



WHAT THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT CRISIS MANAGEMENT MEDIA TRAINING



INTRODUCTION

Stranded passengers, viral footage from disgruntled customers, strikes, accidents, data breaches and freak weather – the travel industry is rarely out of the news.

And that means media savvy travel and tourism industry spokespeople are always in great demand.

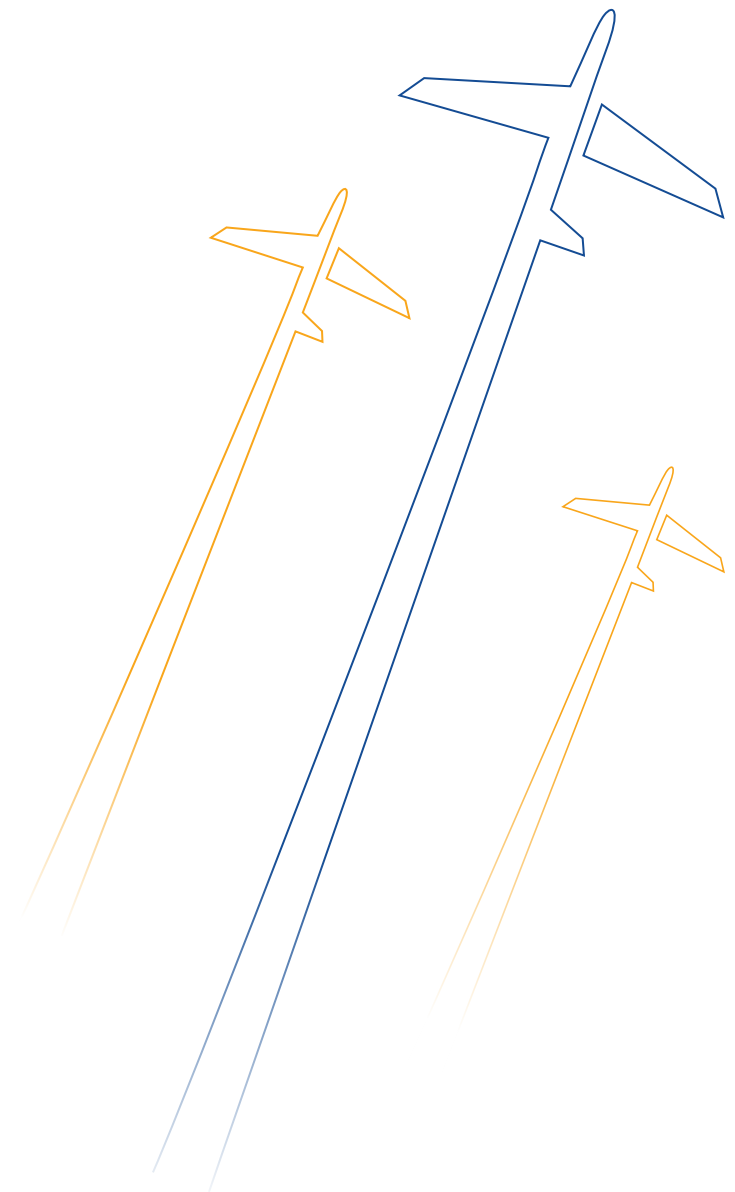
So, it is perhaps not surprising that we have provided bespoke crisis communication and media training for some of the biggest brands in this sector.

But our involvement doesn't stop there.

We've written a lot about media stories in our regular media training blogs. Some showcase incidents and stories that have been handled well and others that could have been managed better.

And we thought it was time we put these all in one handy place where spokespeople and PRs can easily access the tips, advice, examples and lessons.

In this eBook, we will look at how the sector has managed some recent high-profile incidents and the lessons that others can learn from them.



CASE STUDIES – DATA BREACHES

Barely a day seems to go by without a data breach making the news and the travel sector has certainly seen a few.

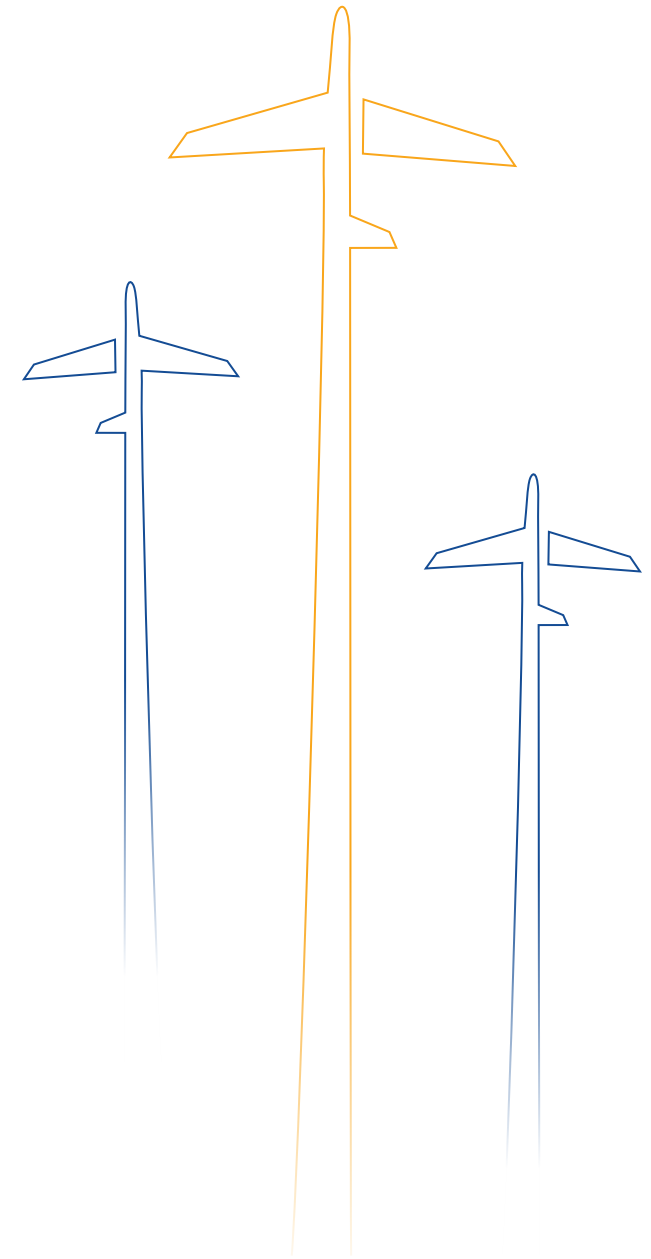
British Airways, for example, made the headlines when around 380,000 transactions were affected by a hack of its security systems.

