

Examining Six Common Barriers to Crisis Plan Implementation



Reputational crises have become far more prevalent (and public) as a result of today's digital media landscape. The 24/7 news cycle, coupled with the proliferation of social media, has created an unrelenting thirst for news and a "race to report first" culture. This puts additional pressure on companies in crisis as both media and the public are asking for a faster response and greater transparency than ever before. Companies must be ready to implement a crisis plan at a moment's notice.

In our recent webinar, *Navigating a Crisis: Top Tips on How to Protect your Reputation*, [Patrick Hillmann](#), Senior Vice President at LEVICK, and [Karen Doyle](#), Managing Director and Leader U.S. Crisis Practice at Burson-Marsteller shared their professional insights and experiences with crisis communications planning and execution.

As Doyle explained, having a crisis plan in place is a great first step – but it doesn't necessarily mean smooth execution. She outlined six predictable barriers one might experience when implementing a crisis plan:



Doyle describes this as ineffective cross-discipline management due to a number of factors like geography, existing internal conflict and budget competition. Companies are naturally divided into functional silos, but your crisis team needs to be one cohesive unit. Overcome this barrier by ensuring your crisis team has representation from all facets of the organization.



When a crisis strikes, the priorities of your communications and legal team will be wildly different. For example, crisis communications will push for plain language where the legal team will want communication in preparation for litigation. Hillmann recommends finding a balance between the two groups. Bringing someone from your legal department onto the crisis team early on and having them take part in crisis simulation exercises can help both teams understand how this is going to go down when the heat is on. It can allow these teams to iron out pre-approved messaging to buy time, or satisfy crisis needs. Your messages to the media, investors and customers will all be impacted by your ability to work well together.



Crisis communications materials, like tweets, news releases and internal memos, can grow stale as they sit in someone's inbox awaiting approval. Couple a long approval loop with seemingly bottomless content and your team will be left "in-progress." Doyle recommends establishing a streamlined approval process and appointing a "final decision maker" to your crisis team. After all, once a crisis hits, you must act fast and strategically.



A crisis can rock at an organization inside and out, and if audiences internally or externally don't like your spokesperson, it could spawn further issues as that person becomes the focus of all negativity surrounding situation.

Hillman describes this syndrome as quite possibly “the most dangerous scenario” in a crisis. Alleviating this syndrome begins internally by ensuring the corporate culture benefits from open, two-way communication from front-line employees to the C-suite. When employees are accustomed to a this style of information sharing, they tend to have more trust in leadership, making it easier for them to buy into and share the official corporate response in a crisis. A properly chosen and professionally prepared spokesperson can bring strength to your key messages and instill confidence amongst your internal and external audiences. [Follow this guide](#) to ensure your spokesperson is up for the gig.



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