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Guerrilla Sales & Marketing

PR Crisis: The Intersection of Danger and Opportunity

LORI TURNER

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Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part series.

You've heard the myth that "any PR is good PR." Considering the many crises U.S. companies faced in 2010, we know this isn't always the case.

Many small-business owners think that PR crises only happen to large companies like BP, Gap or government entities like those managing clean-up after the Katrina disaster. Consider, though, that small companies rely on a limited customer base. Losing a single large customer or two, due to a mismanaged PR crisis, could cripple your bottom line.

However, if you're prepared for such a crisis, your response can at least mitigate risk to your brand's reputation and at best, improve customer loyalty, even resulting in new customers.

So kick off the new year right, by developing a short crisis management plan. Here are a few starting tips:

Identify vulnerabilities: What scenarios put you at risk for negative PR? A robbery? Stolen or lost system data? A safety-related injury at your site? An employee behaving unethically? Disgruntled customers talking to the media?

Identify key audiences: Which groups will you need to communicate with regularly? Customers, prospects, vendors, employees, strategic partners? Keep these lists current and accessible for crisis team members.

Establish processes for gathering information: While it's important to act quickly in crisis mode, it's also vital that you have accurate information to speak knowledgeably, avoiding missteps. Establish communication protocols for the sources you depend on for critical information.

Appoint a crisis spokesperson: For a small business, it's best to appoint one spokesperson and provide that person with media training. As we learned from BP's PR woes, the right person isn't always the CEO. BP's chief, Tony Hayward, will long be remembered for callously stating: "There's no one who wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back."

Select a small-business attorney: During a crisis, consulting an attorney is helpful. Interview attorneys in advance to find one you trust with experience consulting on crises for similar companies.

Create a process for addressing complaints: Establish a year-round process for tracking all complaints and a timeline for response.

If you should have the misfortune of dealing with a PR crisis, act quickly to resolve the situation and always tell the truth. Don't evade critics, instead facing them head-on. Provide regular updates to all key stakeholders, while demonstrating both confidence and compassion.

Be accessible to media – early and often. Avoiding them will deny you the



Lori Turner

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PROPERTY SALES	23	52	632
MORTGAGES	75	151	1,386
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	0	58	669
BUILDING PERMITS	0	66	1,318
BANKRUPTCIES	65	170	730
BUSINESS LICENSES	35	58	288
UTILITY CONNECTIONS	92	232	1,092
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opportunity to tell your side of the story. Keep on message and don't ramble. If you aren't prepared to answer a question, answer a related question that you are prepared to address.

And don't hesitate to apologize and correct a situation when it is warranted. Take responsibility.

John F. Kennedy, a seasoned PR pro, often reminded his staff that the word "crisis" written in Chinese is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity.

Be prepared for both.

[Lori Turner](#) is managing partner of RedRover Sales & Marketing, www.redrovercompany.com. You can follow RedRover on Facebook and Twitter.

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