



Presentation

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Crisis Communications



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Media Relations & Crisis Communications

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Crisis Communications

“Some PR professionals work their whole lives trying to generate national media attention. Some of us get it unexpectedly one day... And usually end up complaining about it.” – Patrick Gibbons



Crisis Communications



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- Pre-Crisis
 - ❖ Preparation
- Crisis Response
 - ❖ Response and communication
- Post-Crisis
 - ❖ Reputation repair
 - ❖ Make progress, recovery and improvement visible



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Phase I: Pre-Crisis



Crisis Communications Plan



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- Crisis communications policy
- **Roles and responsibilities**
- **Contact list**
- Checklist/action plan
- Messaging
- Social media considerations
- Prepping a spokesperson
- **Sample statements and releases**
- Crisis communications center set-up

Crisis Communications Plan



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School system

Law
enforcement

Water authority

Transit system

Library

Fire
department

Public works

Public official



Crisis Communications Plan



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Sample plan
available at:
www.vmlins.org

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Welcome to Communications Consulting. Here you will find a number of resources and information to help you manage your communications activities. For more information on this service, see the [Communications Consulting brochure](#). If you have any questions, please contact Hollie Cammarasana at (800) 963-6800 or via e-mail at: hcammarasana@vmlins.org.

Communications Presentations

- [Developing Strategies to Pitch & Respond to Media](#) - NEW!
- [Effective Crisis Communications](#)
- [Engaging Citizens, Encouraging Open Government: Social Media Considerations and Strategies](#)
- [Intro to Social Media: Supporting Strategic Goals](#)
- [Prepping a Spokesperson](#)
- [Press Releases & Owned Media in the Digital Age](#)
- [Risks and Rewards of Social Media](#)
- [Social Media 101](#)
- [Strategic Communications Planning](#)
- [Workplace Violence: Prevention and Communication](#)

Sample Communications Plans and Policies

- [Sample Crisis Communications Plan](#)
- [Sample Crisis Communications Plan - Appendix A](#)
- [Sample Crisis Communication Plan - Appendix B](#)
- [Sample Crisis Communication Plan - Appendix C](#)
- [Sample Social Media Public Comment Policy](#)
- [Sample Social Media Administration Policy](#)



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Phase II: Crisis Response



Crisis Response



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- Ensure safety first!
- Contact:
 - ❖ Designated crisis management lead & designated chief spokesperson



Crisis Response



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- Your job is to:
 - ❖ Get correct information out;
 - ❖ Get critical public safety messages out;
 - ❖ Correct rumors;
 - ❖ Educate and calm the public; and
 - ❖ Gain support.
- Initiate crisis communication plan
 - ❖ Assess facts/gather information
 - ❖ Develop/distribute standby statement
 - ❖ Stay informed of situation
 - ❖ Track inquiries/news coverage
 - ❖ Assess resources needed
 - ❖ Establish briefing schedule
 - ❖ No comment isn't an option.

Crisis Response



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- Golden Hour – Most initial reports will come out in this order and all subsequent stories will follow the way it is framed in the first hour.
- Provide truthful information FAST
 - ❖ Be FIRST to provide the news/control story
 - ❖ Take responsibility if warranted
 - ❖ Be honest. Don't mislead. Minimize spin.
 - ❖ Never say “no comment”
 - ❖ Be friendly and accessible
 - ❖ Meet deadlines
 - ❖ No such thing as off the record.

Crisis Response: Standby Statement



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- Standby Statement

- ❖ Acknowledges the incident/issue
- ❖ This is what we know
- ❖ This is what we do not know – potentially
- ❖ This is when we will have more information

- **Example:** The Town of XXX recognizes the severe impact of last night's intense storm on citizens throughout the area. We are prepared to assist the businesses, communities and citizens impacted by this storm in whatever way possible. Additional information with details on aid and assistance available will be available within XX hours.

Crisis Response



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- Determine your key audiences
- Determine communications channels
 - ❖ Web site
 - ❖ Facebook/Twitter
 - ❖ YouTube
 - ❖ Traditional media
 - ❖ E-mail blasts?
 - ❖ Special blog or “dark site”
- Track calls and inquiries from media, respond as you can. Be mindful of deadlines.
- Consider streamlining approval process.

Crisis Response: 3 C's



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- Control – Take appropriate action, explain
- Concern – Demonstrate concern, compassion
- Credibility – know the facts, be first with news, build trust



Crisis Response



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- Develop additional messaging/talking points
- Prep spokesperson/self
 - ❖ Our primary concern at this point is
 - ❖ What I can tell you right now is
 - ❖ The important thing at this point is
 - ❖ I think a more accurate term is...

