

How to build an effective crisis communications strategy: FAQs with Steff Berger

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The second part of Steff Berger's FAQ series looks more closely at the practical things you need to consider when dealing with a crisis or constructing a crisis communications strategy or management plan.

If you'd like to read more about the crisis communications challenges and solutions relating to the COVID-19 crisis, you can find her FAQ blog on the topic [here](#).

What would you say to an organisation that is so conservative and so careful not to commit a mistake, which means they never react in time?

I would advise an organization whose conservatism and caution around making mistakes limit their ability to react in time to take a close look at the issue of crisis management and the basic principles/guidelines of crisis management.

This means learning to accept mistakes and bad news. The only ways to capture and manage a crisis are to proactively search for solutions and to react quickly. Failing to react and/or not reacting quickly can cause the situation to spin out of control—and damage an organization's and/or a person's reputation. In a crisis, those affected expect to be taken seriously and presented with solutions. *Crisis management means getting in front of a situation—not running after it.*

Depending on the country, crisis management measures are really different. Do you think it's necessary to adopt global events measures?

I do think we could establish a global event crisis management structure. It would definitely speed up the process for venues, local partners, cities, and clients. This way, everyone would speak "the same crisis management language."

However, each country has its own rules and regulations. They need to be integrated into a global MICE crisis management strategy. Ideally, an organiser would combine country-specific regulations and a global crisis management grid.

How transparent do I need to be in a crisis?

A good crisis management plan follows a step-by-step procedure based on facts, figures, and an assessment of the existing situation, along with decisions that take into account the latest available information.

When you have a good crisis management plan in place, you can be confident about sharing your decisions. We tend to have difficulties in making decisions, but this often stops or slows down the process of coming up with solutions. And this is the main goal of crisis management: finding solutions that help us return to normal operations as quickly as possible.

I've worked with many organizations that struggle to make decisions in a crisis. In this case, I would recommend that you communicate at an organizational level in order to let people know that you've acknowledged the problem—and that you're taking action to find the best solution to deal with the current situation.

This kind of communication not only demonstrates that you understand and accept the problem, but also that you're working to find ways to solve it, even if you don't have a final answer for your audience yet. We all know how difficult it is to make decisions. But, your audience will still rate you and your organization during and after the crisis with respect to how you've handled the situation.

What should I tell my employees during a crisis?

Be transparent. Let your employees be part of your process. Don't just let them know once the decision is final. I've heard from so many colleagues who have been not

able to participate in the process (and gain a better understanding of the reasons behind the decision).

This crisis exposed everyone, and it not only affects your employees but also your partners. If you don't communicate clearly and involve them in the process, it will leave a bitter taste in their mouths. When we do meet again after a crisis, we want to be able to look each other in the eye!

In crisis communication, timeliness is of the essence. Would you recommend waiting until you have all relevant information or put out your communication even if not all information is available yet?

In this case, the first question would be: how many participants, exhibitors, and other stakeholders are asking questions on the different communications platforms—and then it's important to react quickly and send a clear statement or message.

How detailed should this message be? It depends on the information that's available. If the interest/concern among stakeholders is at a high level and you still don't have access to all of the available information, then I would definitely respond and be transparent. It's also okay to let people know that you're still in the decision-making process and hope to make a final decision as soon as possible.

Also, personally responding to comments/posts on each communication platform often helps calm and reassure those affected to a large extent.

What is the role of social media in crisis situations?

In our increasingly fast-moving global world, social media is one of the most important, not to mention one of the quickest, communication tools! This is why it's so important to use social media outlets as part of our information-sharing strategy.

At the same time, we want to keep an eye on the reactions to our messages and events. Social media can spread both misinformation and painful truths – and reactions on social media appear online within minutes.

If people are posting misinformation, damaging opinions, or fake news about your event on social media, then you need to move quickly because fake news spreads faster on social media than the truth. Find the channels being used, monitor hashtags, respond accordingly, and put out your own clear/convincing messages to counteract it.

If you'd like to watch the whole of Steff's webinar, you can find it [here](#) on-demand on IBTM Connect.

Also, we have published another blog from Steff on the practical approaches you can take to creating a crisis communications strategy. You can read it [here](#).