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**GUIDE 2019**

**Crisis  
communications  
management**

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# Crisis communications management

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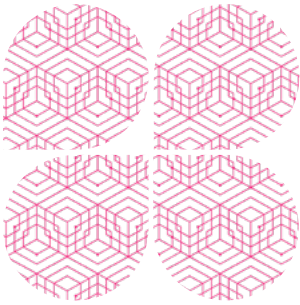
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathy Hayward is managing director of Magenta Associates, and a communications specialist with more than 18 years' experience in a range of journalistic, publishing and marketing roles. She founded Magenta in 2011 after a journalistic career spanning a number of different titles including *FM World*, the award-winning magazine for the British Institute of Facilities Management, *Marketing Week*, *Financial Management*, *Soccer Analyst*, *Supply Management*, *Unions Today*, *People Management* and *Director*. She holds a Masters degree in journalism, as well as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' post-graduate diploma in PR.

## Introduction

From the FIFA corruption allegations to the furore over Jeremy Clarkson's departure from the BBC's *Top Gear*, scandal sells news, which is why there is a whole sector within the PR industry devoted specifically to managing a client crisis. In this guide, we outline the type of crisis you're most likely to encounter within the built environment, suggest ways of managing the situation while in the eye of the storm and offer some practical ways you can prepare ahead for any eventually.





# This guide takes you through the process.

Crisis communications doesn't just apply to headline-grabbing controversies. Within the built environment a seemingly low-key issue, if left unchecked, can boil over into full blown crisis that damages the standing of the organisation.

For example, a services supplier took over a new contract and along with the staff, inherited an ongoing industrial dispute. This resulted in them not only being embroiled in a costly strike, but being dragged through the mud as an unfair employer.

In another scenario, a maintenance company was criticised roundly in the press when it was discovered that every time it changed a set of lightbulbs within a large public sector building this cost the tax payer thousands of pounds. The fault lay in the original design of the lighting, not the M&E contractor, but they still received the criticism.

And in a sector where a good reputation is a fundamental ingredient to attracting and retaining business, this could drastically impact on the bottom line.

A potential crisis may include:

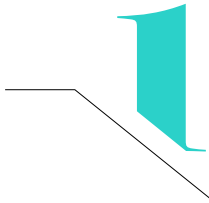
- \* Any media enquiry however apparently innocent
- \* An accident or dangerous occurrence as defined within the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (Riddor)
- \* An incident which involves the emergency services, particularly the police
- \* Threat by customer or employee to contact the press
- \* Terrorism threat/bomb scare
- \* Serious attack on an employee
- \* Staff dispute with management
- \* Asylum and immigration issues

Any of these issues can result in a storm of negative publicity, which must be managed carefully to avoid it blowing up into a major crisis. This is why it is crucial to be available to field calls from the media and make sure that everyone within the client organisation is kept informed.

During the crisis ensure the media enquiry/incident number is circulated to all line managers, and is published on the website. This should not be a mobile number, but a general number which forwards the call to the relevant mobile. This means that calls are not missed when people are on holiday for example.

Those of course are the main steps to take while in the throes of the storm, but key to success, before any incident occurs, how crisis communications should be planned carefully.



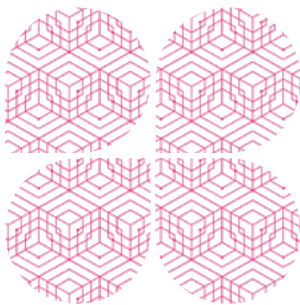


## Planning

In the same way that most responsible organisations have a risk management strategy in place, this same goes for a crisis policy. And the key thing here is to establish that in the event of a potential crisis, who exactly is in charge, who makes the key decisions and who speaks to the press?

It's important to discuss prior to a crisis situation:

- \* What are the typical media incidents which have occurred to date?
- \* How have they been handled?
- \* Has a social media policy been devised which includes informing staff of the consequences should they tweet or post an inflammatory comment on social media?
- \* Is there an existing crisis communications policy in place?
- \* Who are the key spokespeople?
- \* Does anyone within the organisation require some media training? (See below)



Journalists can be persuasive, which is why dealing with the media in a crisis requires someone with training and experience in dealing with the media. The main tips for those speaking directly to the press in the event of a crisis are:

- \* Say sorry (but don't admit liability). Don't speculate, statements should be bland and dull. Say as little as possible and don't lie about anything
- \* Remain cool, calm and collected at all times. Journalists might try to rile you. Don't let them
- \* Don't let junior staff speak to the press
- \* Be human; although it's important to avoid a mea culpa, be careful not to antagonise an injured party by hiding behind legal speak
- \* Be there; refusing to make any comment may make you appear at fault
- \* Explain any next steps or actions
- \* Don't be lured into blaming anyone



## Crisis communications policy

A crisis communications policy should be drawn up which everyone can draw from should a crisis ensue. The areas to cover should include:

- \* Why do we need a procedure?
- \* What is a potential crisis?
- \* What should you do if you think there is a potential crisis?
- \* What not to do
- \* The company's Crisis Management Team
- \* Procedure for the Crisis Management Team
- \* What is expected of the Crisis Management Team?

