

RE-ESTABLISHING TRUST AFTER A CRISIS

Best Practices and Case Studies

Every PR professional's worst nightmare is to find themselves smack dab in the middle of a crisis. Despite all the precautions and strategic planning, it is something most companies will have to endure at some point. The next crisis posing a threat to, or even the survival of your company, may already be coming down the pike. The decision to tackle the storm head-on or merely "ride it out" can significantly influence the way the media portrays the situation and how your key stakeholders react.

When managed poorly, a crisis can linger and drag a business down. For a time, your product or brand might not resonate with customers, investors may be uninterested in your company, and employees might consider going to what they perceive as a more reputable organization.

As favor waxes and wanes, how do you, as a PR professional, maintain key stakeholder relationships and reinforce the bonds of trust that helped make your company a success in the first place?

Consider this: "Eighty percent of organizations worldwide have had to mobilize their crisis management teams at least once in the past two years."

Deloitte Global's 2018 crisis management survey.

LET THE TRUTH BE TOLD

Simply stated: don't fabricate—either actively or through omission—and don't over-spin. News travels fast these days thanks to social media, screenshots, streaming video, and the 24/7 news cycle. If you are not honest, you'll likely get caught, which only means a bigger mess to clean up in the end.

It's best to keep your stakeholders in the know. Even if you don't have all the information, a partial response is better than none. Not only will you demonstrate your trustworthiness, you'll also gain their respect. In terms of the media, take responsibility where warranted and push your legal counsel when necessary. It's less difficult to reduce negative press when you're proactive, rather than reactive.

CASE: GILLETTE'S #METOO CAMPAIGN; WHEN WELL-MEANING ADS GO WRONG

For over a century, Gillette has championed the alpha men who use its razors. The effort has been prominently reinforced in the brand's ad campaigns, referring to their target as "all the world's rulers" and "the millions of big, strong-limbed supermen who are fighting to save freedom."

But their ad released in advance of the 2019 Super Bowl, cut the other way, channeling the #MeToo movement and undercutting toxic masculinity. The first half of the ad portrays males as boorish, sexually harassing women, mansplaining and bullying. Midway through, the narrator proclaims something has changed and that "there will be no going back."

"You can't hide from it. You can't laugh it off, making the same old excuses," the narrator states, as a long line up of men shrug, "boys will be boys." Then, the ad exalts men who "say the right thing" and "act the right way," as it showcases caring and empathetic men who intervene to stop friends and strangers from catcalling or bullying. "It's only by challenging ourselves to do more, that we can get closer to our best," the ad concludes, in a twist on its decades-old tagline "The Best A Man Can Get."

But the ad, which had more than 14 million views on YouTube, went over like a ton of bricks, getting more than twice as many "dislikes" as "likes," and many consumers vowed to dump their Gillette razors and wage a boycott.

The controversy highlights the risk brands take when dabbling into social or political issues in their marketing messages. While Gillette's intentions were to spark a meaningful discussion and soften the brand's alpha image, the groundwork hadn't been established for Gillette's ad to resonate. The attempt left many consumers feeling blindsided by a brand that had never taken such a controversial stance before.

(Based on PR Daily, September of 2019 article).

"The research shows that the vast majority of consumers across markets, ages, incomes and gender say that brand trust is essential to buying. Only quality, convenience, value and ingredients rank higher in importance as a deal breaker or deciding factor when a consumer decides to purchase—or not."
2019 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report, "In Brands We Trust?"

TIPS FOR STRENGTHENING STAKEHOLDER BONDS

- **Be timely:** Although every crisis is unique, in some fashion, it is still necessary to have a plan in place for when things go awry. It's crucial to respond quickly, even if just to say you are aware and working on it. By doing so, you tell your stakeholders you are taking the situation seriously. Otherwise, you are forced into a reactive mode, which may prolong the crisis and reinforce mistrust.
- **Understand the media and its mission:** Why is the media interested in your story? Remember, journalists are committed to reporting and they, like you, must inform stakeholders of the issues. Although some bloggers may not be as formally trained as reporters, they also influence a stakeholder's opinion about a company. In a crisis, prioritize media outreach based on which stakeholder groups are most affected.
- **Choose the right spokesperson:** Although it is important to speak with one voice, it may not be appropriate to have only one spokesperson represent your company. Depending on the stage of the crisis, it may be necessary to have experts, legal counsel, or some other adviser speak for your company. Choose people who can effectively communicate your company's position. The more straightforward, clear, and consistent your messages, the more accurately the issues will be portrayed in the media.

