously, you want to be prepared instead of working through crisis management in real-time. During the heat of a crisis, the here and now takes precedence. You need to have a team dedicated to looking beyond the calendar week, month or year and helping you determine the impact of decisions so you can make wise ones. When the dust settles, the scrutiny will go further back than you expect. Taking a broad view in the heat of the moment is difficult but necessary, and having a team to help is key.

2. Keep everyone accounted for.

Dependent on the severity of the crisis, it may be fast-moving, which also means that public opinion is fluid. Each member of the company (stakeholders, employees, etc.) may have a different angle and perspective. The circumstances will be interpreted differently by every person (internally and externally). Employees will view this differently than investors. Retailers will view this differently than consumers. Make sure that your communication accounts for everyone. Don't assume that your loyal fans, stakeholders, and employees take your side. It's never been more important to listen to these stakeholders and pointedly communicate with each individual.





3. Be communicative, clear, and compassionate.

Whether online or offline, make sure to be communicative, clear, and compassionate. Honest, straightforward and clear communications that are rooted in your company's values will come through as being authentic.

You can bridge the gap between your values and public sentiment with the right amount of clarity and communication. Remember that your company's reputation is not something that happens over three months and then goes away. Your success here is measured in years, not quarters.



Conclusion

Being prepared and communicative is essential during a time of crisis. Involving the right departments, drafting external communications, and reviewing all different scenarios will allow for more seamless response when dealt with a crisis. Instead of scrambling to figure out who to reach out to, and how to do it, you will have a game plan that all your employees will understand.

Now that you have considered all departments, questions, and are ready to implement a Crisis Management and Recovery Plan, reach out to our team of experts at ClearVoice to assist with planning, creating, and writing a plan that you can effectively implement and apply to your content strategy.