Once this document has been drafted ensure all parties are aware of the policy and their role in it and don't just draft it and stick it in a drawer. Things will inevitably change within the organisation so ensure you review the policy annually, or following a crisis, if appropriate.



Statements are an intrinsic part of the crisis communication process, so create draft specimen statements. You can base these on the templates shown below but as a general rule statements should be:

- \* Factual
- \* Unambiguous
- \* Brief
- \* Dull

Statements should not:

- \* Be emotional
- \* Imply blame
- \* Accept responsibility

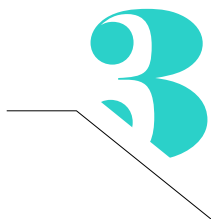
During a crisis incident, particularly if it is one which involves any sort of legal consequences, keep in mind that all emails can be required to be presented in a Court of Law. For that reason, if there is something very sensitive to discuss, use face-to-face discussion or a phone call on private phone lines.

Ensure that any draft statements have written client approval, so they can be used at short notice – particularly important, if for instance the crisis arises out of office hours.

Once a statement has been created for a specific issue, ensure you have written approval from the necessary parties, particularly legal representatives.

Ensure you save these statements in a Word document (rather than email) and include details in the Word document of who requested the statement and when. [See Record of Incident template below]

Once a journalist has requested a statement, keep a constant look out for any mention of your organisation in that publication; and immediately share any coverage with key people.



## Following an incident

It's important to both assess the potential damage after an incident and use it as a way of improving on the way crisis communications are managed in the future. After every media incident, consider whether it could have been handled better, or whether any of the processes can be improved.

Guidelines And Specimen Statements For Incidents At [ [ORGANISATION NAME](#) ]

The table on the next page is designed to provide the Crisis Management Team at [ [ORGANISATION NAME](#) ] with the core material to help deal with inbound queries from media and other stakeholders relating to incidents which have occurred in the operations of the business.

The statements are intended as a set of generic forms of words which can help to improve the quality and timeliness of [ [ORGANISATION NAME](#) ]'s response and help the company to gain the initiative in its communications around operational incidents as far as possible.

The statements are not exhaustive and each incident will have its own special characteristics, for which more specific material may have to be prepared in order to anticipate likely media questions:



1. What has happened?
2. Why?
3. What are you doing about it?

The statements have been prepared primarily for a media audience but could be used as the basis for wider communications with stakeholders inside and outside the business, including customers.

The intention is that the different numbered clauses can be used as appropriate to build statements that are as relevant to the individual circumstances of the incident as possible.

#### **Injury to member of public**

1. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] is sorry that a member of the public appears to have been injured at [location] on [date].
2. Describe injury only if information is available, confirmed and agreed with the injured party.
3. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] takes its health and safety obligations seriously and we have begun an internal investigation into the circumstances surrounding the incident.
4. Until we have more facts as a result of that investigation, [ ORGANISATION NAME ] does not plan to make any further comment.

#### **Injury to member of staff**

1. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] is sorry that a member of our staff appears to have been injured at [location] on [date].
2. Describe injury only if information is available, confirmed and agreed with the injured party.
3. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] takes its health and safety obligations seriously and we have begun an internal investigation into the circumstances surrounding the incident.
4. Until we have more facts as a result of that investigation, [ ORGANISATION NAME ] does not plan to make any further comments.

#### **Bad behaviour by member of staff at work and related to work**

1. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] can confirm that an incident has occurred [or is alleged to have occurred] at [location] on [date].
2. This matter is currently the subject of an internal investigation.
3. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] takes the privacy of its employees seriously and so until we have more facts as a result of that investigation, we do not plan to make any further comment on the matter.

#### **Bad behaviour by member of staff not at work and not related to work**

1. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] is aware of an incident which occurred [or is alleged to have occurred] at [location] on [date].
2. We view this as a private matter and do not plan to make any further comments on the matter at this stage.



[ ORGANISATION NAME ] **is in dispute with a recognised trade union**

1. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] can confirm that we are in a dispute with [the Union] at [location] over [the matter].
2. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] has a good record of positive engagement with our recognised trades unions, we appreciate the work of these unions and value the productive relationships we have.
3. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] is sorry that we have ended up in dispute on this occasion.
4. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] hopes for a swift resolution of the dispute and we will be working towards that goal in the coming days.

**Whistleblowing report by a [ ORGANISATION NAME ] employee relating to an HR matter**

1. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] can confirm that we have received a report from a member of our staff relating to a matter/incident which is alleged to have occurred at [location] on [date if needed]. The report was made under the terms of [ ORGANISATION NAME ]'s policy on whistleblowing and as such, the employee(s) concerned are protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA).
2. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] takes all whistleblower reports seriously and this matter is currently the subject of an internal investigation.
3. Until we have more facts as a result of that investigation, [ ORGANISATION NAME ] does not plan to make any further comment on the matter at this time.”

