

OSC | 11

Ohio Safety Congress & Expo



#423 Crisis communication: When the you-know-what hits the fan

Bruce Hennes, Crisis communication specialist

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Communicating in a crisis

It has been said that it takes a lifetime to build a reputation and only seconds to destroy it. This is true for a business, government agency or nonprofit, no matter if you have one employee - or one-thousand.

No business or agency is immune from a service interruption, serious lawsuit, a product liability action, EEOC complaint, devastating fire, a tornado or other natural disaster. Unfortunately, recent events have taught us that it is no longer inconceivable for a business to face total catastrophe—the sudden deaths of key employees, the disappearance of a key supplier or the destruction of irreplaceable documents.

Expressing concern, providing accurate information and staying in touch with victims, employees, customers, bankers and suppliers can be accomplished through various channels—phone, e-mail, Internet and, often, via television, radio and newspaper.

10 steps to take before a crisis occurs:

1. Anticipate potential crisis scenarios within your company and prepare key message responses. Think of the 10 worst things that you might face and create core answers.
2. Have a media-trained, designated spokesperson. A crisis is no time to hand the ball to an amateur or anyone unprepared to further the goal of maintaining your firm's credibility. You will communicate with some of your audiences through the media. If the media doesn't get the information from you, they'll get it elsewhere.
3. Prepare to reach key personnel with current office, home, cell and e-mail information. You must be able to reach everyone, anywhere, anytime.
4. Prepare basic background materials on your company and its key employees. The middle of a crisis is not the time to prepare a press kit. Give consideration to maintaining a "dark" web site that can be turned on in an instant.
5. Develop a media distribution list with current names, phone, fax, e-mail and cell phone information.
6. Identify your target audiences (i.e., employees and their families, vendors, customers, stockholders, labor leaders, local government officials, etc.). In the midst of a crisis, you don't want to neglect one of your core constituencies.
7. Develop a written crisis response plan. If it's not in writing, it's not a plan.
8. Develop relationships with the media and other third parties - now. If you're in the middle of a crisis, it's too late.
9. Conduct a mock drill. Consider a "tabletop drill" where crisis scenarios are enacted with key people.
10. Revisit your plan on a regular basis.

10 steps to take when a crisis occurs:

1. Assemble the crisis team and refer to your prepared plan.
2. Analyze the situation promptly, but don't over-analyze. A quickly unfolding crisis leaves no time for broad-based consensus.
3. Prioritize your target audiences.
4. Develop and/or refine your key messages. Agree to interviews to make your points – not simply to answer questions.
5. Communicate a consistent, simple and clear message. Anything less hurts your company and your credibility.
6. Set up a place for the media to gather. Meeting with the press off-site can help you control the message and the situation.
7. Provide a steady stream of communication to the media and other target audiences.
8. Assign someone to monitor the media and Web so you can quickly respond to inaccurate information.
9. Make the media your partner, not your enemy. If you stonewall, they'll dig. They're going to write about the situation anyway, so respect the job they have to do.
10. Conduct a follow-up evaluation of your efforts after the crisis abates.



CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS | MEDIA TRAINING | LITIGATION COMMUNICATIONS

paynter@crisiscommunications.com
hennes@crisiscommunications.com
216/321-7774
www.crisiscommunications.com

On-Line Press Rooms & “Dark” Websites

Downloadable Press Kit

Press releases (in text format – not PDF) and organized by subject matter

Complete PR Contact info (be sure it’s 24/7/365)

Searchable archives

Company history, timeline, mergers, acquisitions, names changes, new plants, etc.

High-resolution, color media-trade photos of company/building/products

- Usually 5x7 at 300 dpi (though some newspapers & magazines like 8x10 at 300 dpi)
- Using a JPEG compressed in “very high quality” mode is usually acceptable
- Offer suggested captions

Executive bios (AKA obituaries), headshots & team photos

Video (both high and low-bandwidth footage)

Video News Releases (VNR) & B-Roll

Diagrams, illustrations and graphics, including company logos (offer in low-rez, perhaps keeping hi-rez password-protected)

Press releases (current w/ release dates and archived); categorize by section or product

Corporate backgrounders

Case studies

Product overviews

Searchable database of experts on-staff

Opt-in for news distribution

Links to related articles

Consider adding a blog to provide insight by expert employees & monitor opinion

Events calendar (executive appearances, press conferences, trade shows, products releases)

Hidden content for crisis communications

Post a FAQ, Terms of Use & Privacy Policy

Helpful Tips

Ensure website has an easy to navigate design

- Simple and functional is best
- Avoid fancy graphics, Flash animation, etc.
- Keep use of PDF’s to a minimum – reporters in the field may be using dial-up

Whenever possible, do not password-protect your online pressroom – reporters may not have time for lengthy registrations and they may not like feeling they are going to be “tracked”

