



Summary



Everyone - from organisations to individuals - is vulnerable to crises and when it comes to crisis situations the question is not *if* it will affect your brand or client but *when*. In the first few months of 2016, a diverse set of crises have already hit the headlines. Tennis star Maria Sharapova revealed her doping test failure ahead of the Australian Open, e-tailer Moonpig had to correct delivery mistakes made on Mother's Day and David Cameron has learned some tough lessons after the Panama Papers leak.



As with other areas of communications, crisis comms is facing more challenges than ever, as the media landscape continues to fragment and transform. PRs are expected to respond at a fraction of the time that they have had to in the past and, in addition, they have to ensure that they are up to date with the all the latest digital platforms to ensure messages get to the right audiences at the right time.



In this White Paper we hear from crisis-experts at a range of businesses and agencies, including TUI Group, Burson Marsteller, Weber Shandwick and Launch PR, as we show how PRs should arrange their crisis comms teams, who should be part of them and how they should plan and prepare future strategies to ensure crisis comms success. In addition, we hear exclusively from Moonpig on what it is like to be in eye of the storm as it reacted to its recent crisis challenge and shares with us the lessons it has learnt.



Contents



- Introduction
- Defining crisis comms in the changing media landscape
- How to plan ahead in a pressured environment
- How the crisis comms team should be structured and formed
- In-house or out? What agencies and in-house experts are best suited to
- Building a long-term strategy
- The Gorkana Media Database guide
- Case Study: Moonpig handles delayed Mother's Day deliveries
- Conclusion



Introduction

As media has evolved in recent years, two core elements of crisis communications have changed. Time, or lack of it, is a major issue in the way crisis comms is handled by PR teams worldwide. A negative story that promises to damage the reputation of a brand can now reach thousands of people via social media in seconds. Two-thirds of crises now cross national boundaries, according to Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer's 2013 *Containing a crisis: Dealing with a corporate disasters in the digital age* report.

In addition, the rising profile of individual consumers empowered by platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, has made it easier for audiences to voice dissatisfaction with a company contributing to the rise in the number and scale of potential crisis situations. Burson-Marsteller's 2015 report *Crisis communications in a disruptive era* shows that, out of 426 businesses, around half believe it is more difficult for companies to prepare for a crisis than it was five years ago. However, the rest believe digital channels can also make handling crisis situations easier.

With these changes in mind, crisis comms teams have to hold to the same core objectives that they have always had; there needs to be a solid plan in place as described by Burson-Marsteller's Charlie Howard and Electric Airwaves' Andrew Caesar-Gordon. There needs to be a revised crisis comms team with digital comms in mind as stated by Launch PR's Alex Black and Dynamo's Alexis Dalrymple. Finally, it is essential to have a long-term strategy that is consistently reviewed as described by Weber Shandwick's Rod Clayton and crisis media skills coach Nadine Dereza.

In this White Paper, industry experts from TUI, Moonpig and Electric Airwaves and others talk to *Gorkana* on the best steps to take during a crisis situation in 2016.



Defining crisis comms in the changing media landscape

Having a sound crisis management plan now involves ensuring that a brand or business has immediate access to a savvy digital team of experts that can respond quickly when unfortunate scenarios develop across platforms, alongside the 'traditional' set up of crisis manager, spokesperson and legal team. So, how has the proliferation of different media platforms changed the nature of crisis comms? *Gorkana* looks at how experts define and deal with these new challenges:



Deb Hileman • CEO
Institute for Crisis Management

Deb Hileman, CEO at the Institute for Crisis Management, defines crisis management today:

“Social media has not changed the definition of crisis communication, but it has changed the speed at which companies must respond to mitigate possible damage. Social media has provided a platform for people to complain and protest very publicly, but it is also a tool that organisations can leverage to communicate quickly and effectively with their customers and other stakeholders.