Crisis Response



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- Find angle – what's next
- Develop good news angles – “behind the scenes” or coordinate interviews
- Use all communications channels at your disposal

Working with Legal



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- Same team, different perspectives
- Both critical in emergencies
- Work together in advance to build trust
- Highlight bad examples elsewhere, understand concerns and present options
- Boss needs both perspectives





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2010 Boston "Aquapocalypse"



2010 Boston “Aquapocalypse”



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- Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) massive waterline rupture leaves two million residents under “boil order”
 - ❖ Obtained federal disaster declaration
 - ❖ Boil water order implemented
 - ❖ Reverse 9-1-1 calls to all residents in affected area with recorded message
 - ❖ Major news stations notified within two hours
 - ❖ MWRA worked with news channels to develop YouTube videos with updates and instructions on what to do in crisis
 - ❖ National Guard worked with water distribution to provide emergency drinking water

2010 Boston “Aquapocalypse”



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Hotels/restaurants
unable to function

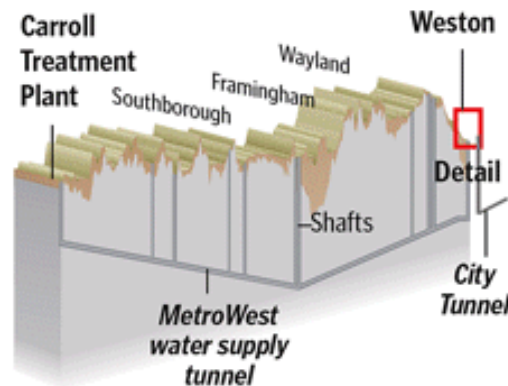
School cancelled
for several days
(cafeteria)

No fresh water for
three days

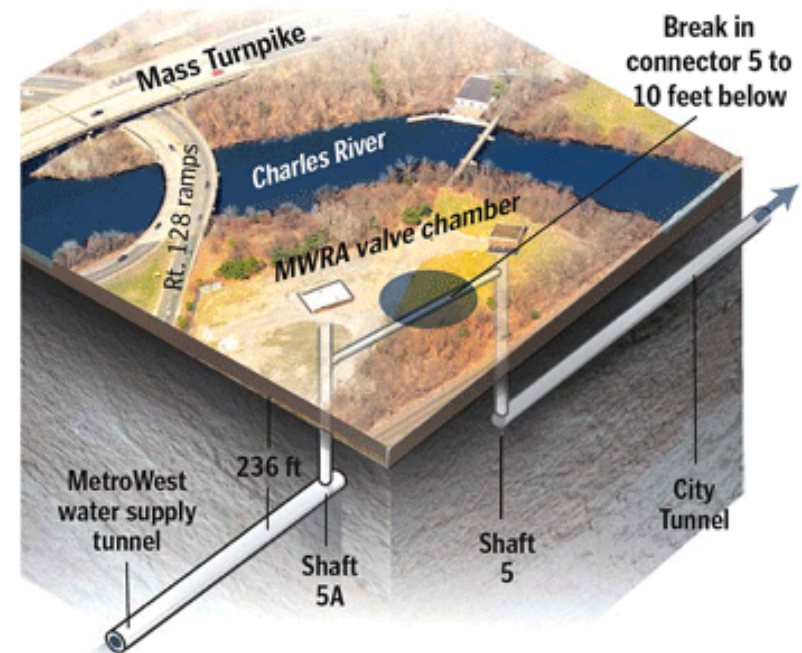
Constant
communication
with the public –
credible,
concerned, and in
control

THE BREACH

The rupture happened in Weston in a 10-foot-wide steel and concrete pipe connecting the MWRA's MetroWest and city tunnels



SOURCE: MWRA, Pictometry



JAVIER ZARRACINA, ED WIEDERER/GLOBE STAFF

Nestle vs. Greenpeace



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Greenpeace parody's "have a break" slogan through YouTube video highlighting unsustainable forest clearing to produce palm oil for Nestle



Nestle vs. Greenpeace



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- Initially Nestle cited copyright and asked for video to be removed
 - ❖ Caused greater outrage/more attention – move to other sites
- Issues Management
 - ❖ Proactive process of anticipating, identifying, evaluating and responding to public policy issues that affect organizations and their publics now and in the future.

