

M3 Blog

Don't Forget Communications in Your Crisis Planning

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In recent years, organizations of all types have embraced the need for continuity planning. Developing continuity plans isn't just good risk management, it's smart business. However no strategy is complete without having a crisis communication plan in place.

Your communication during a crisis is no different than any other element of continuity planning, the better your plan, the greater likelihood of a positive outcome. That means the chances of your organization's image and reputation being greatly damaged are minimized. During the past fifteen years, I've worked on many crisis situations and have found that having a good plan in place can be the difference between a positive and a negative outcome.

Here are some things to be mindful of when your organization makes the investment to create a crisis communication plan:

- ***Crisis communications is a process.*** The core of a good crisis communication plan is a solid process. Keep in mind that process must be adaptable to different situations, as it is impossible to game plan for all the risk possibilities that your organization faces. For the sake of good communications, your team should follow the same process for a fire as they would for a personnel issue. The inputs and the outputs will be different, but the core process should be the same.
- ***Define roles early.*** Like any other situation, a crisis communication strategy needs defined roles to maximize success. Take the time to build roles into your plan which create clear rules and assign responsibilities before an event occurs. Your team should know who will craft your message, who will approve your message, and how your

message will be distributed internally and externally before the need arises.

- ***Don't be afraid of outside help.*** Most organizations have a communications and/or marketing team who work hard to enhance your brand. As good as they are, they likely aren't experienced in crisis communications. Crisis communications is a highly specialized niche of public relations which protects your brand in a time of need. Don't be afraid to ask your risk management experts for help in building a plan or proactively develop a relationship with a public relations firm who can protect your image in a worst case scenario.
- ***Post event follow-up.*** When an event is over, it is easy to turn the page and move on to the next task at hand. However, it's important to make sure your plan has space for post-event analysis. You'll want to understand if your brand was damaged because of the event and give your marketing team the opportunity to repair your image.

While creating your plan, it's important to remember that you can't account for every possible scenario. That makes having solid infrastructure – such as a process, a team and pre-determined roles – in place a cornerstone of a successful communication strategy. Being prepared is often the difference between an event being a long day and a bad day.

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A version of this article, angled at dairy processors, is published in the July 2018 issue of the Cheese Reporter. M3's Food & Agribusiness professionals are regular contributors to the Cheese Reporter. Read the most ***recent M3 articles on cheesereporter.com.***

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