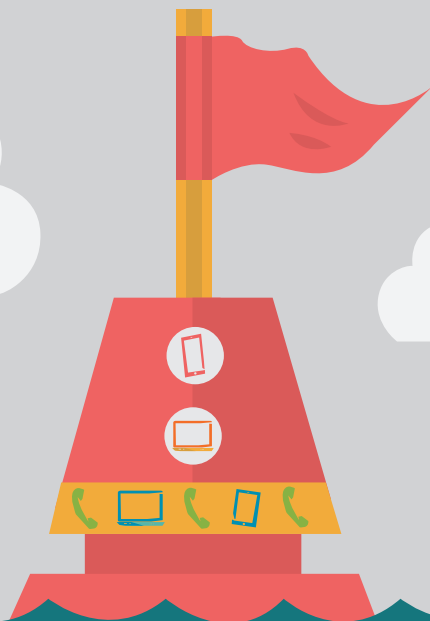


YOUR IC LIFEBOAT

CRISIS COMMUNICATION



allthingsIC

By Rachel Miller

ALL THINGS CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

An unplanned event has thrown your business into chaos – what do you do next?

Crisis communication is the disaster we all dread, yet should be prepared for. Essentially, it is an unplanned event that disrupts business as usual, provoking a reactive response.

At All Things IC communication consultancy, we help senior professionals prepare for crisis communication situations. This includes identifying preparation points, giving advice for business continuity and suggesting ways to review and improve strategies. In part, strengthening employee engagement and cementing a good business reputation.

Giving back the knowledge we have gained, our team wanted to share with you, handy tips which will help you prepare for a crisis at work.

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Rachel Miller

WHAT IS A CRISIS?

A crisis is anything which disrupts business activity. From tornadoes, to floods to tragedies, a crisis situation is an unplanned event which stops the flow of business.

Having a crisis strategy in place provides an action checklist of what to do next. It provides the foundation which your company can build on when communicating with employees.

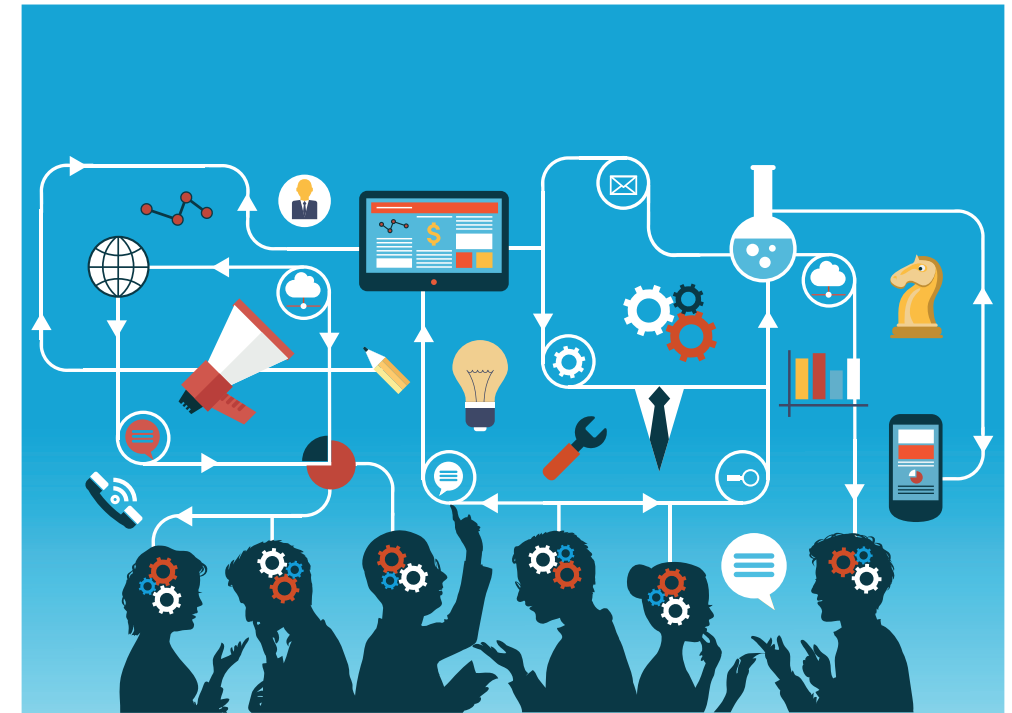
Top tip: *You'll need to tailor your strategy for each situation, but having a rough draft can save you valuable thinking time. Ensure you keep it jargon free and seek input from your dedicated crisis comms team.*



