



## HOW PREPARED ARE YOU FOR A CRISIS?

Hands up if you remember Perrier?

It was pretty much the ONLY brand of sparkling water that people drunk across the world.



But in the early 1990s, it suffered a contamination when regulators discovered that some bottles contained benzene, which can lead to a number of health problems including anaemia.

Perrier was slow to react, blaming local bottle-filling machinery and cleaners before global contamination prompted them to think again.

By the time they identified that they were to blame for the problem, caused by blocked filters, and recalled 70 million bottles, it was too late.

Staff were laid off, share price dropped by almost 40% and market share plummeted.

Their strapline of "It's Perfect. It's Perrier" seemed nothing more than hollow marketing-speak and they have never fully recovered.

Perrier's disastrous response to the crisis shows experience demonstrates how poorly handled crisis planning and communications can seriously damage a product's brand, reputation and business.



## WHAT IS A CRISIS?

Wealthy financier Warren Buffet once said that it takes years to build a reputation and moments to destroy it.

Anything that can damage your reputation or your business can be described as a crisis.

A complaint from a customer, client or employee that goes public; perceived breaking of rules.

## THERE IS NO GOLDEN HOUR

In the old days, the 'golden hour' gave you time to get everything in order before responding to the crisis.

Not anymore.

Smartphones and social media now mean that anyone can film or photograph anything at any time and broadcast it to the world in seconds.

You won't have time to reflect, check your facts and plan your replies - every moment you delay, someone else will comment or criticise.

Are you ready to respond before someone else does?

## PLAN PLAN AND PLAN AGAIN

It is often said that it is not a crisis that causes reputational damage but how you deal with it.

Problems will always arise at some point for your organisation - however large or small you are.

If you've got a clear strategy and have calm and confident management ready to react when a problem occurs, you can safely steer through the problems that may occur.

Having a solid crisis plan can help you survive and thrive.

That means ensuring that your messaging in 'peace time' correlates with your core values and gives you proof points that provide valuable reasons for sympathy and understanding.



## THE CALACUS TEN POINT CRISIS PLAN CHECKLIST

### 1. What has happened?

Hopefully, you will have done a full crisis audit that helps you when a crisis hits.

That means you won't have to make too many adjustments to the plans you've already made in the case of a problem, you'll have a thorough Q&A for all imaginable eventualities.

While time is not on your side, be ready to make a holding statement (see below) so that your key stakeholders know you are actively working to address the problem – and then find out as much as you can as soon as you can.

### 2. Is your crisis team ready?

Having undertaken regular crisis scenario training and media training, your team will know their roles and responsibilities when a crisis strikes – and that a crisis could occur out of hours so they all need to be able to respond swiftly. So...

- You know who to contact to post a statement on your website and social channels quickly.
- You know who will be the main spokesperson.
- You know who will monitor the press and social media channels.
- You know who will monitor incoming calls and emails.
- Your team know what to do if anyone contacts them directly.
- You have a press conference venue available should the crisis warrant it.

### 3. Do you have a lawyer?

Communication is vital when a crisis breaks and legal counsel will want you to say as little as possible.

While there is often some pushback from lawyers when communicators want to provide an update, their role to limit liability or any legal ramifications is still important.

Lawyers will ensure that information is accurate and lawful and advise when journalists have misinformation and retractions or corrections are required.



#### 4. Do you have access to holding statements?

We've already talked about the lack of a Golden Hour anymore.

Industry 'experts', disgruntled former employees, competitors and commentators will be quick to fill the void if you do not communicate quickly.

Even when you have little information, writing a clear and concise statement acknowledging the situation and that you are addressing it will buy you some vital time and show that you are in control.

#### 5. Have you told stakeholders?

It's really important to communicate with clients, customers and employees on a regular basis, and as soon as you have been alerted to a problem.

These stakeholders will be your champions and will appreciate hearing about the crisis directly from you before the full scale of media exposure takes hold.

For those partners who may also be affected, it's also worthwhile having a joint plan for communications so that your messages and statements are co-ordinated and aligned.

#### 6. How are you monitoring 'chatter'?

Whether it is comments on social media or mainstream media, it is vital that one or more of your team is monitoring what is being said about you and the situation.

That will allow you to address any inaccuracies or issues that may not have been entirely obvious to you when further statements and interviews are taking place.

Those following the situation on social channels will need to be directed to your statements and updates with compassion and honesty.



## 7. Who is your spokesperson?

When Calacus undertakes media training for high level executives and athletes, we always get one of two responses.

Either they are confident that they can handle any questions because they have done it so much before, or they are wary because they believe that the media is always out to get them.

Regular media training, to practice messaging, difficult scenarios and how to keep calm when crisis strikes, is vital for any spokesperson.

They need to be calm and reassuring when facing the media, showing that they care and that they are overseeing all efforts to address the problem.

## 8. Is your messaging clear and compassionate?

It's vital that your communications show compassion as soon as the crisis breaks.

When you are being attacked or criticised by media and on social channels, it is tempting to get defensive – DON'T!

The media, remember, are just the communication channel and doing their job, so whatever you do, don't criticise them.

Likewise, if a rival, former client or former employee comment negatively, rise above it. A tit-for-tat argument simply serves as a distraction that overshadows the positive work that you are seeking to do while focusing on the crisis in hand.

Legal counsel will remind you not to apologise, especially when the causes of a crisis are as yet unclear and a poorly-worded apology could be seen as an admission of guilt.

But that doesn't mean you can't show sympathy for the situation and show your stakeholders that you understand the seriousness of the situation and the impact it has had.

At the same time, you have to remind them of your superb track record and the values which have brought you success in the first place.



## 9. Continual communications flow

Reacting to every tweet, every call and every interview request may not seem like the best use of time – and in some cases, it is not.

You need a dedicated individual or team to collect, analyse and share information as it develops but during AND after the crisis.

It is vital that you stay on the front foot and provide regular updates about the situation to your crisis team.

That will help you to have a co-ordinated response regularly on all social media channels and to your media list (which of course you will have reviewed regularly and update with any new journalists who contact you about the crisis).

Not only does this show that you are in control, but it eases the pressure on your team and means that you are always getting your side of the story across.

## 10. Walk the walk

Whatever has caused the crisis, make sure you demonstrate all possible steps to ensure nothing of its kind happens again.

Putting further safeguards in place shows that you took the crisis seriously, even if your involvement was indirect or inadvertent.

Continuing to undertake unrelated activities that match your vision and values, particularly in an age where more and more people want to associate with organisations that do good beyond their core business, will give you further credibility when the next crisis occurs.



# CALACUS

## CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS AUDIT

Have you undertaken a risk analysis audit recently?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a crisis communications plan?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you review your crisis communications plan every 3-6 months?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Are your entire staff aware of crisis communications protocols?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
When did you last undertake media training?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have two senior spokespeople ready at short notice if crisis strikes?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have legal counsel briefed to be ready at short notice if crisis strikes?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a 'dark' website ready to go if crisis strikes?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a digital expert available to update the website and post statements on social media if crisis strikes?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have media monitoring set up or ready to be switched on if disaster strikes?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have media statement templates ready to go?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have prepared industry and general media lists?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a press conference venue and media working room available if required?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you have a list of key stakeholders who will be contacted in the event of a crisis?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>