

Implement a communications plan to help avoid a public crisis

The reputation of your business could be at risk. When a crisis occurs, communication is key.



With today's access to social media and the ability to record events on mobile devices, no one can predict when an incident will go viral or cause a media storm. If you're scrambling for answers when the media asks questions, you can easily leave the wrong impression. That's why it's wise to prepare for any event and have a crisis communication program in place to help you respond accordingly.

Events that might attract media attention include:

- Storm or fire damage to your business
- An employee injury on duty
- An auto accident
- Injury to others due to employee negligence
- A revealing news story about your staff or procedures
- Social media posts/viral videos that reflect poorly on the the business

These are all situations that can surface without warning. Developing a crisis communication program can help you handle the media attention and provide your staff with much needed guidance in emergency situations.

Your Reputation Could Be on the Line

A solid reputation is a key ingredient for any successful business operation. When events occur that cause damage and injury, your reputation can depend on how you react.



Crisis Communications

Having a crisis communication program in place can help educate your employees on how to handle media inquiries, respond to phone calls to your company, and create a smooth process for solving problems quickly.

Get involved with your community before an incident occurs. Meeting with your local emergency services groups before an incident occurs will help you establish a strong working relationship. During these meetings, you can acquaint the emergency personnel with your business and equipment, it's also a way to have your staff meet the emergency personnel and answer any questions they may have.

Crisis Communication Cards

To help respond to questioning, some owners and managers use a single sheet of essential information to address the situation at hand. This is called a crisis communication card. Use this card to capture essential information. During a crisis, critical information may be requested by government officials, employees, local and national news media, and the local community. Important items to include on your crisis communication card include:

- Company hotline numbers
- Contact information for the company spokesperson
- A list of dos and don'ts as reminders for the staff taking calls
- Key facts about the company (e.g., number of employees and contents stored in the building or transported in vehicles)
- Contact list for owners, managers and any staff that may need to be notified of an event
- A standard response for addressing callers' needs so all employees can respond uniformly

Training employees can help protect your business. The media may attempt to interview employees other than the designated company spokesperson, so it's important to prepare employees to decline interview requests and refer media to the designated spokesperson.

During a crisis, the media and public will want to know:

- The specific details of the event
- The chronology of events
- Information about policies or procedures in place to mitigate or respond
- Steps being taken to investigate, resolve or recover from the crisis

Your management team must appear poised, articulate, confident and professional. When your staff is trained to be sympathetic and informative, a positive outcome more often results. Saying "no comment" can often lead media sources to draw their own conclusions, so it's best to have your staff direct any inquiries to the spokesperson.

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