



Managing media during a crisis

Every organisation is likely to encounter a reputational issue or crisis at some point in their lifetime, and in the world of media and communications it's important to ensure you are prepared.

When you're in the midst of a crisis, it's critical to keep your finger on the pulse of all media channels to combat and address statements or commentary as they emerge - but this shouldn't just start when the issue breaks. In order to effectively respond, it's important to have planned and prepared processes in place, and a prompt team to mobilise.

As the mediascape evolves, social media is increasingly playing a key role in maintaining a healthy brand and managing reputation day-to-day. However, with the brilliance of real-time, and customer engagement, it comes as an equally (if not bigger) risk when breaking issues or crises.

So what defines a crisis?

If enough people are saying the same negative thing about your organisation across various media platforms – and all at the same time – you may find yourself in the wake of a crisis. What really identifies a crisis is a major negative change in the conversation about your brand or organisation, and this can be tracked by monitoring content volumes and sentiment relevant to your brand, keywords and campaigns.

As an organisation, you should define how much a change in sentiment you need to see before you can start thinking about the issue as a potential crisis. Once the numbers hit a certain pre-determined point, it's imperative to review the situation – making a call on whether it's time to activate your crisis communications plan.

A formulated crisis communication plan allows you to quickly respond to any potential issue, instead of debating how to handle things as the crisis hits. A pre-formulated plan will allow you to take prompt action and prevent things from getting out of control.

At this point, it's also just as important to internally communicate your crisis management responses. This helps ensure staff outside of the media and comms team are able to manage their relationships and conversation accordingly – particularly if you have a Sales department or other externally-facing function that might be caught off-guard.

With more than a quarter of crises spreading internationally within just one hour, it can take organisations an average of 21 hours to defend themselves in any kind of meaningful way, so it is important to be prepared, and to act fast.

Your social media crisis communication plan should include:

1. Guidelines for identifying the type and magnitude of a crisis
2. Roles and responsibilities for every department (and ideally some talking points)
3. A communication plan for internal updates
4. Up-to-date contact information for critical employees
5. Processes for messaging on social media or talking to clients
6. Pre-approved external messages, images, or information.

Here we outline some of the pre, during and post crisis action you should be taking to ensure you're as prepared as possible.

Pre-crisis planning

Before a crisis even hits, your organisation should be proactive – curating a list of potential crisis triggers, keywords and search terms.

Monitoring brand mentions and keywords associated with your brand can give you some advanced warning of a surge of media activity and get you ready to explain your position before you are equated with the fallout they've generated.

Listen and be present

Not listening to the social chatter or having presence on social communities can reflect badly on your brand. Social listening tools will pick up the chatter about a topic and allow you to address it before it blows up within the social stratosphere. Prevent a potential brand disaster by monitoring social chatter and choosing the most appropriate channel(s) to communicate

with your audience. React as quickly as possible and pay close attention to your competitors as you do your own organisation.

Monitor your industry

If there is a crisis in your industry, it is more than likely to hit you by association. If there is a crisis happening with your competitor, it could potentially be your crisis too and will need to be managed before it is amplified into something larger. Monitor how your industry is being perceived and keep track of any events that may impact it.

Set the right expectation

Be specific and make the expectation visible to your audience to ensure it is seen – and always stick to it. If you are a small business or have limited staff/bandwidth, then the right expectations should be set for response and action. React as quickly as possible but also be realistic that this could be as much as 24, 48 or 72 hours (and have a plan accordingly).

During a crisis

The companies that react quickly, differentiate facts from rumours in real time, assess the situation and act upon it in a timely manner, are the ones demonstrating effective reputation management.

First and foremost, you should assess the level of threat to your reputation and defuse controversy by joining conversations to add facts, perspective and get things back on track. Media intelligence can provide insight into who is talking about your brand, how to defend and how to assess the magnitude as well as the sentiment that is being exhibited.

Publicly acknowledge what's going on

It's hard to hide when your brand is facing an issue or crisis. Your best tactic is to make it known there is a problem and advise you're working to fix it, whether this be on your website, social channels or by sending out an eDM. There still may be some unhappy stakeholders, but this will buy some time.

Inform your team

Immediately communicate with your team. If your team can mobilise and help resolve the issue or respond quickly enough, you may be able to lessen the overall harm.

Publish information on your website

Although you may be posting frequent social updates or sending official responses out to the media, you also need a central place for those affected. This will help provide a central point for you to own the narrative if being go looking.

Be transparent

Trying to remove or cover up negative comments can make it seem like an issue is being ignored, or that you simply don't care about the issue or customers. If a mistake is made, own up to it, admit it, apologise and do everything in your power to correct it. Transparency, authenticity and honesty goes a long way.

Post crisis action plan

When the dust beings to settle, it's extremely important to focus on rebuilding (or repairing) your status, reputation and brand. While this may unfortunately take time, it is vital to ensuring a long-term road back to success.

Leveraging a tool to monitor sentiment in platforms such as Mediaportal, allows visibility across the industry, against competitors, and most importantly your own organisation against itself. You can see where progress is being made, and where gaps still need to be addressed.

While complaints and issues can spread across media as fast as the speed of light, recovering from a crisis can be just as fast. Having access to an effective monitoring tool with all media data in one place will ensure you are kept up-to-date.

Our Mediaportal (and talented Account Management teams) can help identify impending crises across print, broadcast, online and social by alerting you whenever sudden conversation peaks occur, if there is an increase in negative mentions or if something unusual appears to be unfolding.

Mediaportal allows you to analyse everything from how many media items you have to whether your coverage is positive, negative or neutral – giving you the power to quickly assess and take action.

From a social media perspective, determine how many followers have been lost across each platform, specific complaints, and the amount of negative sentiment around your brand. These insights will allow you to understand how badly your reputation was hit and plan for a better future.

Once you make it through your media crisis, take the time to debrief and examine what happened. Keep a detailed record of everything you did and assess how well it worked – and review your existing plan to incorporate the lessons learned.

Want to learn more about the value of media intelligence pre, during and post crisis? Get in touch with our talented, media-savvy team to discuss your needs.



For more information, please get in touch at [isentia.com](https://www.isentia.com)