What stood out in its response to the embarrassing incident was the way chief executive Alex Cruz led from the front, even though the numbers were much less than many other organisations had suffered.

He gave many radio and TV interviews and in them sounded genuinely concerned, showed humility and appeared to understand the difficulties the issue would cause customers.

The language he used to describe the hack was interesting. He called it a 'sophisticated, malicious, criminal attack'. It implies that those responsible had to work hard to penetrate BA's security systems and that the people behind it were organised and highly-skilled.

He also seemed to adapt his messaging as more details emerged, eventually becoming unequivocal on the issue of whether customers would be compensated.



CASE STUDIES – DATA BREACHES

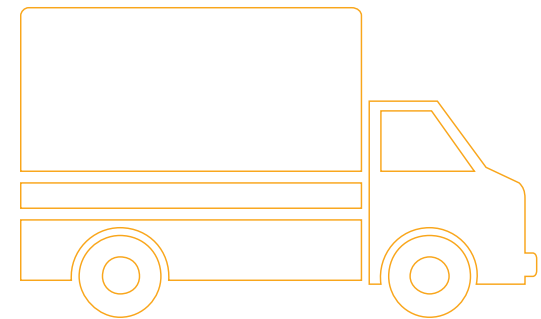
He told Radio 4's Today programme: "We are 100 per cent committed to compensate them. Period. We are going to work with any customer that may have been affected as a direct result of this attack and we will compensate them for any financial hardship they may have suffered."

Interestingly, the airline also became another organisation to take out an apology ad across the nation's newspapers. Those ads started and ended with apologies and contained probably just enough reassurance, but it would have been more impactful if it had come from the top.

BA also appeared to make considerable efforts to respond to everyone on social media who had posted questions about the breach – a brave move considering the scale of the traffic. And it gave its social media teams the freedom to adapt messaging so it didn't robotically copy and paste responses.

Overall, it was hard to escape the impression that a data breach crisis was something British Airways had prepared for.

It had the feel of something which had been rehearsed and practiced, enabling those involved to act quickly and with confidence during the real thing.



CASE STUDIES – DATA BREACHES

But not all data breaches in the travel sector have been handled so efficiently.

When Marriott Hotel's breach happened later in 2018, it lost the data of around 500 million people – no that isn't a misprint.

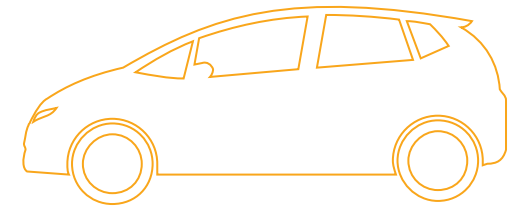
And that huge quantity of data included combinations of names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, passport numbers and payment details, which was particularly troubling for those affected.

Yet its 646-word statement did not include the word sorry. The closest we got was 'regret'.

Here's the quote from Arne Sorenson, the company's president and chief executive, which forms the key part of the statement.

"We deeply regret this incident happened.

"We fell short of what our guests deserve and what we expect of ourselves. We are doing everything we can to support our guests, and using lessons learned to be better moving forward."



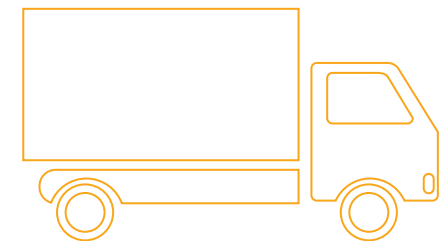
CASE STUDIES – DATA BREACHES

“Today, Marriott is reaffirming our commitment to our guests around the world. We are working hard to ensure our guests have answers to questions about their personal information, with a dedicated website and call centre. We will also continue to support the efforts of law enforcement and to work with leading security experts to improve. Finally, we are devoting the resources necessary to phase out Starwood systems and accelerate the ongoing security enhancements to our network.”

Not only was the statement, titled ‘Marriott Announces Starwood Guest Reservation Database Security Incident’, bizarrely lacking in remorse, but it also feels like it is packed with stock corporate response lines – ‘lessons learned’ and ‘moving forward’ being among the chief offenders.

It had the feel of something which has been put together by committee and gone through an extensive sign-off process.

The key bit – the quote from the boss – was somewhat buried, although that may be because they couldn’t find anything interesting for him to say.



CASE STUDIES – DATA BREACHES

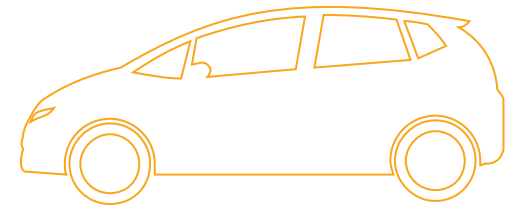
Ideally, the quote should be near the top of the response to show that the organisation's managers are leading the management of the incident. It also an opportunity for them to show that they care.

The social media response was also lacklustre. The Marriott International account, which has 425,000 followers, posted about the breach - albeit in a pretty low-key fashion, which could easily be missed. It tweeted: "Marriott values our guests and understands the importance of protecting personal information. For more information on the Starwood guest reservation database security incident, please visit <http://info.starwoodhotels.com>."

There was no mention of it on the Marriott Hotels account (@marriott), even though that is the handle most people talking about the incident were using. Neither was there any mention of it on the Starwood Hotels account.

Data breaches are an increasingly common cause of crises. It feels like barely a day goes by without one being reported and it surely will not be long until another brand finds itself in the firing line.

When that happens, we recommend they begin by saying sorry – it really shouldn't seem to be the hardest word to say.



VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

Several airlines have found themselves in crisis mode after passenger video footage from flights has gone viral.

The most infamous -and horrific - captured a bloodied passenger being dragged off an overbooked United Airlines flight.

That created a huge headache for the airline which uses the slogan 'fly the friendly skies'.

And it wasn't handled well.

It released a tone-deaf statement from chief executive Oscar Munoz which said: "This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize (SIC) for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly with him to address and resolve the situation."

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

That short statement generated more questions than it answered - why would you put your company first in a crisis when it is surely all about the victim? Where was the apology to the man seen in the footage? Where is the contrition? Who on earth – other than the lawyers - thought the made-up phrase 're-accommodate' was a good way to describe what happened on the plane? How hard is it to say sorry?

A good crisis response should show that you care about the people at the centre of the incident and create the impression you appreciate the significance of what has happened.

