



# CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS: BEST PRACTICES

A crisis can negatively impact your organization's reputation. While it's difficult to predict if or when a crisis will affect your company, preparing a business continuity strategy that includes a communications plan for how you'll respond will help you to manage the impact and get back to business as quickly as possible.

To learn more about business continuity planning, outside of creating a crisis communications plan, visit our [business continuity guide](#).

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## PLANNING AHEAD

### Creating a crisis communications plan

The creation of a framework for communicating important information to employees, customers, and stakeholders in the event of a crisis is a key part of business continuity planning.

To get started, consider the potential risks to your business and which critical areas of your organization might be impacted by a crisis. Your crisis communications plan will identify the organizational roles, processes, and technology that would be required to monitor a crisis, and ensure the timely communication of information to the appropriate stakeholders.

### A crisis communications plan should include:

- **Your crisis management team:** Identify members of your organization who would help to inform and coordinate your response and clearly define their roles. Ensure all internal departments are represented, including your legal counsel, website support, and internal communications.
- **A list of key contacts:** Include the business and personal contact information for your crisis management team, as well as the business contact information of

external stakeholders including vendors, suppliers, and associations. It is also important to include emergency phone numbers for your area and the contact information for any government officials and regulators that would need to be notified, depending on the severity of the situation. To ensure you have key contact information on hand, fill out our [emergency contact list](#) template before a crisis occurs.

- **How you'll share information with stakeholders:** Create a list of your audiences and outline the communication channels that you'd use to share information with them, including email, websites, social media profiles, and media statements. Consider listing multiple channels in case one or more are impacted.
- **A response tree:** Create a map or diagram to illustrate notification channels and how information will flow between your crisis management team and key audiences. Maintaining a central source of information through your crisis management team will ensure that external messaging is consistent and controlled.

This plan should be reviewed and updated with your crisis management team at least once a year.

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## WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS: COORDINATING YOUR RESPONSE

### 1. Review your media policy with staff

A media policy provides guidance to employees on any public interactions with external agencies, including the press. It should clearly outline who employees or volunteers need to contact within your organization if they are approached by any media. If a crisis or potentially damaging situation arises, circulate this policy with staff again and ensure that they're familiar with it.

### 2. Assign one spokesperson to speak on your organization's behalf

Select one representative from your organization to publicly represent your company. This could be a senior business leader, a subject matter expert, or a member of your communications team. This person must be familiar with the situation at hand and should be prepared to answer questions from media or external stakeholders on behalf of your organization, and appear comfortable doing so.

### 3. Respect privacy

You have a responsibility to protect stakeholder privacy. Ensuring that staff refer all media inquiries to a selected spokesperson will minimize the risk of a privacy breach.

### 4. Acknowledge the situation at hand

While your crisis management team may be hard at work responding to a crisis, customers or employees may assume the worst if you have not reacted publicly. Even if the crisis is still unfolding, it's important to acknowledge the situation early on and share how and when you'll provide your next update.

### 5. Pause all outgoing communications

If a crisis does arise, review all communication channels and pause any scheduled outgoing communications that may conflict with new messaging. Important channels to consider include scheduled emails, social media posts, and digital advertising.

### 6. Develop and maintain a key messaging guide

Maintaining a central key messaging document will ensure that you're sharing consistent and factual details that have been approved by your entire crisis management team. Start this document by drafting potential statements that may help to address the situation and compile a list of potential questions and answers for employees, customers, media, and other stakeholders. Updating this document as a crisis unfolds will help ensure a timely and coordinated response. This is not intended for general employee use.

### 7. Consult the experts

Depending on the severity of the situation at hand, consider enlisting the help of a seasoned public relations or crisis communications agency to assist with your response. If your crisis communication team does not include legal counsel, you should consider enlisting the help of a lawyer.

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## LOOKING FORWARD

After a crisis, conduct a thorough review of your crisis communications activity. Learnings from this exercise can help inform improvements to your plan, and ensure that you're better prepared in the future.



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