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How to save your brand reputation in a crisis

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Let's face it: bad crises happen to good people. With the percentage of crises in real estate and construction, take a few moments to review the simple steps to crisis management.

Everyone remembers the Tylenol crisis . . . when packets of Tylenol were poisoned. Tylenol pulled its product from the shelves, made a public statement about the crisis, and re-introduced the 'clean' product to the public several weeks later, once the problem had been controlled.

If only, in real estate or construction, we had one 'product' that we could pull off the shelves, it might make our lives much easier. However that is not the case. Here are ten things to do in a crisis so that you control the crisis, and it does not control you.

1. The crisis occurs. A building with tenants burns down, there is a major accident with one of your workers on a site, or a building is contaminated. First step: shore up the site. Shoring up the site - whether it's 11 p.m. at night or 6 o'clock in the morning. Visit the site and make sure it is secure.
2. Review your media relations policy internally.
3. Once it has been approved by senior management, send the media relations policy via email and hard copy to everyone in the company and all subcontractors. (The media relations policy states that no employees or subcontractors may talk with the media, and all media inquiries are directed to a designated media relations contact.)
4. Hold a meeting with all staff and communicate your policy about talking to the media to all personnel. Make sure everyone acknowledges that they understand the policy.
5. Designate a certain number of staff and executives to walk and monitor the perimeter of the site. It's better if these are not security personnel in uniform. Security personnel can be helpful but they must be paired with suited or plain clothed personnel.
6. Have the perimeter of the site guarded and identify any and all media that arrive on the site. Inform the media that they are to discuss any media issues with the designated media relations person and notify that individual that the media is on site.
7. Keep this up until the heat of the crisis is over.
8. Develop your first statement. Let the media know that you are preparing a statement. The first statement is generally something to the effect that, 'An incident occurred at our site that we were made aware of at xx time and date. We are investigating the incident and will let you know when we have further details.' This will satisfy the media for an initial story. 'No comment' sound like an admission of guilt or a cover-up.
9. Begin to build a strategy. Start to gather the information together about the incident. Detail the facts. Put together a proactive plan that explains how you are helping the 'victims' or anyone involved in the incident. A pro-active statement goes a long way to explain your basic philosophy about how you treat your employees, how you treat your customers, and how you treat your clients.
10. Create a statement. Be sure that the statement includes everything you are doing for the

purported 'victims'. Manage the way the statement goes out to the media. Hold a press conference or choose what media you'd like to be the first recipients of the statement. Deliver the statement and only the statement. Don't deviate from the statement. Choose an individual to deliver that statement who is not emotionally tied to the 'problem'.

Once you have delivered your first statement, you will then need an ongoing strategy to manage the crisis in the news. Remember that you are only as 'good' as the public's last memory of you, and so the way in which you appear at any time in any media will greatly influence the public's perception of your company and ultimately, your brand.

Julia Tanen is President/CEO of TanenPR, Natick, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540