

# Crisis Management: Five Steps to Take Before Providing That Comment

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In the digital age, news—good and bad—travels fast. So can its effect on your corporate image and success. From data breaches to innocent and vicious leaks, a corporate crisis can engulf your business in an unforgiving news cycle that crushes consumer confidence, tanks stock values, and spurs feverish litigation.

By taking these simple steps, corporate counsel and executives can mitigate the inevitable crisis:

- 1. Avoid a Crowded Kitchen** – Designate a “crisis response” team, making one individual the source of all public communication. Clearly designate who has authority to approve final public and internal messages and be consistent. Fewer cooks results in a controlled message.
- 2. Develop Press Contacts** – Reporters who call on deadline during a crisis seek sound bites that fit their theme. To help avoid unbalanced coverage, develop genuine relationships with journalists who cover your region and industry. Preexisting relationships help guarantee more comprehensive coverage that puts the crisis in context. Give journalists information and access during calmer times so that, in a crisis, they will be more inclined to trust you.
- 3. Say What You Mean to Say** – Avoid defensive responses, which feed conflict-focused news cycles and can cause more damage. Accordingly, instill a “do no harm” ethic within your business units, meaning, no outside communications are allowed until the company has a coordinated message that is communicated only by your designated source.
- 4. Shelter Under the Privilege** – Include outside counsel in crisis-response planning. The immediate response to a crisis can have long-term legal and regulatory consequences that extend beyond the newspaper’s front page. Through the attorney-client and work product privileges, you may be able to structure your initial investigation for maximum protection from disclosure. Outside counsel can be better advocates if apprised of your crisis plan before your emergency phone call.
- 5. Think Long-Term** – In the early moments of a crisis, it’s common to attempt to fix today’s headline rather than consider tomorrow’s. That’s a mistake. Remember, the aim is long-term protection. The corporate external and internal message should be structured to shorten the story’s life cycle, and then to make your weakness a strength. To do this, your crisis team must have, in advance, a strong understanding of what drives corporate value. That lets them know what their message must protect.