

J. C. HAWKINS ASSOCIATES

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS 101

Every organization, and certainly every business, must have a plan to deal with emergencies and crises. When a crisis strikes, it's foolhardy to try to make up a plan on the fly. A crisis can take many forms:

- Natural disaster (hurricane, tornado, flood),
- Emergency event (fire, explosion, derailment, workplace violence, crime),
- Unwanted financial situation (bankruptcy, SEC violation),
- Leadership gap (CEO illness or resignation),
- Product or service problem (product recall, business disruption, hacked database).

The list can be endless. No matter what the crisis is, your organization should be prepared to have its act together and get timely, accurate information out to audiences that need it (employees, customers, general public).

Here are the basic ingredients to a solid crisis communications plan:

1. Designate which team members will gather the critical facts needed to create useful external and internal communications;
2. Streamline the process for getting communications approved by leadership/management in a timely manner;
3. Cooperate and coordinate with local authorities (police, fire, hospitals, municipal or state agencies) to ensure the right information gets out from the appropriate source;
4. Train or enlist spokespersons in advance who are effective and credible in working with the news media;
5. Provide work spaces where you can create internal and external communications, and also hold media briefings;
6. Be able to access accurate and updated employee and customer contact lists in order to reach them through email and social media;
7. Take advantage of social media to reach general external audiences and news media as well.

These are just the high points. Each organization will have its own needs and nuances to take into account in crafting a crisis communications plan that will ensure the crisis is well-managed and critical audiences stay well-informed.

Let John Hawkins create an effective crisis communications plan for you. Contact him today at jch@jchawkinsassociates.com or (904) 342-8260.