“We define a business crisis as “any problem which triggers negative stakeholder reactions that can impact the organization’s reputation, business and financial strength”. Business crises are about more than reputation damage. Social media has made it much easier to punish a company for poor service. In addition to an operational crisis plan, organizations need to have a crisis communication plan in place that defines all probable crises, outlines stakeholder groups, strategies and messaging to address the issue, and can be deployed within minutes, if needed.”

The pace in which comms teams have to administer crisis plans presents new dilemmas to a part of the PR profession that already faces many challenges. In 2013, law firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer ran a survey of 102 senior crisis communications professionals from 12 countries, including the UK, Europe, Asia and the US. Those interviewed by the law firm have advised on a total of 2,000 significant reputational crises in the preceding year. Its findings are illustrated on the next page:

The speed and scope of crisis comms

69%

of crises spread internationally within **24 hours** and on average reach **11 countries**

28%

of crises spread **internationally** within **1 hour**



21 hours

On average it takes **21 hours** before companies are able to issue meaningful external communications to defend themselves



1 year later 53% of companies had not seen share prices regain pre-crisis levels

How to plan ahead in a pressured environment

As the growing number of media platforms have heightened the pressure in a crisis scenario and cut reaction times, planning ahead has become increasingly important. *Gorkana* asked experts what can be planned for and how those plans should be prepared and put in place ahead of any possible crisis event.

Key takeaways:



Have a recent holding statement prepared



Anticipate likely crisis scenarios for your brand



Ask the operations team about their nightmare scenarios



Practice, practice, practice



Kristine Pole • Senior lecturer

Canterbury Christ Church University



Pole runs crisis simulation classes for PR undergraduates. She describes the challenges her students face:

“You have to identify who your stakeholders are and who you have to communicate with. Sometimes responding really quickly can be bad. Sometimes responding too quickly means you can say the wrong thing. If they do respond quickly I usually advise they say: ‘we don’t know quite what’s happening yet and we will let you know of any changes’.”

“All researchers and crisis comms experts would say to prepare for a situation before it happens. There’s no reason for an organisation not consider what the likely scenarios are. If you’re a food company, for example, you have to think about contamination at some point. It’s about thinking in advance about what would happen if the situation arises.”



Andrew Caesar-Gordon • Owner
Electric Airwaves



“At Electric Airwaves, we advise planning and practising ways to be fast and accurate. Before digital media, PRs had a ‘golden hour’ to get their ducks in a row and respond meaningfully to the media. Digital has reduced that to minutes. For example, when a US Airways passenger plane crashed into the Hudson River in 2012, the first Tweet came within 10 minutes and the first online media report within 23 minutes. The first statement from the airline took 46 minutes. It was a pretty good effort to get that signed off, and out, but by that point, the media had already set the narrative and US Airways was playing catch-up. Within 70 minutes there was a Wikipedia entry. Complete with footnotes, that wasn’t written by the airline.”

The fundamentals have not changed in crisis comms

“Digital, and its social media sidekick, have clearly fragmented traditional media and segmented audiences. But nothing has fundamentally changed – we still seek to influence our audiences wherever they are to be found. We’d all love to spend our whole time executing our strategy for enhancing reputation. But, at the same time, we are constantly engaged in managing issues. This is ‘business-as-usual’ and managing audiences across traditional and digital channels – whether issues break online or cross over to it – is part and parcel of that.”



Charlie Howard • Director
Burson-Marsteller

“To give some wider context, in late 2015, Burson-Marsteller carried out research among more than 400 business decision-makers in 11 markets across EMEA. The research found that negative or critical new media campaigns are among the five most encountered crises, and that this threat is their single biggest fear. Forty-nine per cent of businesses now have a dedicated digital crisis communications plan - up ten points from 2013 - a clear indication that businesses are starting to take this threat more seriously.

“However, opinion is split on whether the changes in the communications landscape have made crisis planning more difficult. Forty-eight per cent believe it is more difficult for companies to prepare for a crisis than it was five years ago, but forty-seven per cent believe it is actually easier.”