ONE WAY, TWO-WAY, THE BEST WAY

Ensure you have two-way communication channels in place. Crisis situations are not about broadcast. Leaders need to be visible and provide clarity and reassurance. Your employees will want to know what is happening in real-time and need opportunities to ask questions.

Top tip: *Give specific times when employee channels will be updated. You cannot over-communicate in this situation.*



TEAM PREPARATION

Preparing your team for a crisis is not only vital for your company but for testing the dynamics of your internal communication. As the saying goes, if you fail to prepare, prepare to fail. The most important steps you need to ensure, include knowing who your teams is, communicating who the nominated team is with your workforce and most importantly, ascertaining the most suitable and easily accessible channel to communicate your crisis response through, internally and externally. Things to bear in mind:

- > Objectives: What are you trying to achieve?
- > Messaging: What are you saying and who to?
- > Access: If you have a crisis hotline, can it be updated remotely?
- > Availability: Can you contact your emergency team 24/7?
- > Channels: Could your channels sustain the crisis? Do you have a backup?
- > Credibility: What are your approvals processes and who are your spokespeople internally and externally?
- > Team: Does your team include representatives across the whole company?
- > Communication: Does the rest of your company know who the nominated crisis team is?

Top tip: Remember to make a hard copy of all access codes, social media passwords and crisis instructions or keep them securely in the cloud. Back up will aid your preparation.



EXTERNAL CONTACTS

Don't forget to communicate with your third parties! These can be anyone from delivery drivers to catering staff to your cleaning team.

Create a link for external professionals via your website. Provide a similar feed of responsive communication via a channel which is easily accessible and more importantly, easily maintainable.

Top tip: It may be worth having an external contact list for contractors, freelancers - all third parties who can be contacted if a crisis will impact their association with your company.

ANNOUNCE AND PROMOTE

Ensure your employees know which channels are dedicated for crisis communication.

Show and remind them of the nominated channels throughout the year. For example, regularly publicise the number of your employee information hotline. An informative business card or a perforated page in the employee handbook could be an option.

Top tip: *Induction sessions are the perfect time to introduce your crisis communication strategies including nominated contacts and channels.*



COMMUNICATE AND FEEDBACK

It is important to keep your dedicated crisis communications team updated. If rotation changes the nominated lead, the whole team needs to be informed.

More than often, your employees will contact someone they work closely with when facing a crisis. Keeping your team well-informed during and after the crisis will keep the message consistent and sustainable.

Top tip: *Ensuring you communicate effectively within your own team is crucial during a crisis.*



MONITOR CONVERSATIONS

If employees are asking questions through a shared mailbox, or customers are asking via social media, make sure you're monitoring and joining the conversations. If there are recurring questions, it's a good gauge to tell you what's missing from your communication activities.

Knowing what is being said is critical. It can have significant impact on your company's reputation. Understand the concerns and react appropriately.

Top tip: *Have a dedicated person to monitor the two-way channels, responding with agreed information and knowledge of who can provide real-time feedback.*



INTERACT AND RESPOND

Dedicated channels for crisis communication need to be interactive and responsive. Employees and customers will be going through a flurry of emotions so will need reassurance of the situation. They want to know how the crisis affects them and the overall impact.

