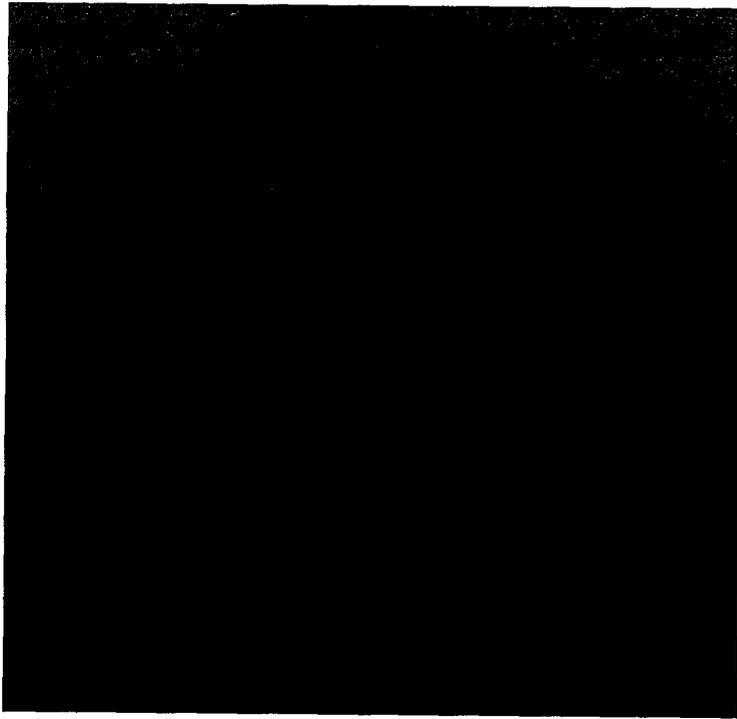


SOMARC's Practical Guide Series

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ICAL PR

Crisis Communications

THE
FUTURES
GROUP

Practical PR

Crisis Communications

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Practical PR: Crisis Communications

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Getting Prepared

Introduction

This booklet will help you think through elements essential to communicating about a crisis, which will be a large part of your job should a crisis ever occur. No crisis is fun, but being prepared for one is half of the battle.

Undoubtedly the best way to manage crises is to prevent them. But this is not always possible. You know better than anyone what the potential emergencies or crises related to your program could be.

Smart marketing managers know that it makes sense to have a crisis plan in place that has been well thought out and created in a proactive environment -- instead of reactive. The word "management" in crisis management refers to the ability to manage your program's *response* to a crisis -- not to your ability to manage the crisis. We at SOMARC hope you will use this booklet to anticipate and plan for a crisis. Then we will all continue to work to prevent a crisis from occurring.

Crisis Rules of Thumb

You can never anticipate a crisis 100 percent. And you can't manage it in advance. However, a crisis or emergency does not have to completely disrupt your program activities. The following basic guidelines can help you effectively manage a crisis situation.

1. Define and isolate the real problem

You need to remain focused on the long-term horizon. Don't get bogged down and distracted by dealing with all the details. Although your first instinct may be to survive the immediate, try to overcome it. Turn your energies to the larger picture and delegate the minutiae to others around you, or to members of your "crisis team."

2. Identify and activate your crisis team (define your team in advance of trouble)

When an emergency or crisis hits, you need a team of individuals around you who can devote themselves to the problems at hand. Your team will probably consist of the people in your office and maybe your public relations agency. You can and should also rely on support from SOMARC's PR Director in Washington. If the situation is extremely serious, you may want to involve outside agencies or counsel trained in crisis management.

3. Identify and prepare your spokesperson

To provide consistency and avoid media confusion about whom to contact, you should appoint one program spokesperson. This person should be at a senior level and should not have to focus on other duties during the crisis. Be sure to have a range of other experts you can call on to handle specific subjects. If at all possible, provide media training for your spokesperson.

4. Centralize and control the information that is being disseminated to the public

Keep your message consistent and clear -- this is critical. If your messages are too complicated, they could lead to misinformation or confusion among your audiences. Appoint only one spokesperson, backed up by experts, as appropriate.

5. Don't give in to combative instincts

Although your first urge may be to fight back aggressively, resist any compulsive urges until you have thought your situation through. Regardless of the circumstances surrounding the crisis, don't forget -- if you lose control of yourself, you lose control of the situation.

6. Understand the media's needs and perspective

Each type of media will be looking at your story from a slightly different angle. Local reporters don't treat stories the same way national reporters do. TV and radio reporters have different deadlines and needs than print reporters. It is important that your spokesperson understands the different requirements these media have and can anticipate and provide the appropriate information.

