

In the last factsheet, we discussed the following:

BEFORE a Public Relations (PR) crisis, we should focus on:

- How and why we should have an extensive PR crisis plan in place
- The need for a diverse PR crisis response team
- What is a PR crisis checklist
- How to identify the appropriate spokesperson to represent your organisation

There are three stages of a PR crisis:



Part II of this factsheet will cover what you should do **DURING** a crisis.

During a crisis, monitoring feedback will help you modify your response strategy.

Now that you have a comprehensive PR crisis plan in place, you need to pay attention to the delivery of the messages. There are still a lot of preparations before your chosen spokesperson speaks to the public to address the issue. What you say and how you say it are vital to how the public perceive your Health or Social care organisation. You should also be monitoring your feedback continuously. A monitoring system not only can identify negative trends but also catch positive patient or client user-generated content or trending topics, which are crucial to creating your marketing and communication strategy and messaging.





Action 1: Be Ready

Identify influencers and brand ambassadors

- These people are not only useful for marketing campaigns and product launches, they are also great for influencing opinion during a crisis. The nature of the crisis will determine which individuals you should approach.

Get the facts before you speak

- It is no surprise that everyone is panicking and everyone wants action and answers. However, you must remain calm, follow your crisis procedure and do not speak until you have all the facts.
- Remember - keep it factual, never speculate, always apologise.

Build your PR crisis messages

- With all the facts at your fingertips, you can now frame your response. Find the most transparent and genuine way to tackle the situation. Tell the public what happened, what you will do to solve it, what you will do in the future to avoid the same mistake. This is where the role of PR in crisis management becomes clear.
- It is important to be open and honest. The sooner you communicate your apology, explanation and solution, the sooner people will stop speaking negatively of your brand or organisation.



Action 2 : What should you say?

Accept responsibility and apologise

- Acknowledge any mistakes, say sorry, and take responsibility. Make it genuine, sensitive, human. Be honest and vulnerable and recognise any impact on your patients and clients
- Do not be scared to apologise. It is the right thing to do and will quickly change the dynamic of the situation.

Always tell the truth

- If you hide your mistakes, people will find out. Your brand reputation and value will be damaged. Be transparent, patients and clients want to work with providers that they trust and believe in.
- If you deny a negative situation, dismiss the issue, blame others - you will make things so much worse when the truth comes out.
- Tell people what you are going to do to rectify the situation, and how you will avoid it happening again.

Provide clarity

- People must understand what is happened and what they need to do. Show that you acknowledge there is a crisis, explain your plan and what the next steps are.

Do not offer false promises

- Promises that you cannot keep will make the situation worse. Always respect the facts. There are people that could know more than you do, never underestimate the media, for instance.

Action 3: How should you say it?

Empathise

- Ensuring your business survives is YOUR priority, but for those hit by the crisis, you should pay your attention to your patients or clients, the public, your employees, and stakeholders. Make sure you do the right thing.

Do not flood with messages

- Three to four external messages are more than enough. Adapt them according to which channels you are going to post on. A good example is to have the main statement on your website and have other channels such as social media to support it.

Channels of distribution

- This will depend on your usual positioning and overall communications. You should know which channels work best for your brand when talking to your audiences, such as blog, social media and press. Consider the different characteristics of each and make sure the core messages fit within character limits.
- Try and keep the main release on your website as it gives you greater control, plus you are talking with your organisational voice.
- Social media involves conversations. Be ready to talk and control your messages.
- Press releases broadcast globally are readily picked-up by agencies, make sure the person whose contact details are on the press release is ready to respond.

How much of the above have you done?

In Summary, you should have:

Identified the appropriate influencers and brand ambassadors to represent your organisation

Gather all the facts before you speak

Admit your mistakes, show accountability and apologise

Tell nothing but the truth to the public, with clarity

Choose the right channels to deliver your messages