

Business Continuity Management: Media Relations

Media Relations

The news media are an organization's liaison to the general public. The media form an established and powerful communications network that can disseminate emergency information quickly. An organization must have an effective media relations plan in place. An effective plan will help the organization to swiftly defuse a crisis, instill public confidence, and maintain a company's reputation and good standing within the community. The plan should be thought out well in advance of the occurrence of an actual crisis. The following guidelines establish a sound, proactive media relations plan.

Planning the Media Relations Program

Develop a written policy statement that clearly reflects the organization's commitment to an effective media relations program. Define the purpose and objective of the program, identify roles and responsibilities of the media relations team, and ensure that the policy statement is fully endorsed by senior management.

Organize a *media relations team* to be responsible for rapid decision-making in emergency situations. In addition to members of the corporate relations department, the team may include senior management and members of the legal, security, and human resources departments. It is vital that all members of the team be key decision makers.

Designate a spokesperson (and a back-up) to speak formally to the news media on behalf of the organization, throughout a crisis. The spokesperson, who is a member of the media relations team, should have in-depth knowledge of the company's operations and should have excellent communication skills. Only designated spokespersons should communicate with the media about the emergency and the company's response to it.

Communicating with the News Media

Provide a press kit to the news media *before* an emergency strikes. This will help to establish a mutual trusting relationship, and will provide positive, accurate background information about the organization. The kit should include a general overview of the organization, the latest annual report, descriptions of achievements, civic contributions, and information about the person who has been designated as the company's media contact.

Get to know members of the news media. Invite them to informal meetings, corporate functions, and open houses.

LOSS CONTROL TIPS

Should a crisis occur, provide a press release immediately. Stick to the facts (What, Who, When, Where, Why and How). Determine appropriate and alternate ways of communicating this information. Promptly follow up with members of the news media. Ensure that all promises to provide information have been fulfilled.

Upon the conclusion of the crisis, issue a final statement which outlines the company's actions, remedial steps, and future actions.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Company Spokesperson

The company spokesperson has multiple responsibilities at all stages of the Business Continuity Management process:

Before a Crisis

- Understand the needs of the news media (e.g., types of information, deadlines, etc.).
- Maintain current information about the organization (photographs, site plans and maps, videos, and other written materials).
- Retain a clipping service to monitor local, regional, and national newspapers and magazines, and radio and television broadcasts.

During a Crisis

- Meet with the Emergency Coordinator to obtain current information about the emergency.
- Consult with the media relations team to determine which statements can and should be made to the media.
- During the press conference, provide clear, concise, and accurate information.
- Handle the emergency professionally and in a concerted fashion.
- Accentuate the positive in all statements.
- Be prepared to bring in independent experts (e.g., special investigators, chemist, physicians, etc.) swiftly, to address issues raised by the media, and to augment information provided in the company's statements.

After a Crisis

- Take steps to rebuild or enhance the company's reputation and to stabilize community relations.
- Deliver a press release, and possibly an advertisement, to offer condolences to those killed, injured or displaced by the emergency; to thank rescue personnel; to acknowledge acts of heroism or kindness; or to promise a thorough investigation to ensure a similar tragedy does not reoccur.

Other Aspects of the Media Relations Program

The media relations team should also ensure that these other aspects of the media relations program are in place:

Facilities and Resources

- Provide facilities and resources that will support effective communications with the media during an crisis.
- Ensure access to photocopying and facsimile machines, overnight mail envelopes, and a debriefing area.

Documentation

- Develop a mailing list of news organizations. Incorporate the mailing list into the company's facsimile and e-mail distribution lists.
- Be sure to update the mailing list at least every six months.
- Keep accurate records of all media inquiries. Document the reporter's or editor's name, telephone and fax number, e-mail address, the nature of the inquiry, and the company's response.
- Annually, review media relations policies and procedures, news media communications, roles and responsibilities, facilities and resources, documentation, and education and training techniques.

Education and Training

- Distribute media relations policies and procedures to all company employees.
- Hold periodic training sessions for the media relations team, the company spokesperson, and the spokesperson backup, to review roles and responsibilities.