Nestle vs. Greenpeace



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- Suspended sourcing from the cited area
 - ❖ Began talking with Greenpeace about palm oil supplies
 - ❖ Chose a nonprofit to certify sustainability of palm oil suppliers
 - ❖ Joined the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil
 - ❖ Changed marketing strategy – now monitors social media 24/7 and coordinates engagement whenever an issue arises
- Lesson – engaging with critics and addressing their concerns is more effective than trying to shut down discussion

Who Are the Media?



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Mainstream
Media (MSM)

Bloggers

Citizen
journalists

Social media

Uncle Randy





Who Are the Media?

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- The role of the MSM as the sole provider of mass public information is gone.
- Social media has changed the rules – even for the MSM.
- Risk to reputations are higher – but where there are risks there are opportunities.

Who are the Media?



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- Hyperlocal news:
 - ❖ Sites delivering news and content relevant to small communities or neighborhoods overlooked by MSM.
 - Track school board meetings, local government happenings, neighborhood squabbles, and sports.
 - ❖ Staffed by professional journalists.
 - ❖ Investigative reporting.
 - ❖ Care *passionately* about what is happening locally.
 - ❖ May be linked to traditional newspapers – PATCH.



- Blogs:
 - ❖ Investment is low.
 - ❖ Not under same editorial processes as MSM.
 - ❖ However, many are staffed by professional journalists.
- Facebook/Twitter:
 - ❖ Frequently used by the MSM as an indicator of events to cover.
 - Ex: Mumbai massacre in 2008, China earthquake 2008, Indonesia bombings 2009, Iran elections 2009, Hudson miracle landing of Flight 1549.
 - ❖ Twitter has been invaluable in crisis media management to control rumors and misinformation.



- Why you need to include social media in your crisis communications plan:
 - ❖ 78 percent of Americans get their news from local TV
 - ❖ 73 percent from cable news
 - ❖ 54 percent from radio
 - ❖ 50 percent from local paper
 - ❖ 61 percent online
- Without social media you could be missing half your audience or half your story.

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Crisis Communications and Social Media



Crisis & Social Media



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- In the digital age, customer relations and public relations are overlapping
- An attack on social media can do damage in minutes, not days
 - ❖ Kevin Smith – Too fat to fly? 1.5 million followers on Twitter
 - ❖ Even though they responded in 20 minutes, not enough

Hey @SouthwestAir! I've landed in Burbank. Don't worry: wall of the plane was opened & I was airlifted out while Richard Simmons supervised.



- Create culture of listening
- Provide proactive customer service – empower them to stop customer complaints before they blow up
- Part of your strategy – but not driver
- Valuable resource for:
 - ❖ Monitoring
 - ❖ Listening
 - ❖ Sharing perspective
 - ❖ Interaction



- The paradigm of the mediated news-cycle is over.
- Bad news – out of traditional media faster/stays on the Internet in perpetuity.
- Put it in writing
 - ❖ Post the latest statements and information on your Web site and Facebook pages.
 - ❖ Post links to it on your Twitter feed.
 - ❖ Post a video statement on your YouTube page.
 - ❖ Cross link all of these.
- Address rumors
 - ❖ Address rumors online, but pick your battles. Don't get into an argument online.



- Blog or “Dark Site”
 - ❖ Overview of situation
 - ❖ Facts and data
 - ❖ FAQ’s
 - ❖ Issues at stake
 - ❖ Corrections and clarifications
 - ❖ Blog posts
 - ❖ Timelines
 - ❖ Downloads – Audio/Video
 - ❖ “In the news” section
 - ❖ Links
 - ❖ Public meeting transcripts/audio
 - ❖ What we propose to do/change
 - ❖ What we need



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Communicating During Crisis

“I have been cautioned to talk but be careful not to say anything.” – Mark Twain



Communicating During Crisis



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- Provide information on the current situation
- Provide a call to action, if necessary
- Reiterate your mission
 - ❖ “As always our mission is the health and safety of the public, stewards of public funds, etc.”
- Focus on “procedure.”
- Avoid acronyms, jargon, use simple words.
- Keep sentences short and create stand-alone sentences.
- Restrict yourself to three key points.

Communicating During Crisis



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- Prepare to address these questions:
 - ❖ Who: is responsible, is affected, will benefit
 - ❖ What: happened, is the impact, is the cost, is the solution
 - ❖ When: did it happen, will it be resolved, will you have more information
 - ❖ Where: did it happen, are people going to be relocated
 - ❖ Why: didn't you know about this, didn't you do something sooner, is this taking so long.
- Why questions – tempt you to speculate, don't do it!
- Again – focus on procedure

Communicating During Crisis



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- Getting out your message puts you on offense, not defense.
 - ❖ Answer honestly – can't play gotcha if you tell the truth.
 - ❖ Take responsibility.
 - ❖ Show humility.
 - ❖ Couple concern with commitment to action.
 - ❖ Address rumors.
 - ❖ Make sure your body language corresponds to your message.

