



Working with Media in Crisis Situations

**Association of Contingency Planners
Orange County
Tellem Worldwide**

High Profile Crises In Corporate Life



Four Workers Shot in Post Office Dispute

Northeast
Columbus
Three
Injured In
School
Melee



Hunt On For Extortionist in Seattle



WEST WARWICK, Rhode Island (CNN)
– Strikers Bring Hotels and Restaurants to a Standstill



Only big names or big cities?



Megatrials

Fire at Great White Gig; Nearly 100 Dead

by Josh Grossberg

Feb 21, 2003, 1:20 PM PT

At least 95 people are confirmed dead and more than 100 injured after a fast-moving blaze swept through a Rhode Island nightclub Thursday night during a concert by '80s heavy metal band [Great White](#).

More than 200 people had packed The Station nightclub in the town of West Warwick, 15 miles south of Providence, when the fire broke out at about 11 p.m., as the rockers took the stage. A pyrotechnics display sparked the fire that quickly engulfed the club, sending fans scurrying for the exits.

Major Population Centers No Longer Required

Working with the Media in Crisis

- **Overview:** the presence of media and its effect on staff, customers, police, neighbors
- **Guidelines:** Create and execute a media relations plan to minimize damage
- **Experts:** Public relations crisis expert, law enforcement, client crisis team, legal

Media and a Crisis

- Crisis is a media staple, driven by audience demand
- News is by its very nature bad news
- Media go anywhere at any time to uncover, develop and sustain a story
- A crisis can be local to international in its scope
- Just like death and taxes, crises are inevitable

Likely Crises

- Fires
- Sexual harassment allegations
- Disgruntled workers
- Corporate scandals a la Martha Stewart
- Ethical transgressions – a la Fleischmann
- Drugs
- Gangs
- Death of a CEO

What This Means for Executives, Owners & Managers

- A media-intensive case can occur in anywhere
- Stonewalling and “no comment” don’t work
- Lack of engagement is passivity which invites “media frenzy”
- You can be overwhelmed, discredited or demoralized if you do not have a crisis plan to handle the media

The “ Verdict ”

Every company must engage the media with a structured media relations plan in order to achieve balance

Today's Media Are a Key Stroke Away



Tellem Crisis Clients in Small Towns or Far Away Places

- Vatican
- Santa Maria
- Toronto
- Maryland
- Monterey Park
- Costa Rica

Situational Analysis

- Some small companies lack resources and manpower to deal with media
- Managers and staff can be overwhelmed
- This can create an unfavorable reaction with vendors and customers
- Rumor and hearsay rampant

Goals

- Satisfy public's right-to-know without compromising case or victim's rights
- Alleviate media overload with printed statements as handouts
- Coordinate any direct contact staff with the media (have strict rules about talking to press)
- Work closely with legal counsel

Actions To Take

➤ Media Relations

- Draft press statement
- Create and/or update media database
- Distribute information in a timely manner
- Field media inquiries quickly
- Talk and meet one on one with local press via a press briefing
- Work hand in hand with legal counsel

Possible Actions

➤ Press Briefings

- Discuss likely subject matter
- Assisting media in logistics
- Confirm format and location
- Drafting FAQs
- Follow-up
- Collect cards
- Hire a clipping service (Burrelles or Customscoop.com)

Results

- Media inquiries redirected to PR team or consultant relieve manager and staff
- Media assured of receiving latest and most complete information
- Press conference focused and informative
- Improved coordination between media, PR, legal, executive team

A Game Plan

- Confirm goals and priorities
- Identify required actions
- Create timeline
- Establish ground rules
- Designate spokesperson (not CEO)
- Media prep as appropriate and feasible
- Establish contact with media
- Consider advertising, letters to the editor where info can be controlled

Media Protocol

- Establish recurring methods of contact
 - Releases or statements
 - Web site
 - Database distribution
- Build and update database (they'll come to you)
- Return calls promptly, but manage expectations on big news days
- Learn the value of “no news” to media

Positive Outcomes

- Control of hearsay, rumor, character assassination
- Company can focus on other work
- Openness and honesty conveyed through media engagement
- More useful information, more quickly to media—win/win

Conclusions

- “Crisis” can occur anywhere
- Media overload has negative effect on day to day operations and staff
- Must have a media relations plan prior to a crisis
- Must consider internal resources
- Deal with media in a professional, effective manner

Questions