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Crisis Communications – an inside guide

Best Practice Communications
Considerations for Business
Continuity and Disaster Recovery

Crisis Management is the response an organisation needs to take to in the event of unforeseen emergencies or disasters to minimise the harm to the organisation, its stakeholders, or the general public.

These events can include natural disasters like earthquakes, industrial incidents such as oil tankers leaking, technological crises such as data breaches, and a range of other possible scenarios including malevolence, terrorism and other man made disasters.

The common outcome of all of these situations is financial loss, reputational harm, and potential risk to human life. Unfortunately, incidents are inevitable for businesses of all size, and without adequate internal and external communications when they do arise, consequences are compounded, including:

- ✅ Breakdown of operational response
- ✅ Uninformed and unhappy Stakeholders
- ✅ Negatively impacted corporate reputation
- ✅ Extended time frame to full resolution of the issue

Crisis Communication Framework

1 Have a plan:

A written plan should be in place, which includes specific actions that will be taken in the event of a crisis. The key objectives during any crisis areto protect any individual (employee or public) who may be at risk, ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed, and that ultimately the organisation survives.

2 Identify a spokesperson:

A key spokesperson needs to be identified, prepared and kept as up to date as possible to ensure that the media, staff, customers and the public are kept informed with a clear, consistent message.

3 Be honest and open:

In our connected age it's no longer possible to hope that information can be kept from the media or general public, so a policy of openness and transparency is essential to maintaining trust. This transparency must be projected through all communications channels: news interviews, social media, internal announcements, etc.

4 Keep employees informed:

Employees are the main conduit to keeping communications flowing between all relevant stakeholders, so it's essential to keep the workforce informed with all relevant up to date information to prevent the circulation of incorrect rumours and potentially negative statements.

5 Customer and supplier communications:

Information on any crisis should reach your customers and suppliers directly from you, and not from the media. Part of the crisis communications plan needs to include these vital stakeholders, and how to keep them updated throughout the event.

6 Update early and often:

Be proactive and early with sharing news, even when the whole picture isn't clear. It is better to over-communicate than to allow rumours to fill the void. Start with summary statements on whatever is initially known, and provide updated action plans and new developments as early and as often as possible to stay ahead of the 24/7 news cycle.

7 Social media:

Ensure that all the channels that your stakeholders may be using are covered, not just the traditional areas in which critical statements were released, such as press releases or the company website. Nothing's more damaging than incorrect information being live tweeted without your ability to see and respond with facts and the appropriate damage control.

Planned, open and effective communication is the key to coping with a crisis. Leverage technology to deliver planned, multichannel, two-way communication streams that keep stakeholders informed, and minimise the risk of financial and reputation harm, and the risk to human life.

State of the Art Crisis Communications Technology

Communications Planning

Having a clearly defined plan in place for communicating in different scenarios cuts down response time, improves accuracy of contact, and ensures the right people are able to be reached in a timely manner. Modern crisis communications tools should have the capability of adapting to all possible scenarios and plans.

Multi-channel message streams

Messages should be sent on the appropriate channels needed to make sure the entire team is reached, including SMS, Voice, Rich Push Messages or email.

Message Templates

Message Templates Message templates should be prepared with specifics which can be rapidly altered during incidents, thereby saving time by providing pre-defined communication and response options.

Message Automation

Where possible, communications platforms should be integrated with monitoring systems, allowing details to be auto-populated into message templates. Tickets can be raised automatically and sent directly to the resolution team members.

Two-Way Conversation Flow

It's not enough to just send messages, there needs to be a system in place to track receipt, allow the receiver to respond as needed, and escalate when required.

Make use of an integrated communications platform

Best practice Crisis Communications programs are built around cross channel communications platforms, which provide interactive, responsive communications, comprehensive reporting and message delivery status transparency for key staff and senior stakeholders.Group-on-laptop.png

Communications automation and workflow acceleration, combined with integrated monitoring systems, provide BCM leaders with a unique and powerful opportunity to advance their organisations resilience posture, while also streamlining day-to-day organisational communications processes.

The Best Defence is a Good Offence

Incidents affecting business operations are a daily occurrence, and without proper management have the ability to escalate into critical events that can risk an organisation's ability to survive.

Effective planning and communications are the keys to ensuring not only risk management, but can also turn changing circumstances into opportunities for building new processes that become a source of sustainable, technology driven competitive advantage.

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