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VOL. 125 | NO. 256 | Wednesday, January 05, 2011

Guerrilla Sales & Mark

## New York Snow: PR Pros or Schmoes

LORI TURNER Updated 9:58AM

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Lori Turner

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

I flew into New York City on New Year's Eve, five days after a historic blizzard – the worst in six decades. The snowpocalypse brought bustling Manhattan and its neighboring boroughs to their knees.

Despite early and accurate forecasting, the region was ill prepared. Subways, buses and trains were crippled for days. Road closings thwarted emergency vehicles and 911 response time was significantly delayed, resulting in needless deaths.

Two city politicians made multiple PR blunders, likely damaging their political futures. One area leader stood out, however, as a master at crisis management.

Small-business owners can learn from these PR tactics and missteps.

*New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie – PR Schmo.*

Taking a family vacation to Disney World days before the storm hit, Christie refused to shorten his trip to help his state battle the storm's aftermath. Rather than simply providing regular 10-minute briefings from Florida to demonstrate leadership, he focused on his vacation.

Serving as New Jersey's defacto leader after the storm was Michael Drewniak, Christie's spokesperson. He made dismissive comments to constituents' concerns such as "the world is not coming to an end."

When asked about his spokesman's callus responses, Christie backed him by explaining Drewniak's "flippant" remarks were "part of his charm."

*New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg – PR Schmo, Then Pro.*

Bloomberg generally shines in PR situations, yet he flailed early on. He fielded questions and complaints with sarcasm, saying things like "people should have gone to the park and enjoyed this time with their families."

He also made promises he couldn't keep, such as getting every street plowed by a particular date. Ultimately, he took responsibility for the city's failures and committed to taking measures to ensure this never happened again – partially redeeming himself.

*Newark Mayor Cory Booker – PR Pro.*

Booker's hands-on management post-storm earned him hero status. He established a plan for digging out and resuming city services. Then, he transformed his more than 1 million Twitter followers into an emergency dispatch channel and hit the streets. He literally dug people out of snow banks, checked on the elderly, and even helped deliver a baby.

Here are a couple of his tweets:

"I'm patrolling with my shovel; helping dig out. Let me know if any seniors or disabled need help."

"Responding to a distress call – woman in labor. EMS on the way but I

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PROPERTY SALES	114	204	204
MORTGAGES	218	397	397
FORECLOSURE NOTICES	0	226	226
BUILDING PERMITS	0	244	244
BANKRUPTCIES	56	142	142
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have a feeling my team will beat them there.”

Booker demonstrated positive leadership, communicated early and often, and jumped in to help, making him a stellar PR Pro.

A PR crisis can just as easily impact a small business as it does a large organization. Check back next week for tips on creating a crisis communication strategy for your small business that can actually strengthen your brand in a time of crisis.

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

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