

## THE ROLE OF SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the theoretical foundations of the emerging concepts of anti-crisis PR, in particular, the tasks and functions of crisis management services are considered. A comparative analysis was made using the example of large global companies. The integration of new communication PR technologies during a turning point has been studied. The role of the media in maintaining a positive image of organizations is specifically noted. A definition is given to the concept of “crisis” and crisis communications. In addition, theories of crisis communications (reputation restoration, situational crisis) are considered. Using the example of foreign and national companies, anti-crisis measures are analyzed.

**Key words:** crisis, anti-crisis PR, communication, conflicts, information policy, anti-crisis strategies, social media.

Any company faces conflicts in its activities. Where there is development, there will be crises. At the very least, experienced professionals should always be prepared for any conflict. Even a small grocery store has problems with customers. But building communication correctly and resolving the issue in the role of brands is not always an easy matter.

Before talking about anti-crisis strategies, I would like to touch a little on the etymology of the very concept of «crisis». According to sources, the word «crisis» has Greek roots. In ancient times it was used as an antonym for inertia, that is, slow development. But from a scientific point of view, there are many definitions of crisis, which are considered as threats in the life cycle of an enterprise.

The world's famous expert on pricing, one of the five most recognized experts in the field of management, Simon Hermann, understands a crisis, firstly, as «an event that happened unexpectedly». According to him, such «surprises» pose serious threats to any company and create a lack of time for any reaction. But there is also a positive interpretation of the crisis. For example, the American educator, speaker and writer Dale Carnegie wrote in his book: «Develop success from failure. Obstacles and failures are the two surest steps to success». This statement indicates that any organization can overcome a turning point. The main thing is to correctly build a plan of action and not give up in front of your competitors.

The 35th President of the United States, John Kennedy, wrote (50 Quotes on Crisis Management & Leadership, 2020): «In Chinese, the word “crisis” consists of two characters. One

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represents danger, and the other represents opportunity». And former French President Charles de Gaulle spoke about the crisis this way: «Faced with a crisis, a man of character returns to himself. He imposes his way of action, takes responsibility for it, makes it his own» (50 Quotes, 2020).

The crisis affects industries and companies in very different degrees (Hermann, 2010). Therefore, managers must analyze the crisis not from a general perspective but from the point of view of their specific industry and company. Products and services that consumers need on an everyday basis are much less affected than «postponables» or «nice-to-have» items.

Products of everyday use, such as food, beverages or washing powder, are less affected by the crisis. The same applies to pharmaceuticals, utilities, or telecommunications (Hermann, 2010).

Crisis communication has evolved significantly since its inception (Crisis, 2023). It originated from public relations and journalism, primarily serving as a tool to manage reputational threats due to product failures, environmental disasters, or political scandals. During this period, traditional media channels such as newspapers, radio broadcasts, and television news were the primary vessels for disseminating crisis-related information.

The development of the Internet, social media and digital communications has completely changed the entire meaning of crisis communications. While these platforms have opened up widespread access to information and improved the speed and reach of crisis communications, they have also created problems associated with disinformation and fake news.

Crisis communication involves the strategic process of communicating with various stakeholders during a crisis. The main goal of this approach is to counteract misinformation and restore the trust of customers (target audience). Crises can come in a variety of areas, including natural disasters, cybersecurity attacks, corporate crime, and public health emergencies.

Let's give a clear example.

An American coffee brand with centuries-old traditions, Maxwell House has always strived to maintain its place in the market with the help of quality advertising. The main highlight of the advertising banners was the atmosphere of love and comfort. Consumers have always been attracted by posters where all family members with a cup of coffee in their hands discussed topics unknown to anyone. Everyone had the impression that it was coffee from Maxwell House that united loved ones around the same table. But despite its pleasant image among the general public, the company has repeatedly encountered difficulties in its activities. Especially in the 90s, when new coffee shops began to

appear on almost every street in the United States, and the number of coffee bottles in shopping centers grew. In order to maintain its position in the local market, the company invited the Ketchum PR agency to cooperate. According to the experts, the individuality of the Maxwell House brands was important for the market. It was about the brand's contribution to shaping the image of America, family and home in general. In a short period of time, the agency developed a strategy to recreate a full-fledged image of the company, which focused on the active participation of the manufacturer in charity. Of course, this could not have happened without the help of the media. To maximize their reach and impact on consumers, PR people began sending biographies and photographs of families who received all kinds of assistance to journalists in American print and audiovisual media. Touching videos were released, free coupons and product samples were distributed, and mobile cafe served as information centers for the charity program. In general, properly structured communication helped the largest American coffee producer not to lose its position in the local market.