“What is surely beyond debate is that the rise of digital media has made the role of crisis communications planning all the more important. Gone are the days when there was enough time to dust off the crisis manual, which had been drafted ten years earlier, and carefully consider how to activate the plan.”

Who's in the team?

Crisis comms teams should now always have a media and digital comms pro in charge of producing materials and statements for external audiences, according to the experts. But, how do essential roles like this combine with people in more 'traditional' areas of marketing, comms and business who have been used to dealing with crucial legal and operational issues?

Common crisis comms team structure:





Alex Black • Consultant director

Launch PR



“Obviously the same person can perform more than one of these roles, and the ‘media and digital comms’ function should ideally be one person or people who are comfortable in the digital or traditional PR world. In my experience, negative social coverage doesn’t lead to negative PR coverage all the time. People grumble about companies on social media all the time, but that doesn’t mean there’s a story in it. Even if a few people are saying the same thing, it can often be nipped in the bud before it becomes a problem. If you don’t have a dedicated social team, you need PR people who are digitally savvy enough to spot a problem and flag it to someone who can fix it.”



Alexis Dalrymple • Head of media

Dynamo PR



“Ten years ago social media was almost an afterthought. These days you need your customer service and social teams need to be right there with you, rather than a PR team and the executive board. You had a pretty good idea as to what might be a crisis. A security breach, a fire, a faulty product and you could plan around that. These days many of these things hold true but one person with a point of view can create huge problems for a brand.”



Andrew Caesar-Gordon • Owner

Electric Airwaves



“Communications teams will want to be monitoring and responding to a crisis across all appropriate channels – and social media is one such channel, which was in its infancy ten years ago. But the depth of involvement of a digital department will depend on the nature of the crisis and the organisation. A global FMCG company in crisis may want or need to be all over social media like a rash. A niche B2B company in crisis may have a narrow, sophisticated audience that wouldn’t seek digital engagement.”

In-house or out?

What agencies and in-house experts are best suited to

How do brands choose the team that should be involved in a crisis situation? While the crisis communications team is often located in-house, many brands outsource digital tasks to agencies which can mean that they may not be the first group to know if an urgent situation arises. Our group of experts discuss when it is appropriate to give the task to an agency and when it should be kept firmly in-house.

Key takeaways:



In-house teams can see an agency as a shield



Agencies can provide the right tools to see upcoming issues



Partnerships must be well-rehearsed



Andrew Caesar-Gordon • Owner
Electric Airwaves



“It depends on the nature and scale of the crisis. Some in-house teams manage fine by themselves and resent external PR people running a negative commentary on their crisis. Other in-house teams value how agencies can swiftly provide boots on the ground to allow an in-house team to scale up its tactical response to huge media and stakeholder interest. In addition, existing, external and trusted advisers who know the organisation or are acknowledged crisis experts can offer valuable ‘outside-in’ strategic counsel.”



Alexis Dalrymple • Head of media
Dynamo PR



“Agencies excel in providing a bit of distance to the problem - sometimes an issue is not a crisis. Also with our monitoring tools we often see issues before the client so we should get an early heads-up on any problems on social media that could be brewing.”



Alex Black • Consultant director
Launch PR



“In-house teams often see an agency as a shield. If you’re getting multiple enquiries, having an agency team fielding, logging and responding to enquiries means quicker response times. If you’re not used to engaging with aggressive journalists trying to catch you out it can be daunting, but having an agency as first point of contact also puts a degree of separation between the organisation and an aggressive journalist.”



Martin Riecken • Head of crisis communications
TUI Group



“External agencies can be valuable assets in a crisis, but it's crucial to have a well-rehearsed partnership. At TUI, the core communication functions are in house, agencies have supporting roles.”



Charlie Howard • Director
Burson-Marsteller



“As an agency recognised globally for its expertise in issues and crisis communications we deal with crisis situations on a daily basis. Clients come to us for a variety of reasons but most importantly because they know our team of experts has extensive experience in the broadest range of crisis management so value our advice, trust we offer scrupulous confidentiality and appreciate the flexible nature of our support.”

