

Credocast

A publication of Credo Advisory

Vol. 4 Issue 3. January 2020

Code Red

Communicating in Crisis

Press Release

**Government Launches Campaign
on Wuhan Coronavirus**

Press Release
Government launches campaign
on Wuhan Coronavirus

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing
elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et
dolore magna aliqua. Quis ipsum suspendisse
ultrices gravida. Risus commodo viverra maecenas
accumsan lacus vel facilisis. Lorem ipsum dolor sit
amet, consectetur adipiscing elit, sed do eiusmod
tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.
Quis ipsum suspendisse ultrices gravida. Risus
commodo viverra maecenas accumsan lacus vel

3

Mitigating Crisis

4

Crisis Phases

6

Reputation Repair

3

INFOGRAPHICS 1 Ebola virus

Mitigating Crisis

As a result of the ripple effects of crises, it is imperative for organizations to be proactive by understanding the principles of crisis communications.



The infographic features a red background with white and yellow text. It lists symptoms: stomach pain, dry cough, and internal bleeding. It also mentions 'IMPAIRED KIDNEY AND LIVER FUNCTION'. A diagram shows a person being infected by a monkey, with arrows indicating the spread of the virus. Text includes 'Ebola virus infects humans, monkeys' and 'THE FIRST CASE OF EBOLA RECORDED IN AUGUST 1976 near the Congo (also known as Zaire) is a river in the Democratic Republic of the Congo'. A skull and crossbones icon is also present.

4

Crisis Phases

It is important to understand the key phases in crisis communications: pre-crisis, crisis response and post crisis.

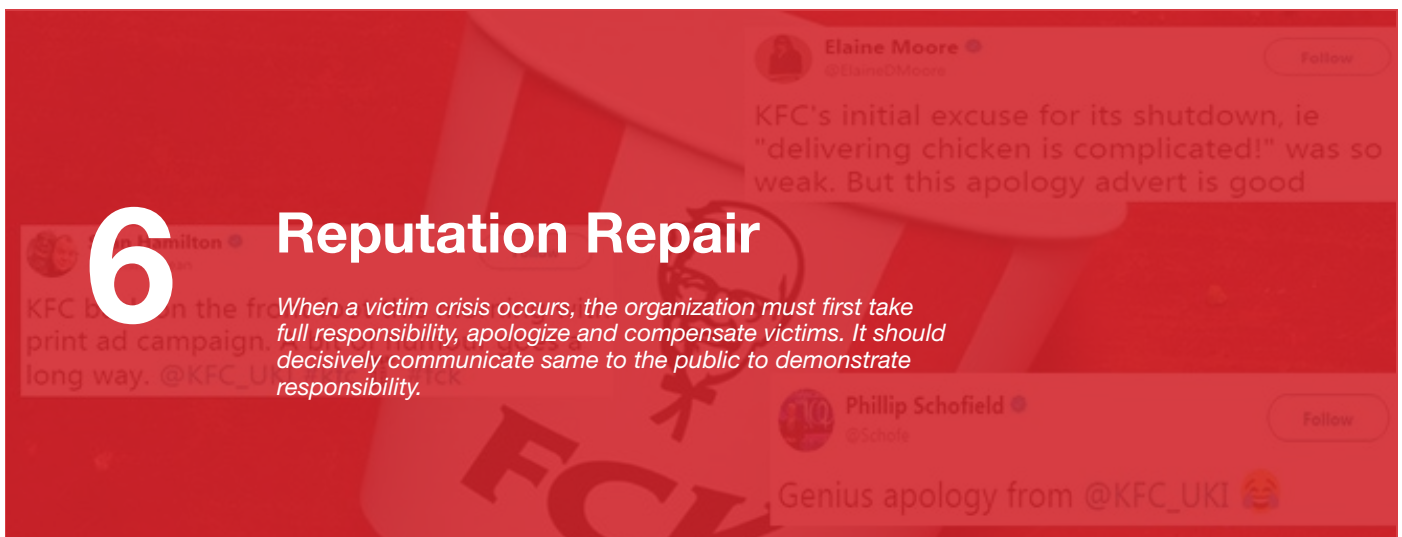


The image shows two men in business attire sitting at a table, looking at a laptop. The background is a solid red color.

