

Crisis Communication in the Modern-Day Media Landscape



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Managing crises has never been a straightforward task for brands, or their PR teams. In the modern business ecosystem, however, the expanded crisis landscape is more difficult to navigate than ever before. The increased complexity, as we well know by now, stems from the rapid and unbridled proliferation of digital platforms. This reality has not only amplified the potential for crises but has also completely transformed the way we approach them.

Social media never sleeps!

The internet is vast and growing. Today, brands and their activities are discussed (read: dissected) across platforms. Social media giants like Facebook and X (formerly Twitter), anonymous review platforms like Reddit and Quora, and niche forums like Glassdoor, all offer individuals a voice and the potential to reach a massive audience. This presents brands with multiple 'warfronts' that demand simultaneous

attention. One negative review or a single viral tweet could unexpectedly originate and spread like wildfire.

And then, there's the added complexity of deepfakes – extremely convincing manipulated videos or audio recordings that can conjure crises out of thin air, pushing brands to put out fires that they never really started.

This technologically-charged scenario begs the question: If it's never quiet on the social media front, does this mean brands always need to be in battle mode?

Well, yes. In a manner of speaking. Given the minefield that is the new-age business landscape, a brand can effectively manage and mitigate crisis only through a long-term strategy. They must prepare and reinforce their arsenal so they are ready to act when a situation turns into a crisis.

Modern problems, modern solutions

It was poet laureate Robert Frost who said 'The only way out is through'. When it comes to reputation crisis, this is largely the truth we live by. Ignorance breeds escalation, and brands must act swiftly to get through the situation and emerge the other side. How? Here are some strategies that have been developed partially from research and largely from hindsight.

Rapid Response. A quick and well-drafted response relayed across relevant platforms can make all the difference between a contained episode and an uncontrollable incident. The right spokesperson, the right messaging, and the right platform will help brands open communication channels with the public and take the first step towards restoring the status quo. Here, PR practitioners must bring in their expertise to ensure that the message is tailored for different platforms and stakeholders for maximum impact and damage control.

Media Partnerships. It goes without saying: traditional media remains the most critical ally for a brand going through a challenging situation. Key media outlets can provide credible platforms for brands to present their side of the story and counter misinformation. Building good relations with media outlets, then, continues to be essential for brands.

Listening Mechanisms. An ongoing effort, the deployment of AI-led listening tools will help brands monitor relevant conversations and detect potential issues before they grow into a full-blown crisis. Listening tools will also help brands carry out sentiment analysis and audience profiling which gives them the awareness required to manage brand perception.

Third-Party Advocacy. While direct communication channels work wonders during tough times, it is sometimes most suitable to utilise a neutral third-party advocate for more credible communication. I've found that building a network of industry experts, influencers, and satisfied customers who can speak on behalf of an organisation can all be impactful advocates to mitigate crisis situations.

Trend Mapping. Leveraging predictive analysis to map past crises and current trends helps brands predict potential issues that may crop up in the future. Preemptive strategies can stop negative scenarios in their tracks even before they occur. (PR)evention, as they say, is better than cure!

A view of the future of crisis management

Unfortunately, it's only going to get more complicated. Fortunately, this will keep giving us opportunities to be more hands-on and devise better, more ironclad strategies. The PR function will become a core necessity for brands as new platforms emerge, technologies advance, and the speed at which information spreads increases.

We'll have more tech-backed tools to circumvent crises and manage them. The fundamental principles of effective crisis management will, however, remain the same – transparency, authenticity, and responsiveness. These three, in the right combination, will see brands through the most turbulent of waters.

In the end, we must view each crisis as a chance to connect with stakeholders, build trust, speak our truth, and turn challenges into stepping stones. Most importantly, in the era of the 24-hour digital news cycle, proactive and adaptive resolution strategies are indispensable. There is simply no other option.