But worse was to follow for the airline when an internal email, in which Mr Munoz doubled-down on the unapologetic tone, was leaked. He described the passenger as 'disruptive and belligerent' and praised staff for going 'above and beyond'.

Following mounting pressure and falling share prices, another statement was issued with a softer, more acceptable tone and an acceptance of responsibility. But it really shouldn't take multiple attempts to get a crisis statement right.

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

Just a couple of weeks after that incident, American Airlines found itself facing a similar incident.

It was put under the spotlight after a video posted on Facebook captured the moments after an employee allegedly hit a woman with a stroller, narrowly missing the baby in her arms.

Another passenger confronted the employee reportedly involved and an uncomfortable exchange ensued where he ended up challenging the passenger to “c’mon, hit me”.

It was potentially very damaging footage, but American Airlines appeared to have learned the lessons from United’s crisis tailspin.

It responded quickly with an excellent statement that prevented the crisis from escalating.

Here’s what it said:

“We have seen the video and have already started an investigation to obtain the facts. What we see on this video does not reflect our values or how we care for our customers. We are deeply sorry for the pain we

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

have caused this passenger and her family and to any other customers affected by the incident. We are making sure all of her family's needs are being met while she is in our care. After electing to take another flight, we are taking special care of her and her family and upgrading them to first class for the remainder of their international trip.

"The actions of our team member captured here do not appear to reflect patience or empathy, two values necessary for customer care. In short, we are disappointed by these actions. The American team member has been removed from duty while we immediately investigate this incident."

It is a statement which includes a lot of what we refer to on our crisis communication courses as the **CARE** technique – It showed **C**ompassion, **A**ction and **R**eassurance and backed these points up with **E**xamples.

The statement talked about being 'deeply sorry for the pain' it has caused the passenger and her family and said it was taking 'special care' of her for the rest of her trip. Compare that to United, who chose to focus on how the incident had been 'upsetting' for its own staff and appeared to initially blame the passenger.

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

The American Airlines response also showed how it was taking action, stating that an investigation had already started and confirmed the employee in question had been suspended.

And finally, there was plenty of reassurance, talking about how the incident did not reflect its values, or its customer care standards.

The other great thing about this particular statement is simplicity of the language – there are none of the boardroom phrases like ‘re-accommodate’ used so disastrously by United.

Ryanair is another airline that has found itself trying to manage the fallout from passenger videos.

It found itself in crisis media management mode after a video emerged of a man launching a racist tirade against another passenger on one of its flights.

The footage sparked outrage after the airline responded by telling the man to ‘calm down’ and moved the victim, an elderly woman, to a different seat.

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

But the airline was slow to respond and when it did issue a response it was weak and lacklustre.

On social media, it issued the shortest and simplest of statements. It read: "Statement: We are aware of this video and reported this matter to Essex Police."

Yes, that really was the full extent of its response, and even then, it was buried among a range of promotional tweets.

It went a little further in newspaper articles saying: "As this is now a police matter, we cannot comment further." But that was untrue – proceedings were not active at that point– and there was no legal reason why it could not elaborate on its response. It is hard to see it as anything other than a cowardly response.

It did subsequently go a little further in some quotes given to the BBC. It said: "We operate strict guidelines for disruptive passengers and we will not tolerate unruly behaviour like this.

"We will be taking this matter further and disruptive or abusive behaviour like this will result in passengers being banned from travel."

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

That addition was welcome, but it doesn't go anywhere near far enough. It was still missing key components of a good crisis media management response: empathy and action.

An effective response would have begun with a sincere apology for the appalling experience this woman suffered. It should also have included an admission that its staff should have acted differently.

A strong response would also have included some condemnation of the man's vile behaviour.

And then it should have revealed what action it is taking to prevent this from happening again and to ensure its staff know how they should respond if it does.

And such was the seriousness of the situation and the coverage it was receiving that the response should have come from its CEO Michael O'Leary.

Airlines, however, are not the only part of the sector that has struggled to manage social outrage.

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

The Royal Hotel in Hull was at the centre of a media storm in December 2018 after it emerged that it had cancelled 'without warning or explanation' a Christmas booking for 28 homeless people.

It is a story that made the headlines across many newspapers, and was discussed at regular intervals on the 24-hour news channels. It was also for a while the most read article on the BBC news website.

And all these stories had one key thing in common – they all reported that no one at the hotel was available for comment.

24 hours after the story first broke, there was still no response from the hotel.

Now, this was clearly a difficult story to manage, but a radio silence approach is not the answer.

The refusal to engage with the media is only made the situation worse and is allowed others to control the narrative.

Take the BBC News story, for example. As well as comments from the charity that made the booking, it has used local residents and an MP to fill the void left by the lack of a response from the hotel.

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

Other stories have used comments by social media users.

The key lesson from this sorry story is that a crisis media management incident can hit an organisation of any size at any time.

A hotel in Hull may seem like an unlikely place for the media's attention in the run-up to Christmas, but a damaging social media post propelled it firmly into the spotlight.

All organisations should have an understanding of what could trigger a crisis for them, and how they would respond if it happened.

Responding in a timely manner is also crucial. Organisations cannot afford to allow outrage to build and others to fill the void left by ...their silence.

This story broke outside of normal office hours. Good crisis media management involves planning for events that happen outside of the 9-5, because crises – and those who report on them - have an annoying habit of not sticking to normal work patterns.

And those plans should involve identifying people who can update the media, respond on social media and make changes to the website out of hours.

VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

Simply saying that 'no-one is available for comment' will not stop journalists reporting the story.

Virgin Trains is another company in the sector which has found itself in a social media storm. In fact, the train operator triggered the backlash with an ill-judged attempt at humour.

When passenger Emily Cole took to Twitter to complain to the Virgin Trains East Coast account that a train manager called her 'honey' in a demeaning manner, she probably expected an apology and a promise that the person responsible would be spoken to or that the matter would be investigated.

Instead, the people looking after the company's social media account inexplicably felt this was a good opportunity for a joke and responded by saying 'Sorry for the mess up Emily, would you prefer 'pet' or 'love' next time?'.



VIRAL VIDEOS AND SOCIAL MEDIA STORMS

That response not only created a Twitter storm but also a range of embarrassing headlines as mainstream media picked up on the exchange.

Customer complaints are probably the most dangerous area in which a company should try to use humour in their response, as we tell delegates on our social media training courses. That doesn't mean that it shouldn't ever be used as it can sometimes diffuse the situation.

But laughter is not always the best medicine and a little bit of common sense would have shown that this particular example was neither the time or place for humour.