6

Reputation Repair

When a victim crisis occurs, the organization must first take full responsibility, apologize and compensate victims. It should decisively communicate same to the public to demonstrate responsibility.



The image is a screenshot of a tweet from Elaine Moore (@ElaineMoore) praising KFC's apology. The tweet text reads: 'KFC's initial excuse for its shutdown, ie "delivering chicken is complicated!" was so weak. But this apology advert is good'. Below the tweet is a reply from Phillip Schofield (@Schofie) saying 'Genius apology from @KFC_UKI 🤔'. The background is a red overlay on a photo of a KFC bucket.

About Credo Advisory

Credo Advisory is a strategic communications firm that specializes in designing and implementing strategic, operational and tactical communication initiatives. We provide a full suite of communications support to our clients, which include public communications and advocacy, government relations, community engagement, media relations, crisis communications, digital communications and capacity building.

Our mission is to develop bespoke communications products, activities and campaigns based on knowledge, research and industry insights. With our ability to communicate effectively with diverse audiences and stakeholder groups, Credo's mission is to provide impactful strategic communications advisory from inception to implementation. At Credo, we are committed to improving the way societies communicate.

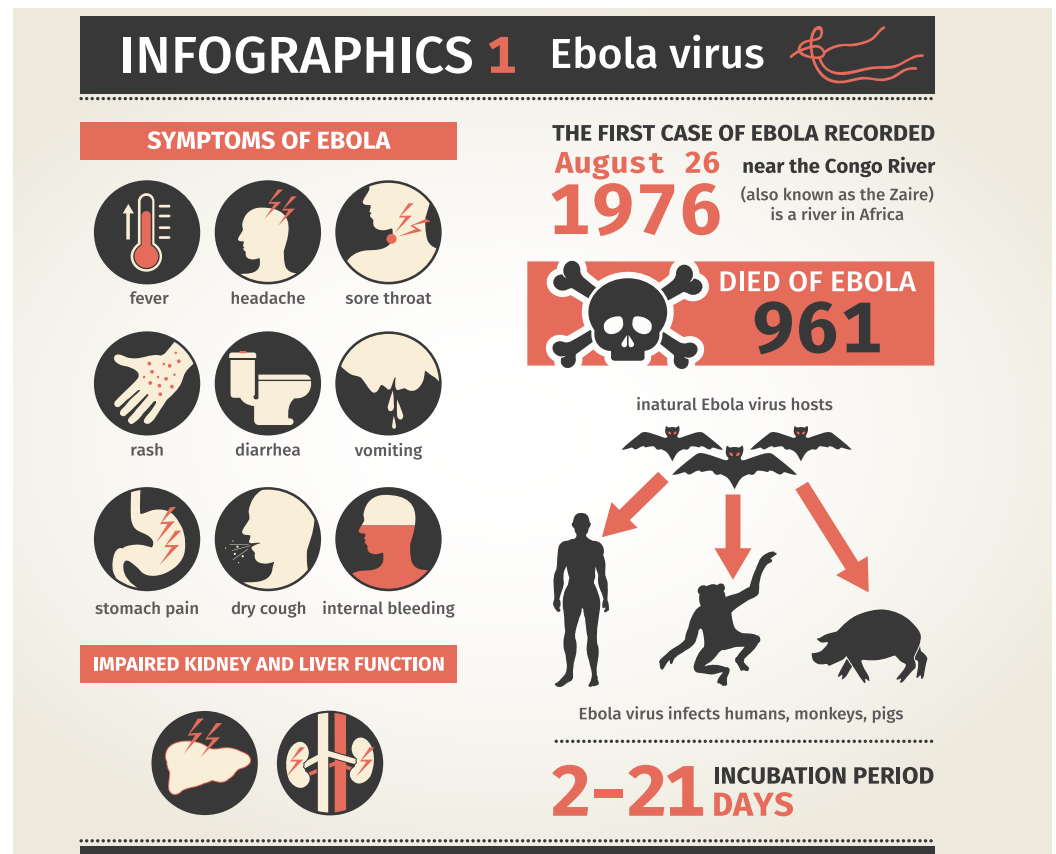
www.creadoconsulting.com



“The communications personnel determines necessary steps, develops messaging and executes public relations strategies.”