7. Communicate to all of your key audiences and maintain good relationships

In addition to the media, it is important to communicate with your employees, pharmaceutical suppliers, distributors, USAID, the government health agency/ministry officials, Advisory Board and others with whom the program is affiliated. Remember, you must take control of delivering the messages to all of these audiences. You don't want them to get the wrong information from someone else.

8. Be prepared to make short-term sacrifices for long-term gain

While this may not be the right strategy in every case, the goal is to contain the problem quickly and halt any erosion of public confidence in your program and, more importantly, the contraceptive methods on the market. Short-term sacrifices may result in unanticipated financial drains, but in the long run, you will find it will have been worth the sacrifice.

Keep in Mind...

The following are important points to keep in mind during any type of emergency situation:

- Be calm when talking to the media or the public
- The designated spokesperson is the only one who should be speaking to the media
- Other SOMARC program employees, including the receptionist, are strictly prohibited from making any

Important Phone Numbers

statements to the media or releasing any information about the situation. You will need to remind them of this during the situation. All inquiries should be forwarded to you or the approved spokesperson.

- When an emergency involves the police or fire department, it is probably on public record and additional information requests should be referred to the fire chief or investigation officer.
- Keep a log of all media calls. Record what was said to each editor and reporter after the interview.
- Keep a log of all of your actions during the crisis. The document may be valuable to you later.

You will need to have a list handy of the people to contact in the event of a crisis. This list will probably include your contacts at The Futures Group, USAID, the Department/Ministry of Health, and ultimately, pharmaceutical partners and distributors.

Crisis can strike at any time of day or night. Be sure to include a home and work phone number and address on your list of key people to be contacted.

You might want to detach this sheet from the plan and keep it somewhere very handy in the event of an emergency. You may also want to make sure that your SOMARC program employees have this phone list in case they need to help execute a plan in your absence.

Name	_____
Title	_____
Work Phone	_____
Fax	_____
Home Phone	_____
Address	_____

Name _____
Title _____
Work Phone _____
Fax _____
Home Phone _____
Address _____

Name _____
Title _____
Work Phone _____
Fax _____
Home Phone _____
Address _____

Name _____
Title _____
Work Phone _____
Fax _____
Home Phone _____
Address _____

Name _____
Title _____
Work Phone _____
Fax _____
Home Phone _____
Address _____

Name _____
Title _____
Work Phone _____
Fax _____
Home Phone _____
Address _____

Conducting Crisis Interviews with the Media

STAY CALM Reporters can smell panic the way a shark can smell blood in the water A nervous and panicky spokesperson makes the media suspect that maybe that person is not telling the whole story

- Do not grant interviews until the emergency situation is under control
- Stick to the approved statement Don't let a reporter goad you into saying more
- Answer questions honestly and only answer questions you are asked Again, be careful not to volunteer information
- Stage interviews in a safe area, away from the crisis scene Never let a TV reporter interview you or the spokesperson with a flaming building in the background
- Don't go into the interview cold Get a basic idea of what the reporter wants to ask and plan your responses in advance Know the facts before you speak
- Request that newspaper reporters repeat back any direct quotes for accuracy
- Be accessible to the press If you grant a newspaper or TV station an interview, you are obligated to give equal time to the other members of the press who are there for legitimate reasons

After you have prepared a list of key message points to make when speaking with the media, you also need to prepare for the questions they are likely to ask you Anticipate the worst and you'll be prepared to do your best Remember, stick to simple, clear, concise messages Use the forum to answer questions as an opportunity to get your key points in as often as possible

Handling Media Questions Effectively

HANDLING MEDIA QUESTIONS

DO:

- Rehearse your answers, but don't sound like they are memorized
- Incorporate key message points into your answers to media questions
- Ask a reporter to repeat or clarify a question if you don't understand it
- Correct untrue statements and back them up with facts

DON'T

- Lose your composure
- Repeat a negative question -- turn it around
- Speak negatively about other people or organizations
- Use jargon and acronyms
- Be wishy-washy Phrases like "I think" or "I believe" weaken your position

Practice Your Message Points

Once you have prepared your key message points, you now need to practice being in an interview situation before you participate in one. If it is possible, you should try to receive some crisis media training, from professionals, or perhaps your local public relations agency.

If you don't have the benefit of practicing with professionals, don't worry. Ask a friend or business colleague to grill you with questions. Then, reverse the roles so that you play the interviewer. Use a video recorder and play back your mock interviews. If you don't have a recorder, you can also practice in front of the mirror. Pay close attention to and critique your body language. Watch

What Will the Media Ask?

your posture, eye movements and gestures. Do you come across as honest, open, believable? Determine what your body language says and make the necessary adjustments to convey an effective image.

During a crisis, you can boil the media's interest down to three specific questions:

1. What's the main point of the story?
2. Who is responsible or who is to blame?
3. Who will fix the problem or pay for it?

