

Building a Crisis Communications Playbook



Organizations are facing unprecedented pressure due to increased expectations from employees, members and outside groups and the ability of movements to quickly form online. These new crises or controversies can arrive at a moment's notice and

your organization should be prepared to respond with the same speed.

While it's still important to have a comprehensive crisis communications action plan, a shorter crisis communications playbook is often needed to react quickly in a digital-first environment. This resource is intended to provide you with a basic template that you can put into action the moment a crisis happens.

What to Include in Your Crisis Communications Playbook:

A Key Contact List and Identification of Crisis Communications Team Members

Crises often occur when you're away from your desk, but having the contact information for your essential stakeholders handy is crucial. Organizations of substantial size should have an internal Crisis Communications Team. These team members should have clear and defined roles with access to the organization's social media accounts and be the ultimate decision makers during a crisis. Additionally, you should have the contact information for key stakeholders including:

- Outside partners or alliances
- Important industry reporters
- Internal spokespeople

- Organizational partners
- Valued community members
- Emergency personnel and essential lawmakers

Depending on your organization's industry and mission you may want to include additional individuals in this contact list; it's important to keep this section updated and organized. Knowing who to call or how to post a blog on your organization's website is crucial to know during a fast-moving crisis.

A Simple Crisis Communications Checklist

Each crisis is unique, but organizations should try and create a short checklist or mini-guide so staff can refer to best practices in the midst of an issue. This checklist will never be exhaustive (and it shouldn't be), but having a quick guide can be immensely helpful, **so keep your checklist to no longer than 10-15 bullet points or steps.** A simplified checklist will help your team move rapidly through the process without unnecessary discussions. This checklist should be unique to every organization because every organization has a different set of goals and priorities during a crisis. However, make sure to include these three action items:

1. Identify the important audiences for your company or association to communicate with during a crisis and a typical prioritization of those audiences.
2. Clearly outline the message approval process and situations when this process might need to change.
3. Define your organization's most important crisis response operating procedures, which should include your goals for response times and answer common process questions for your team.

This checklist should limit the amount of discussion about procedure and best practices while not be overly prescriptive. Crises move faster than ever, and a simple checklist can focus your team on your organization's priorities in a time where confusion may reign.

Preapproved Content:

If your organization has a well-defined set of issues, you can also create preapproved content or draft social media posts that address common issues your organization might face. While you'll want to edit this content to fit your situation, these preapproved pieces can help you rapidly communicate during a crisis. These posts will help define your organization's tone during a crisis which is crucial for public-facing organizations. Pre-approved content could include videos, infographics and images that can help convey important messages during a crisis. While your instinct may be to quickly respond or hunker down during a crisis, take the opportunity to tell your organization's story, reiterate your mission and clear up any misperceptions.

Yes there is a place for a comprehensive crisis management plan, but your two-to-three page crisis communications playbook is also needed. When a crisis hits, communications professionals don't have time to flip through a 300-page binder or track down the one person with your companies' LinkedIn login.

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For more insights on communication topics or to submit a question, comment or addition, contact [Nick DeSarno](#), senior manager for the digital and communication practice.