



CRISIS PLANNING: HOPING FOR THE BEST WHILE PREPARING FOR THE WORST

April 2016

As Volkswagen recently learned, sometimes things really are worse than you initially thought.

When VW's disastrous emissions scandal first unfolded, the auto manufacturer didn't think the issue would cost it very much. USA Today reported that Volkswagen expected the whole matter could be resolved simply: It would disclose what it had done, fix the problem, and pay a reasonable fine.

Instead, the scandal could end up costing Volkswagen almost \$17 billion, according to analysts. And with lawsuits stacking up, a recent survey of Americans' opinions of the world's most visible corporations put Volkswagen at the very bottom.

This is a vivid illustration of how a complication can quickly turn into a crisis communications problem, especially when those at the heart of the issue fail to act quickly and smartly.

That's why it's so vitally important to follow several basic rules of crisis communications:

1. Plan ahead.

The Boy Scouts knew what they were talking about when they adopted the motto "Be Prepared." No one can anticipate every type of event that can turn into a communications crisis, but you can – and should – plan ahead for a wide range of contingencies. Having a solid crisis communications plan will carry you a long way in responding to a crisis, particularly in the early going when developments are unfolding rapidly.

2. Control the message.

Be proactive in messaging. Make your first statements as soon as possible, before events get ahead of you. This way, you can define the situation on your own terms, and on your own turf. When the media and public are hungry for information, **you** should be the source they turn to for reliable information.

3. Don't lie to the public. It will always make things worse.

From the start, assure the public that you are on top of the situation. Say what you're doing to handle the crisis, and what you will do to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Effective crisis communications typically involves acknowledging the problem, owning up to it, apologizing if appropriate – and telling how you're going to move forward to make things right.

When it comes to a crisis, you always prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

Webinar: Do's and Don'ts of Managing a Crisis Online

In today's digital world, a government entity can lose control of a crisis faster and easier than ever before. During this webinar, Ryan Cohn, Vice President of Social/Digital at Sachs Media Group, will offer expert insights on the do's and don'ts of handling a crisis online. These simple but important guidelines will help you take control of the online conversation, earn your citizens' trust, and position yourself as a leader they can turn to for reliable information during a crisis.

Date & Time April 15 | 2:00-3:00 p.m. EST

For more crisis information, visit FLCityGuard.com.

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Username: (enter the name of your city, ex. Port St Joe)
Password: (enter flc followed by your city hall zip code, ex. flc32399)
For assistance logging in, please contact Jenna Tala at jtala@flcities.com