Would Virgin Trains have responded in the same manner if the complaint had been about racism? Almost certainly not, which makes it harder to understand how it came to post such an inappropriate tweet here.



DISASTERS

But what about those situations when the travel sector is managing disasters and loss of life?

Well, the case of flight MH370 in 2014 produced an example of how not to manage the media in these incidents.

In fact, it was hard to comprehend how the government and Malaysian Airlines could have got it so badly wrong.

In today's world of 24/7 news channels and Twitter there are so many ground rules when it comes to handling the media and delivering a coherent, strategic message. And on every single occasion, the Malaysians managed to get it completely wrong.

It's hard to even know where to begin.

Dragging a grieving mother out of a news conference that was being carried live on every major TV news network across the globe was about the worst of their failures. Those images flashed around the world in seconds, the woman's shrieks echoing at the top of every news bulletin from London to Los Angeles.

It's hard to believe that they felt this was, in any way, appropriate or acceptable.

DISASTERS

Then there were the news conferences where they had multiple spokespeople, each of whom, invariably, had very little to tell the world. And they did it all in several languages.

The disappearance of flight MH370 was a disaster that would have challenged any government or airline in any country, but the Malaysians continually managed to compound the misery of the distraught relatives.

What should have happened is simple. From the first hour of its disappearance there should have been one single spokesperson leading the briefings. One voice backed up with the very best information that they had.

If you don't know, don't speculate.

There should have been an acceptance, early on, that this was not going to end well. The mismanagement of information (and the media) gave the families misplaced hope.

But by refusing to state the obvious from the outset, the Malaysians allowed random theories to become news headlines and quasi-fact.

DISASTERS

All of this could have been prevented with a single, simple media strategy. State what you know. Have one voice saying it. Make it all attributable.

And be honest. As difficult as it may be, tell the truth. If you don't, you will be made to look a liar, stupid and uncaring.

The Malaysians could have come out of this with the world's sympathy. A disaster can happen anywhere, at any time, in any country. Instead, they had to deal with the fall-out. And all because they had no message. And nobody strong enough to say it.

A much better approach was taken by Air Asia boss Tony Fernandes when faced by the flight QZ8501 tragedy a few months later.

Mr Fernandes didn't try and hide as some leaders do when crises strike. He was quickly on the scene, flying immediately to Surabaya where the flight originated, to meet the families of passengers. He'd already used social media by Tweeting a simple, clear message: "my only thoughts are with the passengers and my crew... we must stay strong."

DISASTERS

Aware that the media is thirstier than ever for constant updates in these situations, Mr Fernandes issued more than 20 Tweets updating his followers on the progress of the investigation and emphasising that the family and friends of passengers were his principal focus. “My heart bleeds for the relatives of my crew and our passangers [sic],” he said at one point. Does the typo matter? Not at that point. Indeed, the Washington Post praised Fernandes, describing him as being “credible and authentic.”

Apologies during a crisis are often where leaders go wrong. The classic politician’s “I’m so sorry...that I was caught” is now beyond parody but weasel words and niggardly qualifications are all too common in corporate apologies. This is not the case here.

“I apologise profusely for what they are going through,” said Fernandes at a press conference. “I am the leader of this company. I take responsibility. That is why I am here. I am not running away from my obligations even though we don’t know what’s wrong. The passengers were on my aircraft, and I have to take responsibility for that.”

DISASTERS

An older, but still pertinent example, comes from the British Midland Boeing 737 crash near the village of Kegworth. 47 people were killed in the incident and another 74 were seriously injured.

The company's chairman Michael Bishop was on the scene half an hour after the accident and made himself available to press and broadcast crews, giving information as fast as he received it.

He spoke with compassion and said he understood how the relatives of passengers must be feeling because he personally knew every member of the crew and the pilot was an old friend.

The result was that a small airline emerged even stronger from the crisis. In the long term, the airline became BMI and was eventually brought by Lufthansa, which sold it on for £172m.

One of the most infamous examples of crisis mismanagement in the travel sector was provided by Thomas Cook and its handling of the tragic deaths of two young children from carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty boiler while on holiday.

DISASTERS

Nothing the company could have done would have brought the children back, but its handling of the case was a lesson in how not to handle a crisis.

Under advice from lawyers, the company refused to apologise for the deaths until it was forced to do so by the weight of public anger.

The company showed a complete lack of empathy, alienating itself from the people on the street who buy its holidays.

The result? A tarnished reputation and a damaged business – £75 million was wiped off the company's share value in the weeks following the start of the crisis.

So, what can other organisations in the travel sector learn from these examples?

CARE

The examples highlighted earlier show that the way an organisation communicates in a crisis is vital.

Communicate well and you can develop some control of the situation and the way it is reported. Get it wrong and your reputation could be in tatters.

Getting your messages out quickly, even if initially through a simple holding statement, will show that you are aware of the situation, are taking it seriously and are in control. It will prevent the spread of rumour and speculation. You don't want to be on the back foot responding to questions from journalists.

As the situation becomes clearer and your message develops it will need to include the elements of what we refer to on our crisis communication courses as **CARE**, which stands for **C**ompassion, **A**ction, **R**eassurance and **E**xamples.

CARE

- C COMPASSION:** You need to show the audience (your customers) that you understand the severity of what has happened and the impact it has had. Phrases like 'deeply sorry' and 'deep regret' are useful here. If the crisis revolves around an accident, show how you are helping those who have been injured. One of the great failings in the Thomas Cook crisis (mentioned earlier) was the complete lack of empathy.
- A ACTION:** Outline what your organisation has already done and is doing to deal with the crisis.
- R REASSURANCE:** Put the incident into context and show it is isolated. If the crisis is an accident, talk about the safety protocols you have in place and your previously good record. This was a regular message put forward by Merlin Entertainment when managing the media following a serious crash on a rollercoaster at Alton Towers.
- E EXAMPLES:** Use examples to illustrate the key message you want to get across.

SPEED

All of the examples we have mentioned in this eBook required organisations to react and respond quickly.

But just how quickly do you have to respond to a crisis?