The Gorkana Media Database guide

Helping you start the right conversations

- Each journalist profile has an integrated Twitter feed so that you can always see exactly what they are talking, and writing, about. You can even add your own handle to your account so you can communicate in-situ.
- We list all areas of expertise and topics a journalist writes about so you can guarantee that you are always pitching the appropriate message.
- You can download a media briefing pack directly from each journalist profile, which lists everything you need to know. Their career history, the last article they've written, where they like to have coffee, and their last ten Tweets...
- And, we're always innovating. The new social media topic search function provides real-time insight into what key influencers from the database are talking about. Use the tool to search for any keyword, phrase, hashtag and @ mention and you'll be presented with a contact list of the journalists who have mentioned that subject within the last 90 days.
- If you'd like more information contact your account manager, or email us at sales@gorkana.com.



Building a long-term strategy

For a long-term crisis strategy to be effective it has to incorporate reviews of materials, teams and the tools that are necessary for success throughout the year, as well as reviewing which platforms will be essential to get the right message across.

Key takeaways:



Long-term strategies involve a long-term process and learning from others



Many brands still do not review crisis plans more than once a year



Constant testing is essential



All brands should be consistently reviewing plans every six months

How do you future-proof?



Andrew Caesar-Gordon • Owner
Electric Airwaves



“Each day you don’t have a crisis just brings it one day closer. Preparing to manage a crisis is not a single-time inoculation. It is an ongoing process of learning from the experience of others, applying it to one’s own organisation and of constant planning, training and practice on a regular basis.”

Research shows brands are not reviewing crisis plans

“Electric Airwaves research administered across 400 organisations found that 40% hadn’t reviewed their crisis plans within the last 12 months, over 65% hadn’t reviewed the skills and capabilities of their crisis spokespeople or communications team, and 75% hadn’t tested their plans. On the upside, 55% had reviewed their ability to manage social media in a crisis. These people could be on top of their game but I suspect that many are living dangerously. And given the number of comms directors who get fired after a crisis, I’d advise erring on the side of constant planning and preparation!”

How do you plan for new platforms?



Kristine Pole • Senior lecturer
Canterbury Christ Church University



“You’ve got to go with the main channels where most of your customers are, but in a crisis you’re under so much more pressure. You have to be realistic and go where you can reach most people most effectively. With most crises, you won’t be able to get a message on every single platform, and then think about all those stages before you’ve said anything. With future-proofing make sure you have a good command structure and in between have really good holding statements.”



Rod Clayton • Executive vice president /
Co-head of crisis communications and issues management
Weber Shandwick



“The last ten years have taught us that the speed of change is currently so fast in technology, that future-proofing may be an outmoded concept. New digital platforms shouldn’t greatly affect an organisation’s ability to handle a crisis because it should be part of its processes to always evaluate and, when appropriate, engage with those new platforms. The long-term approach is primarily cultural: a commitment to preparedness - ensuring that plans reflect the current organisation, that the crisis team is suitably equipped and empowered, that the team-members work effectively with each other, that they are well trained, and that regular simulation exercises are held that cover not just the operational aspects of a crisis, but also the communications, including digital and social media.”



Nadine Dereza • Business presenter and crisis media skills coach
PS Programmes



“Any company or organisation, regardless of whether it’s a global brand or an SME, should be reviewing its crisis media management plan at least annually, ideally every six months. Run a crisis scenario with key stakeholders to test how effective your crisis media plan is.”



Charlie Howard • Director
Burson-Marsteller



“These days businesses don’t just need a plan, they need to have crisis communications activation built into their DNA. This comes through rigorous training, including as-live simulation of crisis situations, and thorough scenario planning.”

