

BURN AFTER READING

Key takeaways from select sessions from the Crisis Communications Conference (so your boss doesn't think you had too much fun)

Communicating during times of disaster: Setting the stage for crisis response

Vivi Siegel, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- Getting the facts right is important, but expressing empathy is important, too. “People don’t care what you know until they know that you care.”
- If you don’t know something, say what you’re doing to get the information.
- Every tweet on CDC Twitter feed has to have a call to action—if you don’t give people something positive to do, they may react irrationally.
- Example: During Fukushima disaster, people in California started taking potassium iodide, even though there was no significant radiation threat in California (and there are some risks to taking potassium iodide). “They wanted something to do.”
- [Radiation emergency video](#) example: Starts with the most important message and gives people something productive to do.
- People tend to remember the message they hear first. People will only remember three things. First and last messages are most likely to be remembered.
- Peter Sandman: “Risks are a mix between hazard and outrage.” People tend to believe the hazard matches their outrage. Crisis communicators need to address both.
- Main messages should be no more than 27 words.
- Communications plan template:

One Page Magic Communications Plan

- **Communications Objectives**
- **Audiences**
- **Key Messages**
- **Channels**
- **Proposed Timetable**

Key Messages:

- **Message 1**
 - Supporting message
 - Supporting message
 - Supporting message
- **Message 2**
 - Supporting message
 - Supporting message
 - Supporting message
- **Message 3**
 - Supporting message
 - Supporting message
 - Supporting message

- Avoid miscommunications: One country inadvertently sent an Ebola message that used colors similar to one political party's colors, skewing the meaning and possible credibility of the message.
- Meet your audience where it lives. Example: Hurricane prep [infographic](#) also made into a video.
- How the CDC communicates with employees aside from emails: intranet, employee Twitter accounts, text messaging, phone trees.

Working with journalists when reputational disasters strike

Greg Galant, Muck Rack, and Tony Kovaleski, Denver 7

- Ninety-three percent of journalists want to be pitched by email.
- Fifty-three percent want pitches that are only 2–3 paragraphs; 41% want only 2–3 sentences.
- Ninety-one percent of journalists are on Twitter, far higher than any other platform (LinkedIn 37%, Facebook 18%).
- Case study: KFC runs out of chicken, [issues this funny apology campaign](#).
- Greg uses [Whosharedmylink.com](#) to see who is picking up your story—or to find out how much coverage an unwanted narrative is getting.
- Example of authentic crisis response: Marc Benioff, founder of Salesforce, will still address journalists on social media. But you have to have the right people (you heard us, Elon Musk).
- If HIPAA is preventing you from being transparent, you can ask the patients involved if they're willing to sign a HIPAA waiver.

Reaching audiences with the right messages when crises hit

Monique Farmer, Omaha Public Schools, and Bryan Ming Wang, University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications

- For every element of instructional messaging included in a food recall communication, the news article about the recall was 4X more likely to be positive.
- An apology showed no significant change in the tone (positive vs. negative) of the news coverage.
- W. Timothy Coombs' crisis continuum:



- Negative case study: [United CEO's statement](#) following the dragging incident. Lack of empathy and authenticity because it was written by lawyers.
- Positive case study: [Statement written with empathy afterwards](#).
- People don't trust brands, they trust the person behind the brand.
- Some words we use tend to signify authenticity: "I," "we" and "you." Avoid "should," "could" and "must."
- Showing empathy increases positive chatter among the public and the media. Showing authenticity increases perception among the public, but not the news media.

- How do you apply this? Start with the audience—the victims—in mind.
- Positive example of empathy: “**We** are in the process of notifying the families of those involved and ask for **your** patience, **your** prayers and your privacy as **we** allow the time for those families to be notified and time for them to grieve.”
- Positive example of authenticity: “**Like you, I** continue to be disturbed by this incident ... **I want you** to know **we take full responsibility** and we will work to make it right ... It’s **never too late to do the right thing.**”
- Goes without saying? [Never say you’ve been hacked if you haven’t.](#)
- Authenticity killer: overreliance on teleprompters.

Putting preparation to work: How Nebraska Medicine activated during the Ebola crisis

Paul Baltes, Nebraska Medicine

- Fringe information and conspiracies tend to find their way into the mainstream.
- Simple but crucial step in preparing for a crisis: Know what functions your colleagues have.
- “You cannot simultaneously prepare for and react to a crisis.”
- Showed preparation by giving [a video tour of the BioContainment Unit.](#)
- In communications, made an effort not to refer to Ebola victims as “Patient 2” and “Patient 3,” to remind people that these Ebola victims were people.
- PR is not a distraction. It is part of the solution to the crisis. Case in point: People who believe conspiracy theories.
- Not a single person asked to be transferred out of the hospital. Baltes credits the culture of communication.
- Have communications drafted for alternative scenarios, like a staff member getting sick from Ebola.

Did this Burn After Reading sheet provide value to you? [Yes](#) [No](#)