Mitigating Crisis

The right communications may not solve a crisis; however, it can significantly mitigate it. Crises such as workplace injuries or deaths, man-made disasters, natural disasters and organizational or individual controversies have been responsible for destroying the brand and reputation of many entities. As a result of the ripple effects of crises, it is imperative for organizations to be proactive by understanding the principles of crisis communications and ensuring that protocols are established to respond when it occurs. Crisis communications involves collecting, assessing and disseminating information for the resolution of a crisis situation. It involves dialogue between organizations (even countries) and the public before, during and after crisis; with the aim of managing reputation and expectations.¹



¹ The Arthur W. Page Center Crisis Communication. Available at <https://pagecentertraining.psu.edu/public-relations-ethics/ethics-in-crisis-management/lesson-1-prominent-ethical-issues-in-crisis-situations/crisis-communication/>

² ResearchGate (2017) An account of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria: Implications and lessons learnt Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318406083_An_account_of_the_Ebola_virus_disease_outbreak_in_Nigeria_Implications_and_lessons_learn

³ ResearchGate (2017) An account of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria: Implications and lessons learnt Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318406083_An_account_of_the_Ebola_virus_disease_outbreak_in_Nigeria_Implications_and_lessons_learn

⁴ ResearchGate (2017) An account of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria: Implications and lessons learnt Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318406083_An_account_of_the_Ebola_virus_disease_outbreak_in_Nigeria_Implications_and_lessons_learn

The case of Nigeria’s Ebola outbreak of 2014 is a notable example of how communications was effectively used to curtail a potentially catastrophic series of events. With collaboration between the Nigerian government, private sector and international bodies, the health sector successfully implemented quick measures to control the Ebola epidemic.² Public awareness campaigns and health messages in local dialects were circulated in the media and at community levels to sensitize the public on the disease and preventive measures.³ Additionally, an Ebola helpline and information unit was created to manage the flow of information on the epidemic. Other helpful channels and products used to debunk misconceptions were Ebola infographics, bulk Short Messaging Service (SMS) and “Ebola Alert” tips aired on mainstream and social media.⁴

“The communications personnel determines necessary steps, develops messaging and executes public relations strategies.”

As a result of these efforts in collaboration with public health and safety measures, Nigeria was declared Ebola-free by the World Health Organization on October 20, 2014.⁵

This thought piece discusses the principles of successful crisis communications and analyses the steps to achieving best results by using the requisite strategies and resources.

Crisis Communications Phases

First, it is important to understand the key phases in crisis communications: pre-crisis, crisis response and post crisis.⁶

1. Pre-crisis Phase

As uncertain as some crisis may be, there are preventive steps every organization must take to manage risks that could eventually lead to a crisis. They include the following:

- *Have a crisis communications plan*

This is a critical component for effective crisis communications. The plan details the steps, strategies, responsibilities and approaches to communicating during crisis situations. According to communications scholars, Barton, Coombs and Fearn-Banks, it serves as a reference source that coordinates the actions of the communications team.⁷

- *Establish a crisis management team*

Public relations professionals are a vital part of a crisis management team.⁸ Other members of the team may include professionals in law, media advisory, security, operations, health, finance and human resources depending on the type of crisis.⁹ Based on consultations with the various disciplines within the team, the communications personnel determines necessary steps, develops messaging and executes public relations strategies.¹⁰

⁵ ResearchGate (2017) An account of the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Nigeria: Implications and lessons learnt Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318406083_An_account_of_the_Ebola_virus_disease_outbreak_in_Nigeria_Implications_and_lessons_learned

⁶ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

⁷ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

⁸ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

⁹ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

¹⁰ Prachi J. (2015) Crisis Communication - Meaning, Need and its Process. Available at <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/crisis-management-team.htm>



“Organizations must understand their stakeholders to utilize the right communication channels during a crisis.”

■ *Select a spokesperson*

A trained organization spokesperson is a prerequisite during a crisis. He or she must be equipped with accurate information and messaging that aligns to the organization, country or group’s mitigation strategy with the public, media and relevant stakeholders.