**Whistleblowing report by a [ ORGANISATION NAME ] employee relating to a health and safety matter – and possible involvement of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).**

1. “[ ORGANISATION NAME ] can confirm that we have received a report from a member of our staff relating to a matter/incident which is alleged to have occurred at [location] on [date if needed]. The report was made under the terms of [ ORGANISATION NAME ]'s policy on whistleblowing and as such, the employee(s) concerned are protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA)
2. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] takes all whistleblower reports seriously and this matter is currently the subject of an internal investigation”
3. Until we have more facts as a result of that investigation, [ ORGANISATION NAME ] does not plan to make any further comment on the matter at this time.”

**External Investigation by HSE**

1. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] can confirm that we have received a report from a member of our staff relating to a matter/incident which is alleged to have occurred at [location] on [date if needed]. The report was made under the terms of [ ORGANISATION NAME ]'s policy on whistleblowing and as such, the employee(s) concerned are protected by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA).
2. [ ORGANISATION NAME ] takes all whistleblower reports seriously and has self-reported this allegation/ incident to the Health and Safety Executive.





3. As a result, this matter is currently the subject of an investigation by the Health and Safety Executive and subject to legal privilege. In order to avoid prejudicing the ongoing investigation, [ ORGANISATION NAME ] does not plan to make any further comment on the matter at this time.**Record of incident**

[ ORGANISATION NAME ]

Issue requiring statement:

Date of incident:

[ ORGANISATION NAME ] personnel involved:

Approval: NAME

Client's approval: NAME

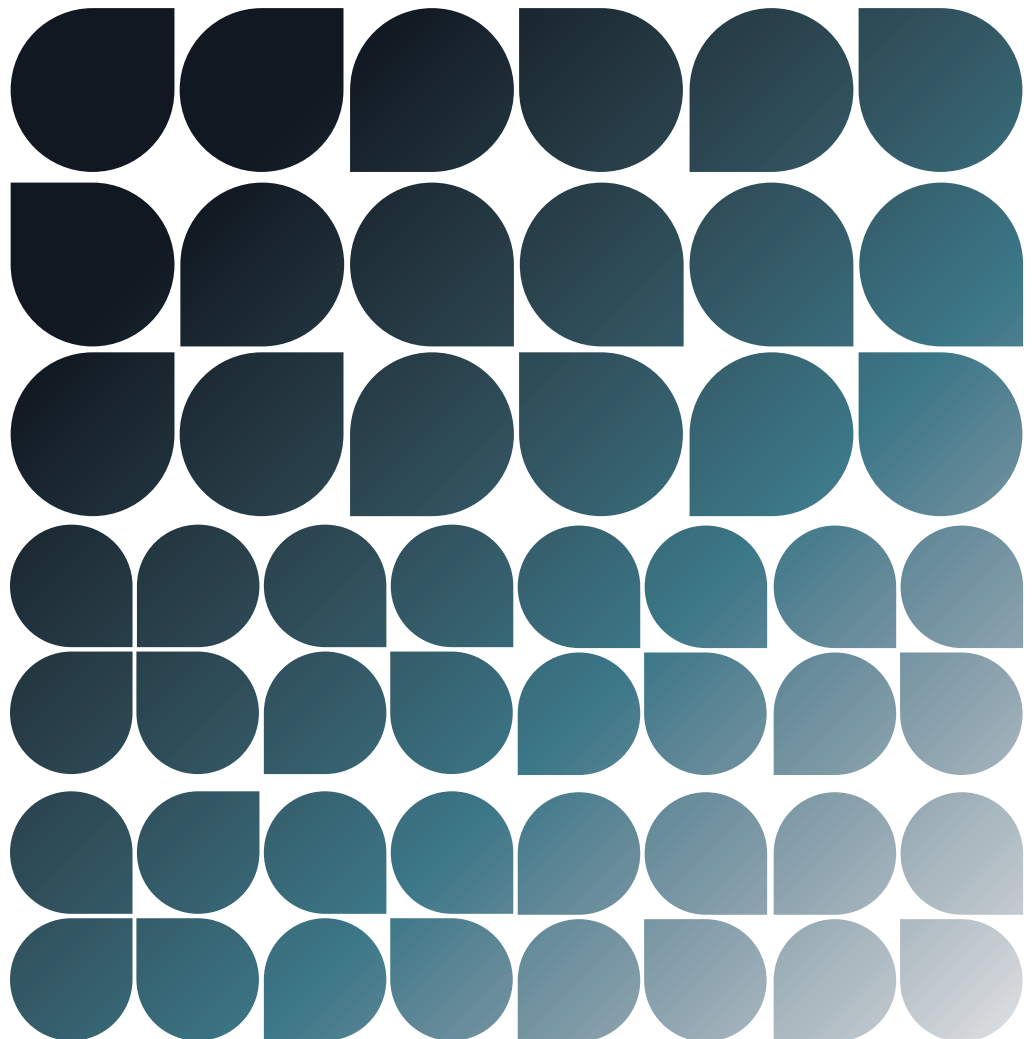
Other relevant details:

Statement:

Statement requested by:

Name of journalist/ publication/ contact details:

Date sent to journalist:







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