Communicating During Crisis



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■ What media want

- ❖ Print Media/Online: Lots of information, details, background
- ❖ TV: Visual impact, sound bytes
- ❖ Radio: Sound bytes, atmosphere

■ Live vs. Taped

- ❖ Print Media/Online: Lots of information, details, background
- ❖ TV: Visual impact, sound bytes
- ❖ Radio: Sound bytes, atmosphere

Communicating During Crisis



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- Problem–Solution Formula:
 - ❖ Two phrases joined by a conjunction. First clause identifies and frames the problem. The second offers a solution. Combined they may survive media editing process.

Communicating During Crisis



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■ Problem–Solution Formula

- ❖ Example: Three workers at a courier sorting facility contracted the H1N1 virus, leaving two employees dead and a third in critical condition.
- ❖ Problem: H1N1 flu virus has killed two employees and put a third in critical condition.
- ❖ Solution: Close the facility and bring in health officials to test all workers and determine the source of the virus.
- ❖ Message: Sadly, the virus has claimed the lives of two of our colleagues and has placed a third in critical condition, so we have closed the facility while state health officials test all workers and determine the source of the virus.

Communicating During Crisis



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- Two part questions.
- Control your body language.
 - ❖ Appropriate to message
 - ❖ Look at reporter
 - ❖ Relax
 - ❖ Do not fidget!
- Answer the question – then **stop**.

Communicating During Crisis



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- Block, bridge, and hook technique
 - ❖ **Block** the question being asked:
 - “It would be inappropriate for me to speculate...”
 - “That’s not my area of expertise...”
 - ❖ **Bridge** to a positive message you can share...
 - “But what I can tell you is...”
 - “Let’s look at this from another perspective...”
 - ❖ **Hook** them onto another line of thinking that prevents them from more speculative questions.
- Faster you get to a quote, faster interview will end

Communicating During Crisis



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- Flagging
 - ❖ “The most important thing to remember is...”
 - ❖ “It boils down to...”
 - ❖ “The best part about...”
- Counting down
 - ❖ I’d like to make three points...
- Multiple questions
 - ❖ Respond only to the one you most want to answer, then be done

Communicating During Crisis



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- What if questions
 - ❖ “I can’t speculate on that, but what I can tell you is...”
 - ❖ “I can’t speak for <someone else>, but what I can say is...”
- Inaccurate statements
 - ❖ If the reporter misstates a fact in their question call them out on it immediately
 - “I’m sorry, but you misstated a key fact...”
- Don’t repeat a negative:
 - ❖ Q: Why didn’t you know about this dangerous situation?
 - ❖ A: We didn’t know because...
 - ❖ A2: Our investigations show....

Communicating During Crisis



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- Commenting on someone's opinion:
 - ❖ Q: We have heard that the mayor is furious that you have rejected his attempts to negotiate with the unions on your behalf.
 - ❖ A: Our goal right now is to ensure that the important work of keeping our community safe continues to be a priority.
- Loaded questions
- Either/or questions
- Closed (yes/no) questions
- Guarantee questions

Communicating During Crisis



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- Closure strategy – reporter not interested in your message and their question is pivotal in their story.
 - ❖ First: Answer question honestly in a way which reflects your prepared message.
 - ❖ Second: Preface response with “As I said,” and paraphrase your message.
 - ❖ Third: Preface with “I’ve answered this question a few times. If you like, I’ll answer it one more time before we move on” and again paraphrase.
 - Say “LAST” not “again,” or “one more time” or “for the last time.” Don’t be confrontational.

Communicating During Crisis



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■ Last tips:

- ❖ Don't "answer" reporters' questions – *respond* to them...
- ❖ Don't try to explain everything – stick to your talking points and soundbites
- ❖ It's okay to ask the reporter to repeat the question
- ❖ Give clarifying details on background to the reporter, not as a quote (say "On background – explain," then "Now here's a quote you can use")
- ❖ For live interviews – focus on bridging (TV). For live interviews, you can talk a bit longer and "run out the clock"
- ❖ For taped interviews – focus on flagging (TV). For taped interviews, you can stop if you make a mistake and state you would like to start over.
- ❖ Always have a closing statement ready – they will ask...



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Questions?

