

## STAYING COOL UNDER PRESSURE A LESSON IN CRISIS RESPONSE

It is said repeatedly – planning is a crucial component to the success of any project. It may be the global launch of a new product or a local community promotion, proper execution of any initiative requires preparation. As valid as this statement is, unfortunately, there are some situations one simply cannot anticipate. These unforeseen problems have affected some of the largest companies in the world. So, what separates the successful companies from those that allow crisis to forecast their failure? Crisis management.

Carefully modulated, one-voice messaging is critical among myriad of audiences during a crisis: press, social media, internal stakeholders/ staff, customers, stockholders, unions, and industry partners. No brainer, right? But easier said than done. If and when a situation arises, there are certain provisions that must be taken to resolve the issue, rescue the company's reputation, or even better, enhance a reputation during adversity.

### **Gather the team and maintain perspective.**

Times of crisis can cause chaos and hostility among team members. Leadership must understand this concept. Review the issue and objectives with the team, and remember, to keep an open dialogue among employees.

In order to properly assess the issue, first one must understand the factors that contributed to the crisis. Ask the following questions:

- What caused the situation to occur?
- Who is affected? Consumers? Employees? The community?
- What is the severity of the issue? Can this be resolved internally or does it have far reaching effects?
- Has this problem affected other businesses? How did they address the issue and what was the outcome? How does this impact the industry?
- Do we need additional resources to aid in the conflict resolution?

### Develop an action plan.

Even with a well-documented and a rehearsed crisis plan, the plan cannot cover every possible scenario. However, with a properly trained team in place and an objective review of the situation, an action plan can be quickly developed. Consider these topics when formalizing the plan of attack for a specific crisis:

- How can the problem be resolved? Make sure to consider factors such as company goals, audiences impacted, ethics, environmental, etc. What precautions can be taken to ensure this problem does not occur again?
- What is the best method to communicate with the individuals affected by the problem? Social media? Phone? Distributing a press release? Press conference? Email?
- As part of the pre-prepared crisis communications plan, tap the individuals who have been designated to manage the various audiences. For example, direct journalists to one central location so they are not receiving conflicting messages.
- How often should the company provide updates to internal and external parties?

To give a real-world example, In 2008, an action plan was developed when Orlando-based, *Golfweek* inserted itself in a racially charged scenario by placing a noose on their cover. To the chagrin of Tiger Woods, he led a charge to have advertisers pull their ads from the magazine - and 70 percent did. But, evōk advertising was there to clear a new path for the publication and reclaim their valued advertisers.

Evōk conducted situational assessments with both internal and external audiences (including advertisers), messaging was developed and a plan was plotted for dissemination. Within eight months, press coverage was limited to the golf industry and the agency helped to stabilize revenue putting the magazine on a growth plan exceeding where they started through rebranding, industry and community outreach, and the launch of Central Florida's first-ever, First Tee Chapter, which teaches youth life lessons through the game of golf.

### **Monitor the situation as a group and be decisive.**

A situation can change by the minute, so it is paramount to continue to monitor the situation closely. When making decisions, the staff must be decisive. This is not a time to second-guess the plan. The scenario was reviewed closely based on the available facts. Don't allow the team to Monday morning quarterback the decisions until after the crisis has passed, and potentially new standard operating procedures can be established based on the lessons learned.

Managing a crisis isn't easy for any business. However, by taking the proper provisions, the pain and duration of the discomfort can be minimized, the respect of internal and external audiences can be enhanced, and perhaps even reaching heightened brand loyalty.