- That said, you still may wish to consider using a combination of open and password-protected areas within the online newsroom, allowing you to keep control over more sensitive information
- Pros: allows you to collect data and monitor how the site is being used; password-protected sites will also keep those pages from being “spidered” and, therefore, unavailable through a Google or Yahoo search

Absolutely, positively make certain that your online newsroom is current and up to date

- Learn how to post news releases and update info without being dependent upon your IT Department (if your site was created using DreamWeaver, Macromedia’s Contribute is an especially easy software program that will allow you or an assistant to change the contents of a website as easily as using a word processor)

Add Really Simple Syndication (RSS) to the site

(rev. 12-10)



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2841 Berkshire Road, Cleveland, Ohio 44118 tel 216.321.7774 fax 216.321.7577
www.crisiscommunications.com

Bruce M. Hennes

Bruce M. Hennes is the Managing Partner of Hennes Paynter Communications, the only firm in Ohio focused exclusively on crisis communications.



Hennes has more than 30 years experience working in politics, having managed or served as a campaign consultant for campaigns at the local, state and federal levels. Hennes also served three years as Executive Director for The Temple on the Heights in Pepper Pike, Ohio, and three years doing government and public relations in the automotive industry. He opened his own communications firm in 1989, which later became Hennes/Haslett & Associates, handling government relations, public relations and media training. In 2002 he formed Hennes Communications (now Hennes Paynter Communications) with an exclusive focus on crisis communications.

As one of Cleveland's best-known crisis communication specialists and media trainers, Hennes is an in-demand speaker before bar and trade associations on the subject of crisis communications and how the media manipulate the news. Frequently sponsored by county Emergency Management Agencies, he often speaks to mayors, police, fire, education and health officials on the subject of "Extreme Crisis Communications" (i.e. how to handle mass casualty incidents and other "extreme" situations involving threats to life & limb).

Hennes Paynter Communications now counts among its current and former clients such companies as Avery Dennison, Case Western Reserve University, Degussa, The Greater Cleveland Partnership/COSE (Cleveland's Chamber of Commerce), The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority, Great Lakes Construction, John Carroll University, KeyBank, NASA, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District and Westfield Insurance (Ohio Farmer's Insurance), as well as many of the leading law firms in Cleveland.

Hennes is past chairman of the Greater Cleveland Partnership's Public Affairs Committee and currently serves on the governing boards of The Business Emergency Planning Institute and The Judicial Candidates Rating Coalition (Judge4Yourself.com). He was one of the founding board members of the FBI Citizens Academy Foundation of Cleveland. He is also a Graduate Lecturer in Advanced Communications/Media Relations in the Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University and a frequent guest lecturer at John Carroll University, Kent State University, Case Western Reserve University and Ursuline College. Hennes is a member of the board of The Press Club of Cleveland, the Cleveland Leadership Center and a member of the Contingency Planners of Ohio. He is also on the executive committee of The Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, which awarded him its first-ever President's Award. Hennes is president of the Leadership Cleveland Class of 2008 and recipient of the President's Special Award for Extraordinary Service from the Cuyahoga County Bar Association and two Vega awards from The American Red Cross. Hennes has a degree in Political Science from York University in Toronto, Canada.

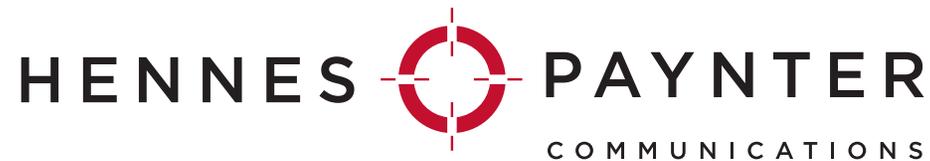
Hennes received certification in Effective Communications from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and The Federal Emergency Management Agency. He is also *of counsel* to Levick Strategic Communications in Washington, DC. (2007 Crisis Manager of the Year & 2007 Litigation Comm. Firm of the Year by PRNews).

About Hennes Paynter Communications

Hennes Paynter Communications is a crisis communications, media training and media relations consulting firm based in Cleveland. Serving corporations, government agencies, nonprofits and individuals who are "on trial" in the court of public opinion, Hennes Paynter Communications also offers litigation communication support, pre-crisis preparation, crisis drills, presentation training and public relations services to clients. The firm is a coalition member of ProtectingAmerica.org and National Preparedness Month (US. Dept. of Homeland Security). In 2010, Hennes Paynter won the Gold Award from the Public Relations Society of America - Greater Cleveland Chapter for its crisis work defending a hospital caught up in a corruption scandal and in 2009, Hennes Paynter won PRSA's coveted "Best of Show" award for its work with another agency on the national peanut butter recall. For more information, please go to www.crisiscommunications.com.



**When your business or reputation is threatened, you need a specialist.
A crisis communications specialist.**



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