On April 17, 2018, one of Southwest Airlines’ flights had an emergency landing, killing one person.¹¹ As part of their crisis management, Chief Executive, Gary Kelly and his team ensured that passengers needs were met including travel and accommodation arrangements.¹² For crisis communications, Kelly, the designated spokesperson, delivered a heartfelt statement to the bereaved family, other passengers and public.¹³ Through this channel, he informed the public on the circumstances around the event as well as measures Southwest Airlines was taking to avoid future occurrences. Additionally, communication was disseminated about the various support and trauma counselling resources (conducted through one-on-one sessions, phone calls, emails, etc.) that were made available to those affected by the event.¹⁴



¹¹ PR Academy The Best-Managed PR Crises of 2018. Available at <https://www.prezly.com/academy/relationships/crisis-communication/the-best-managed-pr-crises-of-2018>

¹² R Academy The Best-Managed PR Crises of 2018. Available at <https://www.prezly.com/academy/relationships/crisis-communication/the-best-managed-pr-crises-of-2018>

¹³ PR Academy The Best-Managed PR Crises of 2018. Available at <https://www.prezly.com/academy/relationships/crisis-communication/the-best-managed-pr-crises-of-2018>

¹⁴ PR Academy The Best-Managed PR Crises of 2018. Available at <https://www.prezly.com/academy/relationships/crisis-communication/the-best-managed-pr-crises-of-2018>

¹⁵ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

■ *Pre-draft messages*

It is not enough to take preventive measures without pre-drafting messages. They serve as time saving templates to be filled with key information when the need arises.¹⁵ These messages need to be approved by decision makers as they are crucial in handling crisis when it occurs.

■ *Select communications channels*

A message is as important as the channel through which it is conveyed. Organizations must, therefore, understand their stakeholders to utilize the right communication channels during a crisis. These may include social media, websites, emails, phone calls, digital and print media to mention a few. For example, communications to shareholders will require a specific channel while engagement with employees during a crisis will need a combination of communication channels.

“There’s no one who wants this thing over more than I do. You know, I’d like my life back...”
- Tony Hayward”

2. Crisis Response

The crisis response is the turning point during a crisis situation; it is the stage after the crisis occurs and actions are taken. The two sub-phases of this stage are; the initial crisis response and the reputation repair and behavioral intentions.¹⁶

■ Initial response

When a crisis occurs, representatives must be proactive in their response. They must accurately assess and determine the situation then respond to the crisis within the first hour.¹⁷ This is where the pre-drafted messages come in as crucial and time saving templates.

In February 2018, Kentucky Fried Chicken closed more than half their stores in the United Kingdom due to chicken shortage.¹⁸ KFC, understanding its stakeholders and the risk to its stock price, proactively ran a comedic apology advertisement tagged “FCK, We’re Sorry.”¹⁹ This messaging helped to sooth angry customers and the company was lauded by the media for the exemplary and unique response.²⁰ KFC, also strategically, created a page on their website for confirming chicken supply status of their local restaurants.²¹



Photo Credit: Independent 2018

■ Reputation repair and behavioral intentions

Political Communications scholar, Bill Benoit, identified strategies to repair reputational damage after the initial response.²² These strategies vary in terms of response methods to victims.²³ For instance; when a victim crisis occurs, the organization must first take full responsibility, apologize and compensate victims. It should decisively communicate same to the public to demonstrate their responsibility of the situation as well share next steps on managing the crisis.

America’s Beyond Petroleum (BP) crisis of 2010 created a huge media frenzy, when a major oil spill of the Gulf of Mexico led to the death of 11 rig workers.²⁴ Its crisis management lacked key elements of proactive crisis communication messaging - responsibility, accountability and care. Instead of taking responsibility, BP executives blamed their contractors. BP CEO, Tony Hayward went on to make insensitive comments, “There’s no one who wants this thing over more than I do. You know, I’d like my life back...” sparking public outrage.²⁵

¹⁶ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

¹⁷ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

¹⁸ RockDove Solutions (2018) Three recent crisis management case studies that we can learn from <https://www.rockdovesolutions.com/blog/three-recent-crisis-management-case-studies-that-we-can-learn-from>

