

Crisis Communications Services

A crisis can come in many shapes and sizes. It might be a man-made crisis, such as an explosion at a manufacturing plant, a food poisoning outbreak or an act of corporate malfeasance. It could be a natural disaster: a sudden summer storm that knocks out power and floods streets. It might be unwanted media scrutiny stirred up by adversaries or competitors.

Whatever the crisis, one thing is constant: it can come on suddenly, putting your employees, the public and your organization at risk, disrupting operations and knocking your organization off stride by consuming your attention and resources for days, weeks or months.

There's another common element: risk to your organization's reputation and credibility. Whether or not the crisis could have been avoided, you will often be more intensely scrutinized on how you managed the crisis than on your role in the underlying events that triggered it. How you respond to public concerns at a time of intense internal stress and external scrutiny truly matters. It can have a major financial impact.

In the last 30 years, our public affairs and crisis management firm has worked on a wide range of crisis assignments. They've included high-profile allegations of racial profiling by a local police department; a mistake at a hospital which exposed a young mother to HIV-tainted blood; a change of ownership at a beloved Chicago company fostering both rumors and the reality of restructuring and layoffs; a malfunctioning escalator in Denver that injured 35 people; and even exploding toilets in a New York City high-rise building.

We have the ability to jump right into the thick of a crisis situation, as well as help client think about and plan for potential crises before they occur.

JT's crisis management experience includes the following:

- In the days and months following a tragic accident in which a window fell out of the Chicago headquarters of a national company and cost a young mother her life, we worked with the organization on everything from employee communications and media relations to maneuvering through the complicated issues with the City's Building Department.
- JT assisted a local village in managing a controversy over alleged racial profiling by police officers. The issue drew intense national and local media coverage, requiring us to maintain a balance between messages that played well locally and nationally, as residents of the suburban community tended to be far more skeptical of the claims, which grew out of a labor dispute with white police officers.
- We have worked with a number of hospitals through the years on crises including infection control incidents, Medicaid fraud investigations and accreditation issues.
- JT helped a national higher education institution respond to a class-action lawsuit filed in Canada by a small group of disgruntled students who sought to blame the school for their own inattention to their studies and thus "win the legal lottery." Our efforts included mobilizing students, administrators and alumni to speak to the news media and provincial government on behalf of the education offered by this leading for-profit higher education institution.
- In the minutes following a deadly explosion at an Indiana steel plant, and with "news choppers" hovering overhead, JT dispatched a team of crisis communication professionals to the scene to help this client disseminate timely and accurate information to the news media and local government officials.

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- JT worked with a major Chicago law firm to manage a sexual harassment claim by a former associate against one of the firm's senior partners. We provided counsel on appropriate tactics and developed messaging to put the incident in the proper perspective for the news media and the firm's other partners, associates and administrative staff.
- During Fourth of July weekend 2004, an incident occurred on one of the escalators at a major Denver sport stadium. About 35 people, including children, were injured and/or hospitalized. JT was called into this situation by legal counsel about three weeks later to help the escalator company manage the fallout from this crisis when the company realized that media attention, driven in part by other parties seeking to shift blame, was not going away.
- JT represented a major national hotel chain in responding to a salmonella infection incident in one of its restaurants. One of our most successful tactics was retaining a respected former state public health director to provide his expert counsel to the hotel and to help assure the public that the hotel was doing everything possible to investigate the incident and take whatever corrective actions might be needed.
- JT was retained by a public television station, to provide crisis communications counsel when the station discovered an embezzlement of funds prior to the start of an on-air fund-raising drive. We developed key messages and materials, and conducted media outreach to get out in front of the issue, effectively containing the crisis within a 24-hour news cycle.

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