References

1. Barton, Laurence. "Media Relations," from "The Crisis Management Plan," Chapter 8 in *Crisis in Organizations: Managing and Communicating in the Heat of Chaos*. Cincinnati: South-Western, c1993.
2. Kelly, Robert B. "Dealing With the Media During Emergencies." Chapter 17 from *Industrial Emergency Preparedness*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, c1989.
3. *The Hartford's Guide to Emergency Preparedness Planning: Hazard Assessment and Risk Evaluation; Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery*. Hartford, CT: The Hartford Loss Control Department, c1998.
4. Fennelly, Kevin P. "Public Relations and the Media." Chapter 39 in *Handbook of Loss Prevention and Crime Prevention*, 3rd ed., ed. by Lawrence J. Fennelly. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, c1996.

For more information, contact your local Hartford agent or your Hartford Loss Control Consultant.

Visit The Hartford's Loss Control web site at <http://www.thehartford.com/corporate/losscontrol/>

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Business Continuity Management Media Relations: Effective Planning Checklist

Planning the Media Relations Program

- Develop a written policy statement that clearly reflects the organization's commitment to an effective media relations program. Define the purpose and objective of the program, identify roles and responsibilities of the media relations team, and ensure that the policy statement is fully endorsed by senior management.
- Organize a *media relations team* to be responsible for rapid decision-making in emergency situations. In addition to members of the corporate relations department, the team may include senior management and members of the legal, security, and human resources departments. It is vital that all members of the team be key decision makers.
- Designate a spokesperson (and a back-up) to speak formally to the news media on behalf of the organization, throughout an emergency. The spokesperson, who is a member of the media relations team, should have in-depth knowledge of the company's operations and should have excellent communication skills. Only designated spokespersons should communicate with the media about the emergency and the company's response to it.
- Retain a public relations firm to assist with media relations when personnel within the organization are not available, or when the organization's PR personnel have limited emergency communications expertise.

Communicating with the News Media

- Provide a press kit to the news media *before* an emergency strikes. The kit should include a general overview of the organization, the latest annual report, descriptions of achievements, civic contributions, and information about the person who has been designated as the company's media contact.
- Get to know members of the news media. Invite them to informal meetings, corporate functions, and open houses.
- Provide a press release immediately after an emergency. Stick to the facts (What, Who, When, Where, Why and How). Determine appropriate and alternate ways of communicating this information.
- Consider providing a video news release (VNR) to send a well-rehearsed, taped message to thousand of broadcasters worldwide.

- Promptly follow-up with members of the news media. Ensure that all promises to provide information have been fulfilled.
- Upon the conclusion of the emergency, issue a final statement which outlines the company's actions, remedial steps, and future actions.

Facilities and Resources

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- Ensure access to photocopying and facsimile machines, overnight mail envelopes, and a debriefing area.

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Business Continuity Management

Media Relations: News Organization Mailing List

Develop a mailing list of news organizations. Incorporate the mailing list into the company's facsimile and e-mail distribution lists. Be sure to update the mailing list at least every six months.

Sample mailing list:

| MEDIA GROUP | CONTACT NAME | PHONE | FAX | E-MAIL | MAILING ADDRESS | COMMENT |
|-------------------|--------------|----------|----------|--------|-----------------|---------|
| Newspapers | | | | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| Television | | | | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| Radio | | | | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| Others | | | | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |
| | | W: H: | W: H: | | | |

Reviewed or Revised (Date): _____

Business Continuity Management
Media Relations: Press Release

| | | | |
|--|--|------|-------|
| Date | | Time | AM/PM |
| Company Name | | | |
| Company Address | | | |
| Primary Company Media Contact | Name: Work Phone: Home Phone: Fax: E-Mail: | | |
| Alternate Company Media Contact | Name: Work Phone: Home Phone: Fax: E-Mail: | | |
| General Company Contact Information | Name: Work Phone: Home Phone: Fax: E-Mail: | | |

| |
|-----------|
| Headline: |
| Text: |



**Business Continuity Management
Media Relations: Press Inquiry**

| | | | |
|--|--|------|-------|
| Date: | | Time | AM/PM |
| Person receiving call | | | |
| Name of person making inquiry (reporter or editor) | | | |
| Inquiry received from (organization name) | | | |
| Contact information for person making inquiry | Phone: Fax: E-Mail: Website: Mail Address: | | |

| |
|-------------------|
| Question/Inquiry: |
| Response: |
| Notes: |