

Media consultant David Niven will take you through the steps to effective media management. You will learn how to set up and manage the correct channels within your organisation for working with the media, before a crisis even happens.

Recognising the importance of the media, you will learn to identify the right persons to establish a single, unified voice of integrity for your company and the key difference between secrecy and privacy.

After travelling for a while, I studied to qualify as a social worker and , as well as focussing mainly on work with abused children and their families, I pursued a parallel road with the professional body, the British Association of Social Workers. After holding a number of posts, I was elected national chairman and this catapulted me into the media spotlight-----ready or not!!! I received no specific training and the dominant subjects then, as now, were incredibly serious. Child abuse in all its forms with several high profile deaths. Tens of thousands of men from industrialised countries travelling abroad to abuse young children. Government initiatives that publically needed supporting, challenging or condemning—whatever day it was! A constant stream of requests to speak to all forms of media about where vulnerable people and social work were involved. My learning curve felt like a straight line up the face of a mountain. Lessons came hard and fast. The very day I was elected, a journalist booked an interview to talk about what hopes I had for my term of office. He came to my hotel room and we talked for half an hour about all the issues of the day. Just as he was leaving, he turned and asked if it was right that I was taking child protection as the theme of my term of office. I said yes and he asked if there was much work to be done. Again I said yes and that was it. Next day, the headline in the newspaper read “ New social work chief targets perverts ! ”

Now, there's been a lot of water under the bridge since then and, although not everything is predictable when dealing with the media, it does feel more comfortable. I could have reached this point much quicker, with less angst, if I'd only had some training and guidance. Personally I found one strong aspect of social work training that moves across easily to media training and that is the resolution of conflict. Assessment , negotiation, short and long term planning and people management are all used as tools to resolve conflict.

I believe that the business of youth and student travel is seen by the vast majority of the population as what I would call 'warm and friendly enterprise'. There is a perception that, although recognised as having all the commercial needs of any business, yours operates to provide adventure, pleasure and education. You have such an advantage over so many other areas of work who have to start from a much lower level of public trust. Therefore it becomes more vivid, more memorable, more shocking when an incident occurs and a crises ensues.

During the next five years, 83 percent of companies will face a crisis that will negatively impact the profitability of that company by 20 to 30 percent,

according to new research by Oxford-Metrica, an independent adviser on risk, value, reputation and governance (Aon, 2006).

Of course this involves all possibilities. For example a fast food chain getting huge negative publicity if vermin were found and photographed on the premises or if there was a serious fire that destroyed a site but none of the IT material was backed up. Some won't impact on your business but some will and the principle is the same. Accidents claimed as preventable, human error, poor risk assessments, faulty safety information or equipment.

Much of the negative impact will be reflected, if not occasionally stimulated, by the media.

The United Kingdom's Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (2008), describes a crisis as "an abnormal situation, or even perception, which is beyond the scope of everyday business and which threatens the operation, safety and reputation of an organization. The department advocates that businesses treat crisis management planning with the same attention as other business plans."

And therefore, 'Crisis management is the process by which the organization manages a wider impact, such as media relations, and enables it to commence recovery'.

It's the same as any major insurance need. Do whatever you can to prevent incidents occurring but prepare well and create a sound plan that will cover most contingencies.

Firstly take a look at preventative measures. This is where all good customer care, health and safety checks and risk assessments are found. In short, you're behaving in a way that demonstrates that you are a caring business. It's here that crises planning should sit and whether it's to do with the imminent arrival of a hurricane along a continental coastline or an injured individual on a school trip, the principal is the same. Show you've taken all reasonable steps to prevent or, at least, prepare for unwanted incidents.

Sometimes there are variations on that theme and events occur that threaten the health of the company. An Act of God----- fire, flood, earthquake,----- an accident, an assault or a financial scandal can all spiral into blame situations where impressions and perceptions are influenced by the reporting of the event.

So, the creation of a clear plan that will cover most situations is the task. It's basically the traditional 'who, where and how' formula.

Firstly , Who? Make sure that, if there ever is a problem, then your senior managers are the ones that are seen. The impact of a more junior manager in a time of great distress or confusion has usually proven negative as public opinion is moved to feeling that the company doesn't take this seriously enough. A good example was the Exxon oil spill in Alaska. The

company wasn't speedy enough to respond in an appropriate way. It then tried to blame the government and that caused it serious harm in the public eye. The fact that the CEO sent less senior executives to be the face of the company caused a real problem as the public could feel they weren't taking it as seriously as they should. The person or people you choose to speak for you have to be properly briefed about the background to whatever incident occurs. Not having a reasonable amount of facts to hand makes you possibly seem unprepared or ill informed, neither of which give confidence. So, whatever the scale of the crises, people want reassurance. They want to see a confident, credible, honest and sincere presentation. And one, possibly obvious, rule, which is "whatever you're able to say, don't be tempted to make it anything but the truth. There are plenty of descent journalists out there who will respect that.