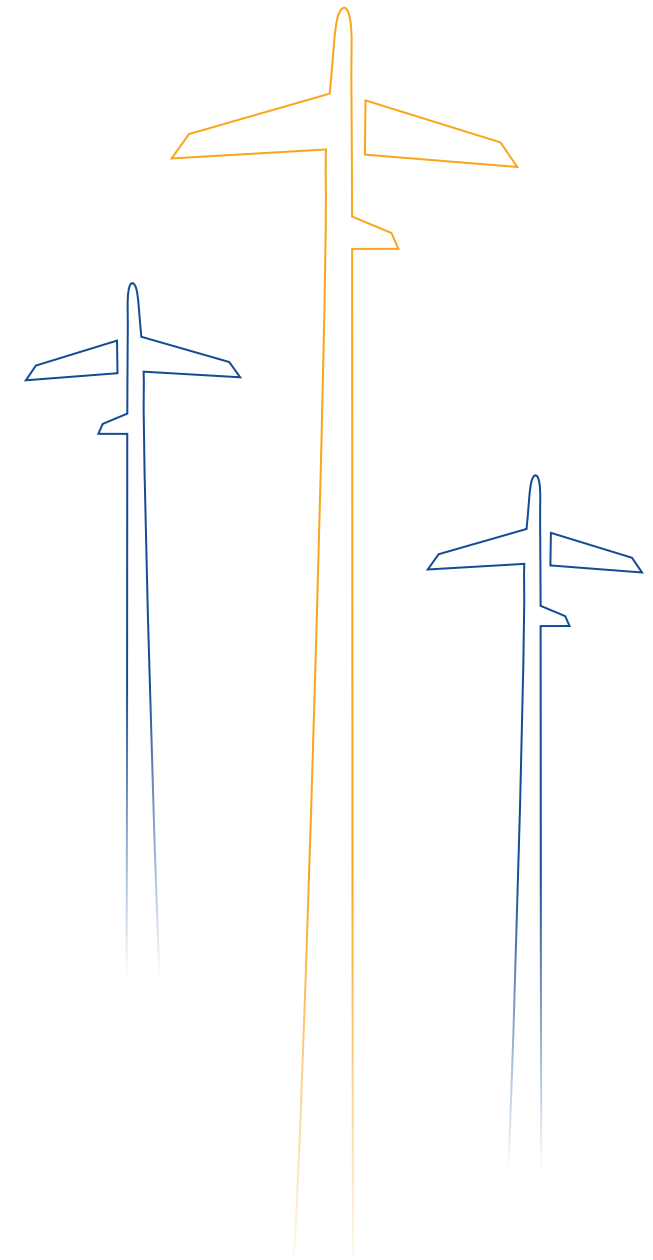
Well, according to the chief executive of one airline which found itself in the news, the pressure of social media means you need to respond to a breaking incident within 15 minutes.

Peter Bellew made that comment after an incident where a Malaysia Airlines flight en route from Melbourne to Kuala Lumpur in 2017 was forced to return to Tullamarine airport after a passenger claiming to have a bomb tried to enter the flight deck.

The airline made its first statement on the incident after just 14 minutes.

Here's what Mr Bellew said about the incident:

"As soon as we got the call, we worked out the press statement, which included saying we were sorry. Fifteen minutes later the aircraft landed on the ground. At 14 minutes we had the first statement out.



SPEED

“Then that got copied on social media everywhere and that dictated where the story went.”

He added: “I actually think you have less than 15 minutes now to say you’re sorry because people were live streaming on Facebook what was happening on the aircraft because the aircraft was below 4,000 feet.

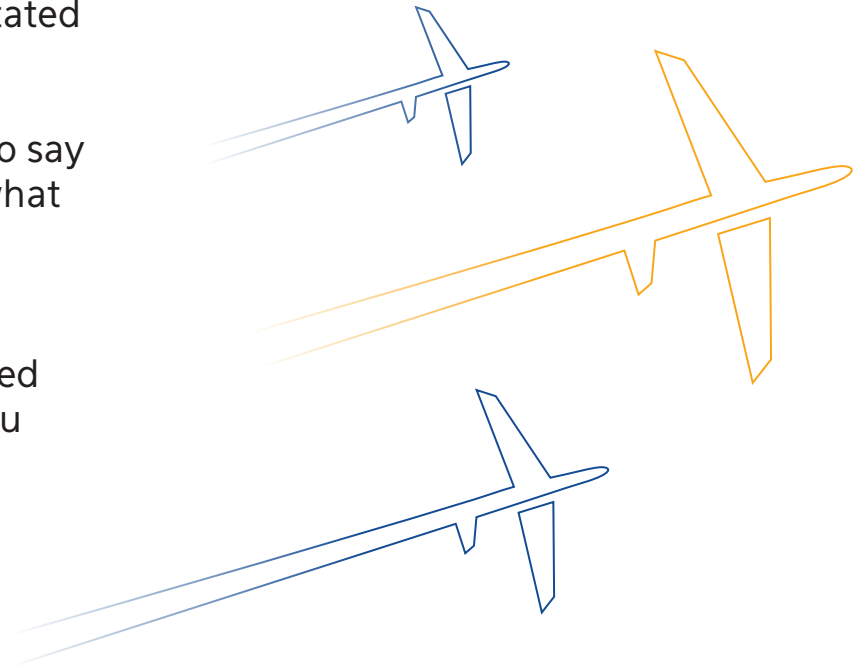
“That’s the pressure you’re under now. It’s horrendous. The speed and the proliferation of the social media will overtake you so you have to take control of the story.”

Does 15 minutes sound realistic for your organisation?
It is undoubtedly a daunting figure.

The key is good preparation and holding statements.

On our crisis media management training courses, we always stress the importance of organisations planning for a crisis.

And part of that planning process involves preparing several holding statements that can be used at the start of a crisis.

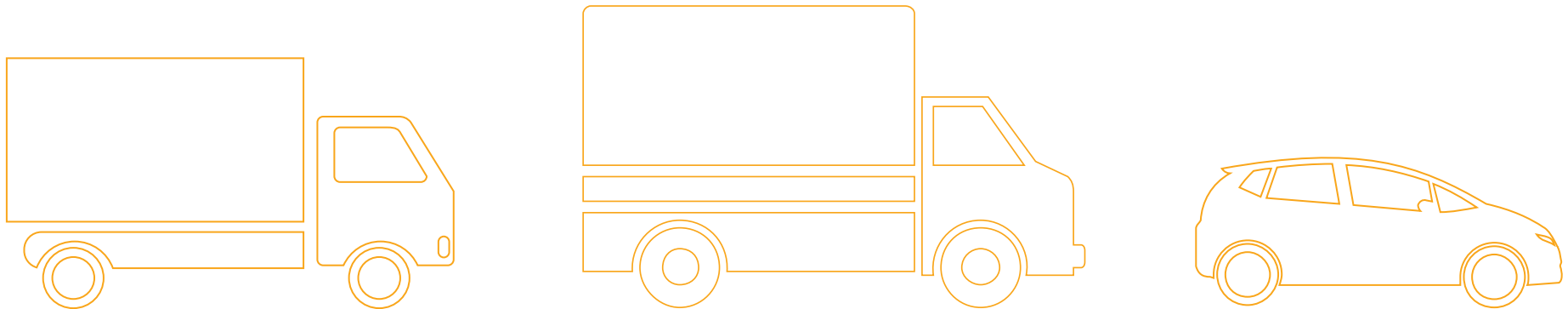


SPEED

But they will expect you to show you are aware of the incident, acknowledge that something has gone wrong and show that you are trying to resolve the situation.