¹⁹ RockDove Solutions (2018) Three recent crisis management case studies that we can learn from <https://www.rockdovesolutions.com/blog/three-recent-crisis-management-case-studies-that-we-can-learn-from>

²⁰ RockDove Solutions (2018) Three recent crisis management case studies that we can learn from <https://www.rockdovesolutions.com/blog/three-recent-crisis-management-case-studies-that-we-can-learn-from>

²¹ PR Academy The Best-Managed PR Crises of 2018. Available at <https://www.prezly.com/academy/relationships/crisis-communication/the-best-managed-pr-crises-of-2018>

²² Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

²³ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

²⁴ The Arthur W. Page Center Public Relations Ethics Case Study: BP Oil Spill. Available at <https://pagecentertraining.psu.edu/public-relations-ethics/ethics-in-crisis-management/lesson-1-prominent-ethical-issues-in-crisis-situations/case-study-tbd/>

²⁵ The Arthur W. Page Center Public Relations Ethics Case Study: BP Oil Spill. Available at <https://pagecentertraining.psu.edu/public-relations-ethics/ethics-in-crisis-management/lesson-1-prominent-ethical-issues-in-crisis-situations/case-study-tbd/>

“Stakeholders need to be updated on recovery progress and corrective measures.”

In what seemed like “polishing the corporate image”, BP, subsequently, ran a multimillion-dollar crisis mitigation campaign which only worsened the situation. Key influencers publicly condemned using the funds on the campaign instead of channeling it to address the economic and environmental damage as well as compensating victims.²⁶

3. Post-Crisis Phase

For reputation management, crisis managers must fulfil the promises made during the crisis stage to earn public and stakeholder trust.²⁷ Stakeholders need to be updated on recovery progress and corrective measures.²⁸ In the recent series of earthquakes that struck Puerto Rico in January 2020, countless homes were destroyed and majority had no access to electricity.²⁹ The crisis mitigation and communications of the White House continues to be vastly criticized.³⁰ Beyond the occasional press statements, the Trump administration has been accused of neglecting the plight of Puerto Ricans with limited federal aid and insufficient engagement with the public and victims on needed efforts.³¹

Credo Experience

Credo Advisory’s strategic communications support include crisis communications. On a particular client programme, a beneficiary issued a misleading news report which triggered negative feedback from other programme beneficiaries. In the crisis phase, a factsheet was quickly developed to re-validate the correct programme information which helped counter the misleading report and serve as a future guide. Credo Advisory ensured that the initial online article was replaced with a factual version and disseminated the factsheet to related stakeholders. Finally, the client was advised to circulate regular programme updates on various digital and social media platforms in addition to beneficiaries asked to submit programme related press statements prior to release.

Conclusion

As a general rule, it is pivotal to understand the concept of crisis communication, key phases and elements of proactive crisis communication which include responsibility, accountability and care. Organizations must constantly take preventive measures that could play a huge role in ensuring their organizational success and safeguarding their public image.

In crisis situations, some organizations may react from a position of denial or excuses and these have proven to be detrimental in managing crisis in most cases. Crisis communications practitioners, on the other hand, ensure that stakeholders and the public are addressed promptly with empathy, a call to action and next steps depending on the nature of the crisis. However, difficult as it may seem to plan for an unknown occurrence, implementing crisis communications remains a key component in the successful outcome of crisis situations.

²⁶ The Arthur W. Page Center Public Relations Ethics Case Study: BP Oil Spill. Available at <https://pagecentertraining.psu.edu/public-relations-ethics/ethics-in-crisis-management/lesson-1prominent-ethical-issues-in-crisis-situations/case-study-tbd/>

²⁷ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

²⁸ Institute for Public Relations (2007) Crisis Management and Communications, Available at <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>

²⁹ CNN (2020) Another earthquake hits Puerto Rico with 5.9 magnitude Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/11/us/puerto-rico-earthquake/index.html>

³⁰ The Atlantic (2020) Trump’s Malign Neglect of Puerto Rico Available <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/puerto-rico-was-invisible-trump-made-things-worse/604984/>

³¹ The Atlantic (2020) Trump’s Malign Neglect of Puerto Rico Available <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/puerto-rico-was-invisible-trump-made-things-worse/604984/>