Ensure you regularly communicate with employees. It's ok to say you have nothing further to add and when the next update will be. Don't leave big gaps between updates, and encourage them to have their say.

Top tip: *Two-way communication puts your employees' and your customers' minds at ease.*



ALWAYS UPDATE AND COMMUNICATE

Be vigilant. You may have the perfect strategy in place but do you still have the original team working for you? Make sure nominated teams are known by all employees and any leavers have been noted and details updated. More importantly, ensure your entire team are aware of these changes, particularly for emergency purposes.

Top tip: Review and communicate changes periodically.

PRACTICE AND RESPOND (INTERNALLY)

Preparing for the worst case scenario can be challenging, but facing a crisis can be the determining factor of whether your strategy works or collapses at the first hurdle.

Why not have a practice run? Create a crisis rehearsal. You can do this as a planned exercise or spring it on the on-call team (make sure you tell them it's a trial run first!).

Communicate your motive for a trial run with your employees and execute your strategy through the pretend scenario. This will give you an understanding of how it works when put into motion and will identify areas for improvement.

Top tip: Rehearsals and fake crisis scenarios allow executives to play different roles. This helps them see the crisis from other perspectives.



PRACTICE AND RESPOND (EXTERNALLY)

Implementing your crisis strategy is a great way of working out how effective your communication channels are and if your business can function if office access is limited.

But how do you know the strategy will work externally?

Try a practice run with a selection of your clients or associates who are trusted with the given information.

Construct a crisis scenario, use the appointed communication channels and interact and respond with your selected audience. You'll then know if your channels can handle the crisis externally and how responsive you are with customers.

Top tip: *Be selective of who you use for the practice run. Ideally you want to use associates you can trust. Make sure if you're using Twitter your accounts are locked, or people will think a real situation is occurring.*



CRISIS, CHECK!

Having a checklist to hand can be an excellent way of making sure nothing is missed and all factors are accounted for. It doesn't need to be long and complicated – that is what your crisis strategy is for!

A checklist will guarantee that the strategy is being carried out throughout the crisis process. It may include:

- > The nominated communications team have been informed of the crisis situation.
- > Your nominated communications team have communicated with the rest of your employees.
- > Dedicated two-way communication channels are in full action.
- > All bodies associated with your company have been contacted including all third parties.
- > Updates are regular and consistent.
- > Alternative locations have been set up/or are on standby depending on the severity of the crisis.
- > Press have been informed.

PR NOMINATION

Communicating the crisis internally and externally needs to be handled by a nominated team. However, handling the press can be a complicated process, and if handled incorrectly can spell disaster for your company's public image.

Therefore, it is crucial that you have fully trained, and fully prepared spokespeople who will talk with the press. They need to know how to assess the situation, respond adequately and efficiently and know who to contact directly when making a public statement.

Don't just rely on one person as they may be on holiday, unavailable or have left the company!

Top tip: *PR can be the icing on the cake for your company if managed and executed effectively. It is worth investing in PR training if your nominated employees do not have the relevant experience.*



ANY
QUESTIONS?



- ☒ TELEPHONE
- ☒ COMPUTER
- ☐ HEADACHE PILLS
- ☐ CHARGERS
- ☐ CONTACTS BOOK
- ☐ COFFEE
- ☐ MILK

REMEMBER, REVIEW AND IMPLEMENT

Your reaction to a crisis can either strengthen or weaken your company image with employees. Improvements will inevitably emerge with any crisis plan, it is your responsibility to capture them and act on them next time round.

Once the crisis is over, review what happened and seek feedback and ideas from employees. Transparency will engage your strongest team.

Top tip: *Don't blanket your mistakes. Be open and honest and make suggested improvements in the next plan. Remember, your team is the one communicating the crisis, so include them in the content and channel selection stages.*



**All Things IC can help you achieve
communication excellence.**

**Contact us: rachel@allthingsic.com
or Tweet [@AllthingsIC](https://twitter.com/AllthingsIC)**

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