A good holding statement will allow you to do this while buying you a little time to get a better understanding of exactly what has happened before you issue something more detailed.

Responding quickly will also enable your organisation to position itself as a trusted source of information and help control the narrative, rather than letting rumours and inaccurate information set the agenda.



RISK REGISTER

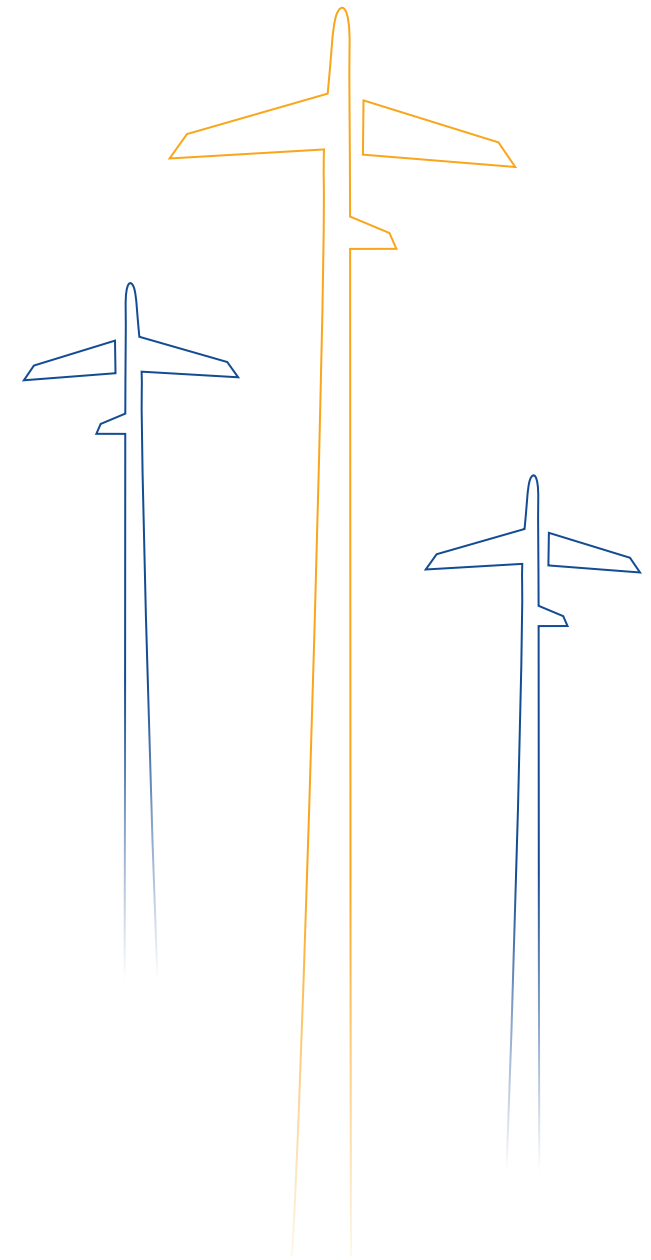
As well as holding statements, another good form of crisis preparation is to plan for the unexpected.

You are unlikely to be able to predict the exact scenario you will face, but you can take a look at your organisation, anticipate its vulnerabilities and forecast potential storms on the horizon.

What could expose your organisation to public attention, intense media scrutiny and damage your reputation?

Identify your organisation's vulnerabilities and create a risk register. If your organisation has a risk manager you will already have a detailed register in place and you should ensure comms is included on it.

For those who don't have one, an example of what a simple version could look like can be found on the next page.



RISK REGISTER

Event	Person responsible for risk	Comms lead	Risk rating (1-9)	Action taken	Next review
Data breach	IT Director	Jo Bloggs	8	Holding statement prepared Message development and testing training booked with Media First.	
Potential strike	HR Director	John Smith	7	Holding statement being prepared Customer communication awaiting sign-off	

CHOOSING THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON

Comms teams often assume it will be the chief executive or company chairman who would front a crisis.

But they may not always be the best person to put in front of the media.

You need someone who can demonstrate compassion, authority and honesty and be able to connect with the audience.

They need to have a detailed understanding of the organisation and its sector and it is essential they have previous media experience and had recent practical media training with current working journalist tutors.

Strong body language and a professional appearance are also important.

Of course, if your crisis is a tragic accident with multiple deaths, the head of the organisation needs to be there to show they care and are accountable.

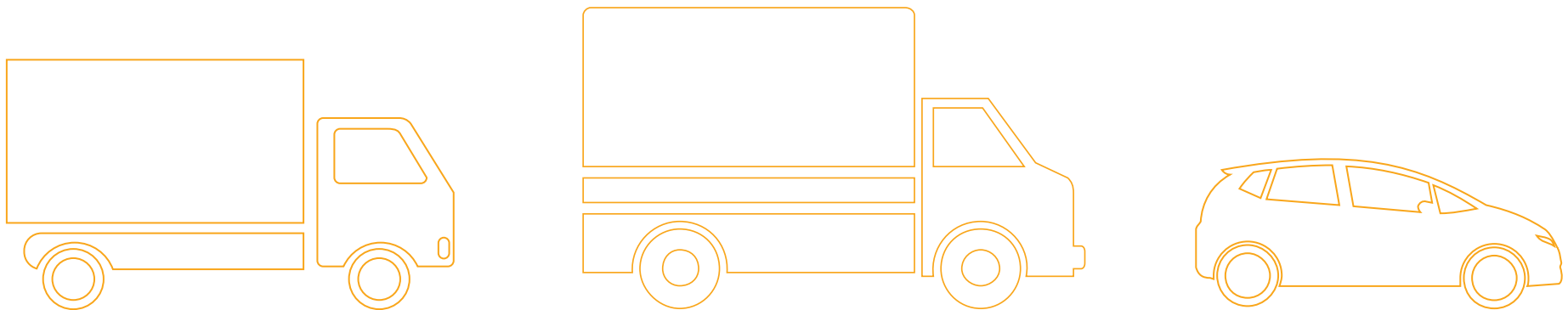


CHOOSING THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON

But, let's say your crisis is a large IT failure leaving customers unable to access a service. Would your IT Director not be better placed to lead the media response? If the problem escalates then bring the chief executive into play.