In early 2003, fast food giant McDonald's announced a loss of \$343.8 million for the final quarter of 2002 (McDonald's, 2003). It was the first time in the company's 48-year history that it reported its losses in red ink. In addition to losses caused by falling sales, there was a sharp drop in the company's stock prices.

According to Antonio Diaz Morales, marketing professor at the Instituto de Empresa de Madrid (IE), McDonald's problem is that «although consumption outside the home is never going to stop, it is hard to have just one format that addresses people's needs. One day, you can go to a restaurant like McDonald's, but you can't go every day» (McDonald's, 2003).

Traditionally, crisis management experts relied on the «within the first hour» (Ferrier, 2020) rule when responding to critical events. However, in today's instant media world, one hour seems too long. Experts now use the 15-20-60-90 rule for effective crisis communications response time. This rule means: An organization needs to release information about an incident within 15 minutes of when it occurred. Often, this announcement doesn't have much information, but it acknowledges that the organization is aware and will respond accordingly. This quick response builds confidence that the organization is ahead of any developments and will be the point of contact for the event.

For example, law enforcement will notify the public that they know an incident occurred and are looking into the event. 30 minutes – Here, an organization will provide more details or information. Anti-crisis enterprise management in a market economy is aimed at ensuring a strong, stable position in the market (Menshikov, 2013).

Loss of reputation can reduce profits and can even lead to bankruptcy. It may not take 30 years to create a positive image, but it is very easy to lose. In a matter of seconds, a company can come into view of its target audience. This is something that must always be remembered.

In a crisis, the most valuable and scarce resources are time and information. Therefore, it is fundamentally important to be able to professionally dispose of. Therefore, during a crisis, the most important rule is «always be in touch». With the development of social networks, it is not necessary to provide journalists of all leading media with your mobile phone number.

In the transformation of modern society, one of the main influencing forces is the mass media, in the system of which, in turn, occurs (Muratova, 2022): the merging of various technologies together, which leads to an increase and simplification of the information support of the production process; increasing the role of the media in all spheres of human activity, which is of particular importance, as it is inextricably linked with the study of their role in modern society.

Based on this, maintaining constant contact implies openness to the press. Communication with media representatives will produce results if official representatives of the company or organization are able to convey the key message.

In a crisis situation, such a message should be considered a convincing response from the speaker to a journalist's information request. It must be remembered that in a crisis situation, media requests reflect the needs of society. If the company successfully builds communication with the public using the media, then the conflict that arose against the backdrop of the crisis can be mitigated.

How should we deal with crises? Summarizing, we can come to the following conclusions:

First of all, by promptly providing comments, you can interact not only with the media, but also with the target audience.

Providing information that an objective and in-depth investigation is underway and not blaming anyone before the results of the investigation are made public is another important part of anti-crisis measures.

This is exactly what the Oktepa Lavash fast food restaurant chain did during an incident with customers. Following the mass poisoning of its customers in 2019, the fast food chain issued a statement to the media:

«Our leaders visited the victims in the hospital and reimbursed the costs of treatment and moral damage. We are currently conducting an internal investigation and establishing the exact cause of the incident» (Post, 2019), the company said in a



statement.

In this case, talking about the measures taken during the crisis is the best way to show the audience that similar situations will not happen again.

And the most important thing is to emphasize interaction with law enforcement agencies and emphasize cooperation with all interested parties.

Summarizing the above examples, we can draw the following conclusion:

Anti-crisis PR is based on the strength of the brand. This is the courage to admit a mistake, correct it, or speak honestly about what happened. The main thing is not to remain silent. Otherwise, fake news may appear on the Internet, especially when social networks and online platforms are highly developed.

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