



Five crisis survival strategies in the age of social media.

Real-world lessons about crisis management from the author of the blog SteveOnCrisis.



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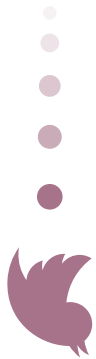


Introduction

Crisis management strategies must evolve as rapidly as the social media bursts that intensify and extend a crisis. Waiting even an hour to respond to an unfolding crisis could mean your company fails to corral it. The damage could hurt sales and market share—both in the short term and for the long haul.

Steve Bell, a 30-year journalist who now heads the Reputation Management Practice Group at Eric Mower + Associates, analyzes real-life crises, highlighting what works and what does not. In his blog steveoncrisis.wordpress.com, Steve shares daily lessons learned and opportunities missed. Over the past three years, he's written about crises involving everything from airline crashes to Cheerios, but there's an overriding recommendation. Given the speed a crisis spreads, it's essential to create and practice a crisis response plan before it's too late.

Here are five crisis survival strategies drawn from the pages of the [steveoncrisis](http://steveoncrisis.wordpress.com) blog...



140-Character Crisis

A crisis now moves in 140-character (or fewer) bursts that can overwhelm even your best plans in a short time. Minutes after Asiana Airlines Flight 214 crashed in San Francisco, for example, a photo that illustrated the disaster was retweeted 32,000 times. The company's response took five hours, and by then, it was retweeted only 500 times. Instant reactions with something factual are crucial to put you in the conversation and give you a chance to balance all the conjecture.

Informational overload—accurate and inaccurate—is so overwhelming, you must initiate a crisis response in minutes, or you risk damage to both your market share and your reputation.

More from the SteveOnCrisis blog:

**Crisis 'Cycle' Demonstrates Need
for Prearranged Crisis Plan »**



Always Avoid the Death Strategy

Do not deny, delay or deceive. Social media can be relentless, and the longer you remain silent or try a cover-up, the more ammunition you provide your critics. Silence or no comment offers your critics a free shot, unimpeded by facts.

Have appropriate spokespeople ready 24/7 with comments, facts and, if necessary, an apology. People must see your commitment to transparency and your willingness to take ownership of the situation.

More from the SteveOnCrisis blog:

[Of Braun and Baseball and Coming Clean the First Time, Not When You're Nailed »](#)



Create Focused Messaging

There can be nothing haphazard about unified and effective messaging in a crisis. Work fast, but produce careful messaging that directly addresses the crisis issues washing over you. Strong messaging is your best shield against darts from social and traditional media.

You cannot predict when a crisis will strike, but you should know where you're vulnerable. Have messaging worksheets filled with key facts ready to go.

More from the SteveOnCrisis blog:

[When a Low-Key, Honest Response to a Crisis Wins the Day »](#)



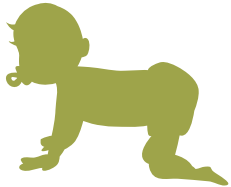
Prepare and Practice a Crisis Plan in Advance

More so now than ever, companies must create crisis response plans and undergo training when days are calm and thinking is relaxed and productive. When a crisis hits, it's too late. There is a 15 percent average drop in a company's value the year after a reputational incident where a company responded slowly, failed to communicate, issued inadequate answers, refused to take responsibility or attempted to shift blame, according to the Oxford Metrica Reputation Review.

A crisis engulfs and overwhelms regular operations, like a surprise enemy attack. To stand your ground, make sure there's a well-prepared crisis team before the battle begins.

More from the SteveOnCrisis blog:

[Maker's Mark Respects Customer, Apologizes for Decision, and Builds Its Reputation »](#)



First Steps Count Most

If you are going to take hits to your reputation, take them early, accept your punishment, swallow your humiliation, take responsibility for your acts and apologize. Issue a plan of improvement and recovery. And remember to communicate first to your internal audience and constituencies. They should always hear from you first. Keeping your friends friendly is crucial to reputational management.

Any good manager has a competitive component in their make-up. But if you or your company did something wrong, and that could affect sales and market share, it's far better to apologize for it today. Put it behind you rather than deny, fight and end up apologizing weeks or months later.

More from the SteveOnCrisis blog:

[‘No Comment’ Just Gives Reporters, Critics a Free Run at Hurting You »](#)



About

Steve Bell spent 30 years as a journalist for the Associated Press and served in four top editor positions at *The Buffalo News*. He is now Partner/Director of Public Affairs, Crisis and Reputation Management at Eric Mower + Associates, one of the nation's largest independent advertising, integrated marketing and public relations agencies, with seven offices in the Northeast and Southeast. Learn more about EMA at www.mower.com.

PR Week, the leading industry journal, ranks EMA's Public Relations + Public Affairs practice in the top 50 of all U.S. PR firms. Our Reputation Management Services group—11 of our most senior and battle-tested veterans—has handled hundreds of crisis engagements encompassing a wide scope of situations over the past 25 years. We have strategies that have proven successful for responding to bad news of nearly any kind; we've probably already encountered situations similar to yours.

Bad things happen to good people all the time. Today's Internet-driven world propels information—especially the negative or controversial—at near instantaneous speeds 24/7/365. With risks greater than ever, protecting your good name and reputation becomes demanding, complex and critical.

Have a crisis that requires immediate attention or need help creating or updating your crisis communications plan?

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