You will also need to consider having more than one spokesperson.

If the crisis is expected to last several days you will need to ensure you have more than one spokesperson trained, engaged and available to meet the demands of the media.



CRISIS TESTING

Once you are familiar with your organisation's risk register, or have devised your own, and have identified your spokespeople, you need to test your crisis communications plan against those risks with some role play and desktop exercises involving realistic and fast-moving scenarios.

In these exercises, you should look to develop your holding statements and anticipate the media questions you would be likely to face.

Here are the questions we think you are likely to face in the initial stages of a crisis:

- What happened / went wrong?
- Where did it happen?
- When did you become aware of the problem?
- What action have you taken?
- Who is affected?
- Were there any warning signs?
- Who's to blame?



SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLEXITY

Social media has brought us many communication advantages but it can be an added complexity in a crisis and means that an incident is likely to reach the mainstream media much quicker than before.

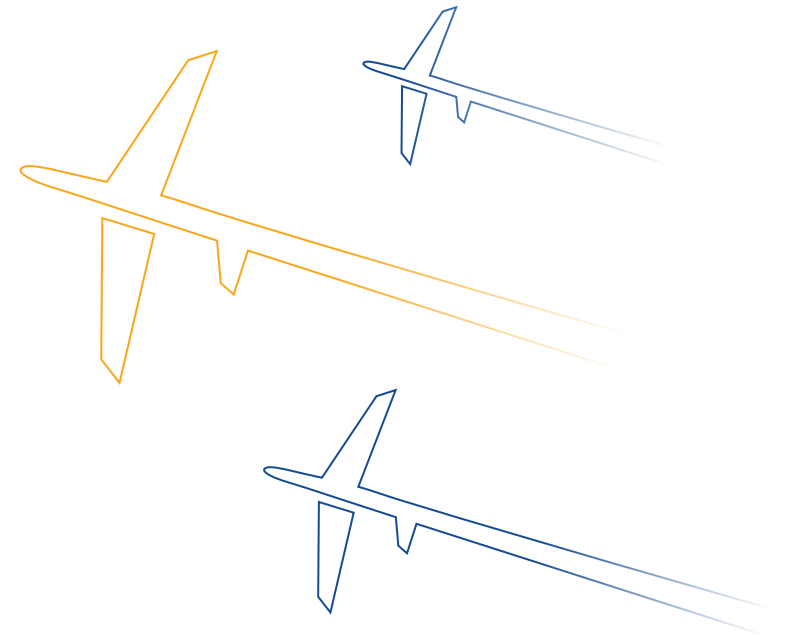
It can even be the source of the crisis, as easyJet found when it turned a negative tweet into a reputational issue.

It happened when an easyJet customer posted a picture of someone sitting on a supposedly backless chair during a flight he was taking to Geneva.

The poster, Matthew Harris, quipped “easyjet beats Ryanair to have backless seats.”

The low-cost airline responded by saying “thanks for bringing this to our attention, before we can investigate this could I ask you to remove the photograph & then DM us more info regarding this, so we can best assist you.”

That response caused social media outrage with users slamming the airline and others going out of their way to share the picture it was so keen to see removed. The company was trending on Twitter for much of the day. And the story was propelled into the mainstream media.



SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLEXITY

The airline subsequently issued a statement, around two hours after the tweet – far too long in a crisis media management situation - which said that “no passengers were permitted to sit in these seats as they were inoperative awaiting repair.”

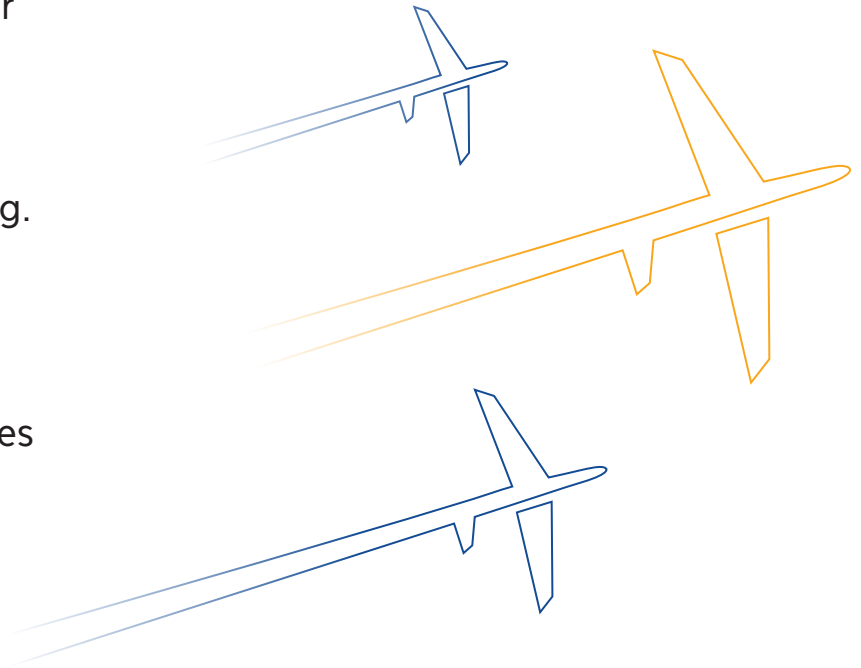
The suggestion was that the photo was staged or at least misleading.

But by that point, its initial handling of the situation had already turned a non-story into a damaging crisis media management situation.

The key with social media is to stick to the key crisis comms principles - respond quickly, provide regular updates and communicate with compassion, concern, honesty and empathy.

When a fire broke out on a British Airways flight in September 2015 the McCarran International Airport, in Las Vegas, used its Twitter account expertly.

The Boeing 777 was due to take off at 4:05pm local time but when the plane reached a speed of around 90mph the decision was taken to abort. At 4:13pm the captain made a mayday call to air traffic control requesting fire crews. Around a minute later he called again to say the aircraft was being evacuated. By 4:18pm the plane was empty and the fire was out.



