
7-STEP GUIDE TO CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

FABRICK



Crises can happen anywhere and at any time. If you're not prepared you risk losing your brand and your reputation - that you've spent years building - in a matter of minutes.

It's no good thinking 'it will never happen to us' because it can – especially when working in such a high risk industry as construction. You need to ask yourself 'is it worth taking the risk?'

People always remember the bad before the good so it's vital that construction brands know how to manage and minimise any negative impact that may be caused from a crisis of any level. Remember with real time communication tools such as social media, a tweet or fiery Facebook post can reach thousands within seconds.



WHAT QUALIFIES AS A CRISIS?

A typical crisis is difficult to define. It could relate to anything from an employee being injured on site through to a failure of plant and machinery, the failure of a specific product, an accident involving a company vehicle, an event affecting the local community or the actions of employees – whether physical, spoken or even written.

The high risk nature of construction and the built environment has been reinforced by high profile crises such as

Grenfell Tower, fires at Camden Market and Daventry warehouse and crane collapses in Reading and Crewe that led to the death of workers.

These examples have shown that all companies (small or big) – whether you're an architect or contractor, manufacturer or supplier – can be drawn into an incident that can have a negative impact on a company's brand and reputation.



**SO HOW SHOULD
COMPANIES BEST
PREPARE THEMSELVES
AND RESPOND TO
A CRISIS?**



STEP 1 **IDENTIFY** **THE RISKS**

Before you can identify solutions to potential crises you need to establish the risks that can cause a threat to your business – both internal and external. Get your stakeholders together and ask yourselves a series of ‘what if’ questions.

For example, what if your premises were damaged?

What if an employee was seriously injured on site?

What if there was a fire?

What if there was a data breach?

What if a senior member of staff left under a cloud?

What if your product was failing?

What if your housing development didn't need building regulations? Etc.

Dig deep and identify any potential skeletons!



STEP 2

DEVELOP A CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN

Now that you have identified the risks your company may be susceptible to, you need to create a plan that puts in place the necessary steps and protocols your business should take and implement in the event of an incident/crisis.

This will run right through the business from the person who answers the phone to your sales team on the ground. It will identify who takes responsibility, what initial steps need to be taken, who your staff need to call, who responds to media enquiries, what not to say and much more. It will provide measures to communicate internally, as well as externally, to customers and other stakeholders as well as the media.



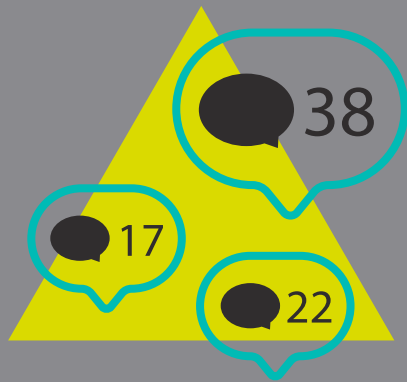
STEP 3

STAY CALM AND ESTABLISH THE FACTS

Once a crisis happens things move very quickly so it's important to stay calm and know what to do. Don't jump in to try and rectify the situation. This can have the opposite effect. It is better to take a breath, gather the facts and refer to the crisis management plan which will tell you what steps to take.

While it is essential that you take control of a crisis the moment it occurs, that does not mean you must respond at once.

Your priority is to gather all the facts and information you can as this will prove essential for managing the crisis.



STEP 4 DON'T IGNORE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media has added a further level of complexity to crisis management due to its real time nature. Any incident that is in the public domain, or to which the public has access, has the potential to be posted on social media.

A story can gain momentum incredibly quickly online, especially if the public can easily see an incident occurring as videos and images are taken and posted on multiple platforms.

A crisis management plan needs to take into consideration the impacts of social media. This could be by the general public as well as staff. It should put in place a process for monitoring what people are posting on social media and it should give guidance for staff as to what to do, or not i.e. no personal social media posting relating to the incident. Posting of messages via corporate channels would form part of the communication strategy, detailed in the crisis management plan.



STEP 5 MAKE A STATEMENT

Media relations is at the heart of crisis management and is fundamental in shaping public opinion of a brand or company. You can't ignore a crisis. You need to manage the messaging and issue a statement.

When it comes to making a statement, it is important to find the right tone and appropriate language. Be considerate, thoughtful and respectful. Get straight to the point and don't try and hide facts in confusing statements. It is better to be honest and open.



STEP 6 CONSIDER ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

In some instances, additional support may be required. This could take the form of a communications agency or legal representation. A communications agency would be ideally placed to advise on internal and external communication protocols and procedures as well as messaging and timing. Legal representation would be able to provide advice and guidance from a business

risk and best practice perspective. In our experience, joining the loop and having a team that includes senior management, legal representation and a communications agency is the most effective, especially in the case of major incidents.



STEP 7 PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

A crisis can have a negative impact on a company's brand and reputation so you need to think beyond the crisis. What can you do to shed some positive light

on your company? How can you turn things around? What positive messages can you communicate?



WHAT NOT TO DO IN A CRISIS

1 Bury your head in the sand

It's rare for a situation to blow over with no adverse reaction or speculation. Take responsibility and deal with the situation. Silence can prove fatal for a company, its brand and reputation.

2 Panic

Panicking helps no one. You need to keep calm and take control of the situation. Crisis management plans provide calm.

3 Publicly apologise before you have the chance to think and take appropriate advice

All too often – whether it is your fault or not – people's initial reaction is to say sorry. Saying sorry can be seen as an admission of guilt. In a similar way, not responding can also be seen as an admission of guilt.



HOW CAN FABRICK HELP YOUR COMPANY?

Fabrick has been managing crises within construction and the built environment for over three decades. Our team of 25 in-house professionals can:

- Evaluate a business to identify the risks that pose a threat
- Create and aid implementation of a Crisis Communications Plan / Strategy
- Help communicate the Crisis Communications Plan / Strategy within an organisation and its importance
- Manage all media enquiries
- Provide media relations and social media training for staff
- Create and implement marketing and PR plans and strategies to increase brand awareness and sales



THE NEXT STEP

**Contact our Managing Director,
David Ing, to discuss how we can help
your company prepare and
deal with crises.**

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