Your spokespeople may have to conduct press conferences and training in this aspect of presentation would be advisable. Planning, venue, timing, resources, speakers and choreography all and more have to be attended to and delegated. Post conference, journalists will probably want personal interviews so be prepared for one to one responding as well.

How many of you have organised or participated in a press conference?

What positive advice would you give to others and what difficulties did you come across?

Let's look at the 'where' that I talked about on our list. This actually has two parts to it. One is literally where you meet the media. If you can find the right venue and supply whatever helpful information you can on a regular basis then the media will have respect for the working relationship. Don't be worried about laying on refreshments and allowing at least limited access to your facilities for comfort breaks etc as sometimes the nature of the drama is that it lasts for hours and people are hanging around.

The second 'where' is the place or area where the crises occurred. Spokespeople need to be fully briefed about location, what the company's involvement there was and the nature of the immediate response, so, when talking about the situation, it's obvious that you're well informed.

The next word was how. The main point here is that you keep a reasonably open line of communication with the media and, to some extent, control the agenda. Often in a crisis there are constant rumours, false leads and genuine misunderstandings. Use the opportunity to provide accurate updates that fill the void. You will be fulfilling two functions. Firstly, the need for good accurate information will be appreciated and secondly, you will be more in control of the news.

A crises brings its own dynamic. The person who faces the media has to be fully briefed and knowledgeable. If there has been a terrible accident, for

example, then the company must be seen to know all the detail about the nature of the activity, the safety measures that were in place, how many people were you responsible for sending and into what circumstances customers were sent. So, communication plans and protocols throughout the company will save time and money. And the best ethical plan puts any person first while trying to maintain the integrity of the company, wherever possible, as well. Not only should you put people first but you have to be seen to do so.

So, general media training for staff, the selection of a few as spokespeople (with more focused training) and the creation of a media strategy to sit alongside fire safety, evacuation procedure, serious toxic incident response, health emergency etc Tell your employees how to respond if the media contacts them. Lay out clear company media guidelines. Write down who does what and be clear about who talks to whom. Right from the very first contact give employees a clear procedure about what they should say, whom they should forward media requests to, how to respond to difficult situations and train them to realise what kinds of requests and calls they might expect. For the people who will be speaking with media, be clear about what they have permission to talk about and what must be referred elsewhere. An explanation of what you, as the senior manager, will say usually helps clarity and consistency among staff groups.

Another, often ignored , requirement is the need to rehearse. A plan is fine sitting on the shelf but if no-one has tested it then the smallest detail could derail it.

I really hope you have no cause to use the plan but the potential saving of reputation as well as custom is surely worth it.

Now there are other preventative measures that can compliment your preparation and truthfully allow you to explain that, whatever happened, your customers didn't lack information on personal safety. This is the core purpose of the charity Travel-Safe, who are a client of ours and are here at the Conference. The literature they produce for the travel industry, for young people, for law enforcement and all those involved in sending or receiving young people is helpful and reassuring. It was originally set up by Avon and Somerset police in the west of England but it's now independent with their blessing and support. It's run by ex chief superintendant Chris Gould and he's here during the Conference. So, what you would be gaining is satisfaction that you'd made a reasonable effort to supplement the traveler's safety as well as credit from any examination of your procedures after an incident. I'm really proud to be associated with them and I'll be helping them talk about their work as well as offering training events on their behalf, over the next few days.

Another preventative measure would be fostering relationships with the media, certainly at a regional level and hopefully wider. Remember that the media strategy is not just reactive but proactive too and all media have a voracious appetite for stories. All staff in key positions could benefit from media training.

So the production of good news stories in a professional way can bring positive attention to the business. Building this network inevitably creates relationships of sorts and these could be supportive in a crisis.

So, for the great majority of you who agree that the media is an invaluable marketing component think about what you already do with them,-- news copy,-- advertising and advertising features, --networking relationships with journalists—how you measure the business that comes from different sources. This communication network can be critical in a crisis. The bonus is that this can be terrific for all the time there are no problems, which we hope is always, and we have no challenge to our reputation. The media do need a constant flow of good news or achievement stories as well as the more melodramatic.

There are many journalists who do have reasonably high standards but any good journalist is also driven to 'get behind the news'. Please keep away from concepts such as "off the record" or "no comment". 'Off the record' is sometimes breached and it's just not worth it. 'No comment' has the sound of defensiveness and possible secrecy and there's nothing that gets the professional blood up of a journalist that something that seems secret.

Training would help in understanding, in media terms, the difference between secrecy and privacy. The ability to put some material into the public arena in a proper way while respecting police or civil enquiries.