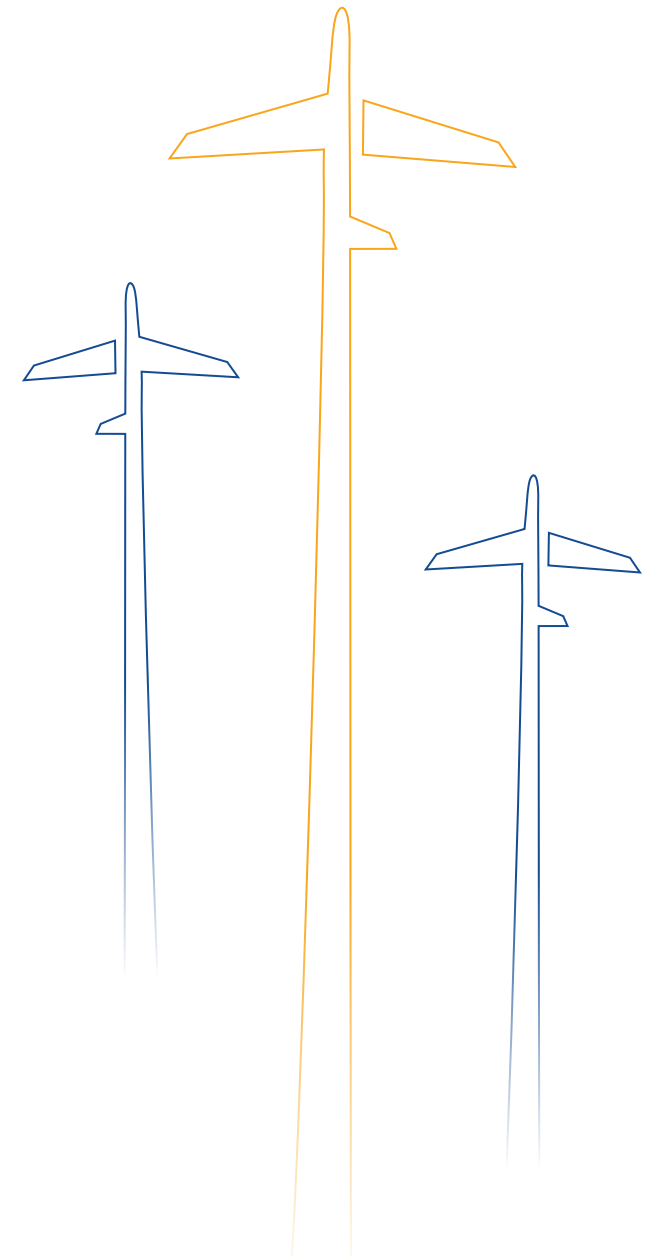
SOCIAL MEDIA COMPLEXITY

Just four minutes later @LASairport issued its first two tweets. It confirmed there had been a fire on a plane but that it had quickly been put out. It was also able to confirm all passengers were off the stricken plane and that there were no known injuries at that stage.

The airport effectively broke the story and from that strong starting position then continued to drip-feed information to journalists.

That example shows how social media can be used effectively in a crisis to provide resources to the media.

It is also a great opportunity for your organisation to communicate directly to its customers and provide them with information first hand.



DON'T FORGET YOUR COLLEAGUES

In a fast-moving crisis, it can be all too easy to focus on your external message and forget about your internal comms.

But an organisation's employees are its ambassadors and can be strong advocates.

Make sure they are aware of what the company is doing to deal with the situation, be honest and ensure visible leadership.

An engaged workforce is less likely to give potentially damaging information to a journalist or post something unhelpful on social media.

It is vital internal comms colleagues are involved in your crisis communications.

It is also important to carefully consider who else in the organisation could be exposed to the media in a crisis situation.

Receptionists, security and customer facing staff, will all often wear branded clothing and are highly visible members of the team and easily accessible to journalists.

Investing in some media awareness training for these colleagues is essential so that they have a basic understanding of what to expect from the media and know how to escalate any interest from journalists.

This level of training does not need to be face-to-face and can be easily delivered through a webinar or through a speaker at a work conference.

THE CRISIS COMMS GOLDEN RULES

We cannot stress enough how important it is for an organisation to prepare in advance for a communications crisis. Here are our golden rules to help you get that preparation right:

- Identify and understand your organisation's vulnerabilities
- Develop a crisis communications plan
- Create a crisis team
- Identify and train your spokespeople
- Test your plan, team and spokespeople
- When crisis strikes move fast and communicate, communicate and communicate some more



FINAL THOUGHTS

A crisis can strike any organisation at any time.

Clearly, there are some sectors where a crisis could be considered more likely and the nature of the travel sector means it falls into that category.

Managing a crisis is never going to be easy but you can ease some of the pain by being prepared.

Plan well and execute that plan effectively and your organisation's reputation and share price may emerge from the storm unscathed.

Remember a crisis is an opportunity to show your customers you care. A well-managed crisis also has the potential to be a career-defining moment.

WHAT WE'VE DONE IN YOUR SECTOR

FLYBE

Flybe has worked with Media First over the last five years and I would have no hesitation in recommending them. The range of experienced journalists who work for them means that the media training delivered is relevant, up to date and above all, challenging – in short, everything you'd want from an external provider.

Niall Duffy, Head of PR and Public Affairs, Flybe

EAST MIDLAND TRAINS

I had planned to just be there at the start and finish of the course, but I found it so interesting that I couldn't tear myself away. The two trainers were absolute professionals and we couldn't have wished for a better pair of trainers. They helped to put everybody at ease and really added some fun to what was quite a tiring day for the participants! Thanks so much for delivering such a great course.

Emma Knight, Senior Group Communications Manager, East Midlands Trains

LONDON STANSTED AIRPORT

As always, the course was excellent. The trainers did a great job keeping the pace and energy levels up and all the participants really enjoyed learning new skills – I now look forward to getting them in front of the camera/microphone!

Mark Davison, Head of Media Relations, Stansted Airport

ABOUT MEDIA FIRST

Media First has been delivering bespoke media, presentations and communications training for more than 40 years.

In that time, we have delivered a large number of bespoke crisis communications courses to organisations in the travel industry.

From developing and delivering holding statements, handling impromptu doorstep interviews, organising effective press conferences and dealing with the barrage of media requests, we'll show you how to communicate effectively, regularly and with empathy through the storm.

We'll work with you to develop tailored role-play scenarios to reflect the real-world challenges you will face. Then, led by our team of working journalists, you'll discover our unique, tried and tested approach.

As the realistic scenario develops, you'll gain the communication skills and confidence to remain compassionate, authoritative and in control as the media descends.

Whether the training is for your senior management or your communications team our range of crisis management courses will help you prepare for the unexpected.