Crisis communication
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**The challenge of crisis**

A crisis is the ultimate test of communication. Bad crisis PR destroys brands, whereas a strong response can protect or even enhance reputation.

Never is communication more crucial, or more challenging. Scrutiny and pressure are intense.

That makes crisis preparedness one of the most important responsibilities of every communication department.

**Key success factors**

The primary success factor for crisis communication is the ability to get the message out fast.

Organisations that hit the ground running establish themselves – rather than their critics – as the go-to source of information. In a weak response, delay signals disorganisation.

The second challenge is to sustain the flow of high-quality information. This transmits an image of competence, transparency and control. In a weak response, silence signals guilt.

Even these basics are impossible without extensive crisis communication planning and preparation.
We support companies to build crisis communication capacity across three main service areas:

- Crisis Preparedness
- Crisis Training
- Crisis Simulation

At the height of a crisis, there is no time to develop teams, define policies and processes, train spokespeople, or get documents written and approved.
Crisis preparedness

Crisis communication audit

Most organisations have crisis resources in place, but they are not always complete and tend not to be up to date – and it isn’t always easy from the inside to see what is missing.

We work alongside communication directors to conduct a crisis preparedness audit, in which we compare existing strategies, plans and resources to our own database of international best practice and our own experience of how other organisations prepare for crisis communication.

This is always a constructive process: we are not looking for problems, but rather areas where attention will pay off.
Crisis content development

This priority issues list becomes an input for crisis resource generation. For the highest priority scenarios, we will develop issue-specific messages and templates for urgently needed documents such as holding statements, press releases, social media posts and microsites.

Other topic-specific resources can be developed in full such as fact sheets, infographics, FAQ documents, media briefing documents, biographies, stock photography and video B-roll.
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CRISIS ISSUES MAPPING

Some crises are totally unpredictable, but most arise from known risks that are either specific to your organisation (e.g. oil spill, product recall) or common to all (e.g. employee misconduct, financial scandals, data breaches).

The ISOC crisis consulting team helps clients to conduct a structured Issues Mapping process. This usually involves facilitated workshops drawing together many departments and business units where a crisis might begin, including less obvious places such as HR.

The output is a prioritised list of crisis events that are most likely, most damaging or both.
Crisis preparedness

Red book
The crisis communication team will need immediate access to a range of crisis resources, even if the crisis itself has disrupted access to normal locations, systems and networks.

The ISOC crisis consulting team will work to develop an electronic “red book” containing all essential crisis resources from media, staff and stakeholder contact lists to crisis team responsibilities.

Systems
We will help to define a structure of roles and responsibilities for the crisis communication team, and its interface with senior management as part of the broader crisis response.

We will develop protocols and standard operating procedures, including information cascades.

External resources
Where a large-scale crisis communication response may be required, we will advise on the provisioning of third party support, such as agency-operated call centres, venues for crisis news conferences, upgraded crisis media monitoring, and SEO/SEM services.
Crisis training

Training courses for PR teams

We regularly deliver in-house training for organisations needing to focus on certain topics or work with sensitive information.

We also offer public courses for crisis PR team members on a range of crisis communication topics. The following short courses run regularly at our public training centres in London and Dubai:

- Crisis Communication Management
- Crisis Communication Programme (5 days)
- Crisis Management in Social Media
- Handling the Media in a Crisis

See isoc.com for details and dates.
Crisis media training helps organisations take back control of this key element of crisis response. Crisis spokespeople can build universal strategies for answering difficult questions, awareness of how to manage journalists in a crisis, and confidence to cut the right presence on screen.

Crisis media training is also an opportunity to remind bosses to prioritise the media dimension of crisis response.

Media training is a main service area at ISOC. See isoc.com/media-training or download the ISOC media training brochure.
Crisis simulation

Crisis communication drills

The ISOC crisis consulting team regularly delivers simulation exercises for large organisations wishing to test and develop their crisis response systems.

Learning can operate live, semi-live or as a table-top exercise. A typical simulation lasts one or two days, allowing time to test all dimensions of the response.

ISOC crisis simulations are usually standalone, but can also be plugged in to provide a communication dimension to a large-scale crisis drill including operational response protocols.

We also run simultaneous crisis simulations for teams distributed across multiple locations, cities, countries and time zones.
Simulation methodology

Training is always based on a realistic rolling scenario designed in advance in collaboration with a small closed group within the communication team.

The scenario unfolds as information is revealed step by step on a schedule that mirrors the information phases of a real crisis, from initial confusion and scarcity of facts to information overload.

Active learning

The communication and PR team is expected to work from its crisis communication plan and resources, including using templates to create messages, draft statements and press releases, compose social media updates, advise management, brief spokespeople and take calls from journalists.

Maximum realism

For added realism we create mock-ups of media reports including TV packages and social media feeds.

Trainers role-play journalists and other stakeholders and simulate press conferences and ambush interviews to test and practice spokesperson skills.
Crisis communication

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CASE STUDIES

ISOC crisis consulting and training teams work at the highest level to help organisations raise their capacity for crisis communication.

- Crisis media training for more than 100 spokespeople over five years at a top-five global airline.
- Live crisis communication simulation for a top-10 global oil company, involving three locations on two continents.
- Semi-live combined crisis operation and communication simulation for a globally renowned university.
- Media simulation add-on for a full-scale spill and explosion drill at a Fortune Global 500 chemicals company.
- Crisis media training for the entire Cabinet of a national government.

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