- Infuse empathy and compassion: People want to know you care. Ensure you've made an effort to understand how this situation affects your stakeholders and how that makes them feel. Communicate earnestly with the appropriate amount of compassion and empathy for the crisis at hand.
- Point to the future: Try highlighting key things that your company has done—or is in the process of doing for the overall good. According to the Harris Poll RQ® study (2018), "More than ever before, the American public has more insight and engagement with the companies they do business with. Consumers value brands that are standing by their values, building deep community relations, and fueling momentum in science, health and education. Americans prefer brands that offer respite from chaos and that embody hearth-and-home values."

The Trends in Customer Trust report, by Salesforce Research (2018) **found that 95% of customers are more likely to be loyal to a company they trust while 92% are more likely to purchase additional products and services from trusted businesses. Furthermore, 93% of customers are more likely to recommend a company they trust.**

CASE: BOEING AND THE 737 MAX CRISIS

The case of Boeing and the 737 Max crashes is a classic example where a lack of transparency helped to further complicate an already dire situation for the company. In March 2019, the Boeing 737 Max was grounded after 346 people died in two separate plane crashes. Investigators determined that a new automated flight control, the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS), malfunctioned on both flights, sending each plane into repeated nosedives.

The post-crash investigation showed that Boeing had many miscues both before and after the accidents. The manner in which Boeing handled communication with the airlines that purchased the 737 Max was their first communication misstep. Pilots felt misled regarding the lack of warnings about the possibility of the autopilot system engaging during takeoff causing the plane to fly erratically.

After the crashes, as aviation authorities around the world grounded the 737 Max model involved in these incidents, Boeing and U.S. regulators seemed to dig in their heels, insisting the 737 Max was safe while offering little evidence on the reasons for their confidence. This was a situation that called for total transparency and abundant caution. What the American traveling public got instead was condescension, a "trust us" message that grew harder to sustain as nation after nation declared its skies closed to Boeing's top-selling plane.

Boeing's handling of their crisis magnified the situation. Boeing did itself no favors with its tone-deaf initial response to the 737 Max crisis. The reluctance to park these planes until investigations could be completed reflects poorly on the judgment and priorities of Boeing, U.S. airlines and the Federal Aviation Administration—the same entities whose credibility will be a key determinant of whether air travelers ever feel safe in a Boeing 737 Max again.

(Based on PR Daily, September of 2019 article).

YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO IT ALONE; LET BURRELLES HELP

Part of managing a crisis is building relationships with reporters and keeping on top of news about your company and competitors. Let Burrelles be your source for media outreach, monitoring, and analysis. From our roots as a press clipping service, to our modern PR software, Burrelles is the most trusted and credible partner in the media data services industry.

Our comprehensive media monitoring service is unique in the industry for applying human insight along with sophisticated technology to provide you with curated coverage from national and local print, broadcast, social media, and myriad online sources. This ensures that you see all the coverage most relevant to you, your organization, and your public relations goals.

Media monitoring is where Burrelles started, but today it's just one of the ways that we help you maximize the value of your media relations results.

- First, target your messages to those most likely to write about your efforts using the industry's most comprehensive online media directory. Take advantage of the integrated e-mail distribution of all your news releases.
- Next, monitor your coverage from every form of media. We deliver exactly the news you want to see, complete with all photos and graphics.
- Then, gain insight through our automated and customized media measurement services.

CONTACT US

For a free consultation, or to find out more about Burrelles media relations planning, monitoring and measurement services, please [contact us online](#) or at: **Burrelles.com | 800.631.1160**