Case Study: Moonpig handles delayed Mother's Day deliveries

Moonpig's PR manager, Melanie Howe, told *Gorkana* that she has seen "overwhelmingly" positive responses since the brand faced complaints about its Mother's Day services in March 2016. On 5 March the brand was forced to apologise to consumers after its Twitter and Facebook feeds were inundated with complaints from people who said gifts had either not arrived on time or turned up damaged. Howe describes how the Moonpig comms team tackled the challenge:

The team

"Our customer service team operate across our social channels. Based in London we're able to work closely with our in-house PR and social teams to make sure messages are consistent and that customers are responded to effectively. There's constant communication between product, customer service, our suppliers and the comms teams, and an external comms partner provides counsel on media facing commentary."

"We regroup as a wider team ahead of any peak occasions. As a business it's important to regroup to look over lessons learnt as well as being aware of any issues which might influence the peak trading period. As a PR Manager I am on call throughout peak with other team members working from the office to monitor social chatter more closely. If any issue arises we follow protocol to alert a 'crisis' alias internally which covers heads of departments as well as our external comms partner to bring everyone up to date quickly. Naturally phone calls also complement this email communication."



The toolkit

“As we have traded at these peak occasions for over 15 years now we are lucky to have a crisis toolkit which we can refer to and refresh when necessary. This toolkit and team conference calls are fundamental in ensuring a timely response to media enquiries, be it a ‘no comment’, or a full statement with a quotation. Due to the popularity of social media channels as customer service tools as well as a news lead generation we are seeing more interest than past years in how our customers interact with us through social media.

“We have the benefit of tools such as Tweetdeck, amongst others, to track and assign customer enquiries but nothing is as useful as a trusty press office alias group email address. Rather than being directed at one individual it means that the PR team can dissect incoming emails and respond accordingly. News is around the clock and as such my role adapts to that, it’s easy enough to jump onto work emails or check Twitter status at the tap of an iPhone which means I can work from most places.”

The future

“Of the uttermost importance to us is the satisfaction of our customers. They put their trust in us to deliver at an important calendar moment and naturally we wanted to reassure them we would do everything we could do to make true on that promise. In terms of future-proofing we will look again at our crisis comms toolkit and review how it works. We’re constantly seeking to evolve our customer service offering. For example we launched the Moonpig Instagram channel in 2012 and this year is the first year we’ve seen customers use the DM (direct messaging) facility on there to contact us about customer service related issues.

“It’s likely therefore that we will review this in our round table discussion later in the year. We’re lucky in that we’re still a young business and can operate nimbly, meaning a statement can be drafted and approved fairly smoothly without too many corporate hoops through which we need to jump. This in terms means we can concentrate on responding to our customers quickly.”



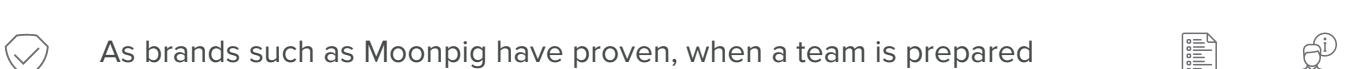
Conclusion



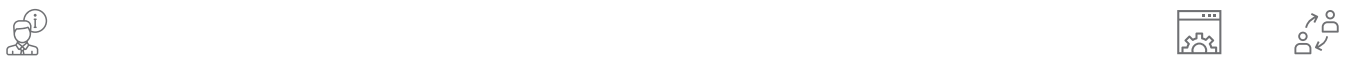
Planning, teamwork and consistent review are the core of crisis communication and this is one aspect of the role that hasn't changed despite increasing pressures on PRs. Limited time constraints, the growing voice of the consumer and in-built digital teams have developed with the continuing growth and influence of digital, but with these challenges there have also been positives. It can be easier to get brand messages across to your audience.



Planning ahead still involves locating the right audiences, which now can be much more fragmented than in the past. Getting in touch with the right stakeholders, in-house and out, and ensuring that brands have the digital capability to support this is essential. Frequent reviews of crisis plans is more important than ever in a world where change is constant.



As brands such as Moonpig have proven, when a team is prepared with a digital strategy, as well as a comprehensive team that consistently reviews likely crisis moments for the company, it is in a better place than most businesses to react proportionally when a crisis occurs.



Sources

<http://gorkana.com/news/>

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