Some other matters to consider:-

1) The first short period of a crisis is often critical—at least for the image of the company if not the fabric of the business. How you perform will stick with the viewers, readers and listeners for the duration of events. Any misunderstanding or contradiction will be replayed over and over again

2) It may be obvious but be prepared for the unexpected. A perfect example was when I was asked to give a series of interviews to the BBC about an initiative to help combat child sexual abuse and we'd just launched it at the Houses of Parliament. It was to be an hour of live radio interviews with successive BBC radio stations round the country. Each producer would come on air 2 minutes before the presenter and check I was ready. The first 4 went fine. Then the 5th one ! No producer and when the time came, the interviewer burst on the air with " Now we welcome David Niven. David is a chicken farmer who plays classical music to his chickens to improve the lay"

You only have a few heartbeats to make up your mind and just before I broke in , someone got to him and he made a quick apology and then asked me "So, David, what's new in child sexual abuse"

3) Be prepared. If you don't understand a question fully then say so.

4) One of my associates had a client recently who called him to help as a television programme was going to make allegations about the company in

their weekly documentary slot in 5 days time. Instead of meeting the next day he recommended an immediate meeting as some forget that , to get viewers, the television company will probably give some information to the press and let them trail it. Meaning there could be reporters on their way any time

Remember, it won't be the travel journalists who are sent to 'doorstep' people. It's the news reporters and some can be exceptionally tenacious and 'attack' minded. Someone to blame is the holy grail of some people in the media so be prepared.

5) If you give out a prepared statement please remember to coach whoever is reading it to sound as human as possible. Often it sounds robotic and comes over as just something they've been instructed to say and not heartfelt. Personalising it, even a little, increases the spokesperson's and, consequently, the company's credibility. Viewers and listeners are incredibly sensitive to false sincerity so just speak in a straightforward manner and be careful how the spokesperson sounds.

6) Don't overlook all methods of communication now open to everyone. Sites such as Facebook, You tube, Twitter (microblogging) can host your ideas as well as be the source of questioning.

7) Phone cameras make everyone a news photographer. So keep aware of what's going on around you. 24 hour news and a 10 fold increase in magazines and newspapers over the last 20 years all add , along with digital and satellite technology , to the mix.

8) With all the communication outlets, it just takes one incident to spark a forest fire. Groups and franchises are thought of as one if the name is being discussed in the media. So , if one office has a problem, all offices in the group could be associated with it.

9) Your appearance is another matter. No one would expect immaculate turnouts but how you look does influence journalists and even on radio or newspapers, the immediate impression has some weight.

10) Sounds easy but –relax---and if that's difficult for you to do most times and you are the spokesperson, then it would do no harm to get advice. I say this because, as you know yourselves when watching or listening, someone on edge can be spotted a mile away and automatically people assume something's wrong. I remember being invited on to a television programme on the BBC in the UK called Newsnight. This was the definitive, serious, evening news analysis programme and usually hosted the agenda setters. There was also an iconic table that featured during interviews and so, sat there, I was really nervous and hot and wondering if I was going to make a fool of myself. I hadn't much experience of the media yet. And I was still dedating the truth of the George Jessel remark “ the human brain starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you stand up to speak in public.” Anyway, just then, a small miracle occurred that was just the job and showed how easy it is, with the right trigger, to relax.

I looked under the table, on this prestigious show, where all the heavyweight people of the day appear and saw that it was held up with beer crates!

That's all it took for me.

More seriously though, difficult decisions will have to be made. It's understandable that the chairman or chief executive will feel responsible and feel they have to be the face of the company. I do recommend that a very senior person represents the company, as I said before, but not if they just are not able to fully engage through nerves or honest acceptance that someone else could better fill that role. It's very important for the company that this decision is the right one.

11) Never try and underplay a problem. By all means you can clearly say that you don't have enough facts at your disposal but will give them all you can as soon as the information comes in.

12) There are plenty of good journalists and you can expect fair treatment from the majority. The trouble is that it's difficult sometimes to immediately tell whether the journalist you've just met is in the difficult minority. That's where, again, some professional help could be invaluable, bringing with them a network of known people built up over the years.

Ultimately you are less likely to have to deal with a major crisis, directly focused on you, and more likely to benefit from having a robust media strategy. But sensible insurance is worth having and the cost benefit of good media training can be a continuing bonus.

The U K's Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (2008) summed up the aims and benefits of having a crises management plan

1. Ability to assess the situation from inside and outside the Institution as all stakeholders might perceive it.
2. Techniques to direct action(s) to contain the likely or perceived damage spread.
3. Better institutional resilience for all stakeholders.
4. Compliance with regulatory and ethical requirements, e.g. corporate [social responsibility].
5. Much better management of serious incidents or any incident that could become serious.
6. Improved staff awareness of their roles and expectations within the institution.
7. Increased ability, confidence and morale within the institution.
8. Enhanced risk management insofar that obvious risks will be identified, mitigated (where possible) and through crisis and business continuity management - as prepared for.
9. Protected and often enhanced reputation a much reduced risk of post event litigation.

