

Three Steps to Successful Crisis Communications

When a crisis occurs, organizations often face a single daunting question: “What do we do now?” But experience has shown us that it’s far more helpful to ask a very different, yet equally straightforward, question: “What do people expect us to do now?”

By understanding the expectations of your audiences, whether they are loyal customers or casual observers, the path forward becomes clear.

1. Acknowledge What’s Happened

When a crisis occurs, your stakeholders are looking to you to speak up and will evaluate how long it takes to hear from you. You can protect the trust you’ve already built with your audiences by acknowledging that you’re aware of the issue - to simply confirm that you know what they know within the following hour. Adhere to your brand’s tone and voice to genuinely convey sympathy and a sense of urgency to learn more and to make things right.

At this stage, the immediate narrative around your brand is unwritten. There is precious time for you to take pen to paper before others begin writing the story on your behalf.

2. Take Ownership

Maximizing trust and credibility requires an organization to take responsibility, openly acknowledge its mistakes, and keep an open line of communication with the public rather than deflecting blame, downplaying the issue, or minimizing its effects. “Owning” the crisis means being upfront and proactive in addressing it, while a defensive posture can easily color your organization as being self-serving and tone-deaf.

Taking ownership can radically shift the public’s perception of a crisis from one in which your organization is their adversary to a cooperative effort in confronting a common challenge.

3. Make It Right

Last, but not least, you’re expected to clearly and transparently convey your plan of action to bring the crisis to a resolution. This can involve a combination of immediate steps that have already been implemented, short-term plans to institute change, and long-term commitments to prevent such incidents in the future. Strategically, this step should also be considered your brand’s earliest opportunity of clarifying the scope of its responsibility.

Steps one and two are absolutely critical in empowering your organization to reach this third step and begin turning the page to the next chapter in your brand’s journey.