Remember, centralize and control the information flow as soon as possible. It is critical that your spokespeople are able to provide the media with facts that relate to the three questions above. As soon as information becomes available to you, incorporate it into your key messages and answers.

Practice Makes Perfect -- Be Prepared

Many corporations do a test run of their crisis plans to ensure that they are prepared in the event of a serious crisis. While you may not have a whole day to devote to running through potentially negative situations in detail, you may want to verbally rehearse the steps with your employees and perhaps involve your public relations agency, if you have one, in drafting your specific crisis plan.

REMEMBER -- Emergency situations are best handled by people who are prepared, who have a plan and can implement the plan quickly. Success also depends on being part of a team and making sure that each team member knows his or her place in the chain of command. If you can study your finalized Crisis Communications Plan and internalize the steps in the event of a crisis procedure, you will be able to help put the best face on a potentially negative situation.

Crisis Communications Plan Outline

Any number of events can slow or stop progress of a SOMARC program. Even the best-prepared programs have been caught off guard by crises that couldn't be anticipated. To ensure the program will be able to manage a crisis when it occurs, please take the time to complete this outline. It is designed to help programs

- organize the facts about the good parts of the program so they will be ready to be communicated when needed,
- assess where your organization might be vulnerable,
- identify staff responsibilities in a crisis situation and
- determine the procedures to follow in the event of a crisis

If you complete this procedural outline now for each SOMARC product you market, when a crisis strikes you will have more time for strategic planning and action when it really counts

TIPS FOR MANAGING CRISIS

- Define the real problem
- Identify a team
- Centralize control of information
- Resist combative instincts, when at a loss go back to the higher purpose of the SOMARC program and your organization
- Understand the media
- Consider all audiences/publics
- Make short-term sacrifices for long-term gain
- Assess the value of controversy
- Be responsible communicators
- Be ready

Assess Organizational Vulnerabilities

Take a look at your organization to see what, if anything, is in conflict with what you say your SOMARC goals are and identify the strengths of your work. Answer these questions. As you do so, identify any conflicts of interest or areas which might look suspicious.

How many employees do you have? _____

How many facilities? _____

Besides the SOMARC project, list other products and/or services you provide and the number of people each project serves

Project Products Clients	Purpose	Number People Served
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

What is your CYP per product?

Pills _____

IUDs _____

Condoms _____

Spermicides _____

Norplant _____

Injectables _____

Total _____

What are your gross sales and total profit?

Total sales last year _____

Operating costs _____

Total profit _____

How long have you been in business? _____

What is Your Image?

What is current awareness among consumers about your program and each product?

What is current awareness among the pharmacists, physicians, midwives, other important members of the trade about your program and each product?

Relationships

Identify contacts in organizations that you have which might come in handy

Government agencies and personnel

Agency

Individual/Title

Politicians

Organization

Individual/Title

Business people

Company

Individual/Title

Nonprofit organizations

Organization

Individual/Title

Trade and professional associations

Organization

Individual/Title

Academia

Institution

Individual/Title

Church/religious organizations

Organization

Individual/Title

Crisis Potential

What could possibly go wrong? Consider...

- Your billboards are set on fire
- Attacks on contraceptives for promoting promiscuity
- Attack on the Pill for causing HIV infection
- Product failure
- Death due to OC because contraindications were not explained
- Religious organizations name your program in their new advertising campaign

List whatever has potential to be a problem

Notification

Develop statements about how key people within the organization and associated with the project will be notified. Identify who will do the notifying and who will be notified.

Who will notify staff?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify the board?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify USAID?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify the Futures Group?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify the Department/Ministry of Health?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify pharmaceutical partners?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify distributors?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify clients?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Who will notify advertising and PR agencies?

People to be notified

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

Responsibilities

Other people to be notified:

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

_____ Phone _____

By whom?

Who will be team leader?

Responsibilities Coordinate activities of the team

Reports to _____

Who will be responsible for public relations?

Responsibilities Coordinates all communications activities to internal and external audiences

Who will be responsible for customer relations and changes in marketing programs?

Responsibilities Manages provision of information to customers, and exploring what needs have changed that require modifications in marketing activities

Who will be the product specialist?

Responsibilities Tracks matters related to storage, product testing

Who will be the legal counsel?

Responsibilities Handles issues related to liability and government regulations

Who will be the regulatory specialist?

Responsibilities Manages relations with government agencies

Who is the scientific advisor?

Responsibilities Provides advice on medical and scientific issues and advises on relations with the scientific/medical community

Who will be spokespersons for the Project?

Responsibilities Speaks to the print and broadcast media, making all statements emanating from the project

**Early Alert
System**

Who will be technical spokespersons?

Responsibilities Speak publicly for the program providing perspectives that will represent or appeal to different sectors, enhance credibility Consider the following types of spokespersons as appropriate politicians, doctors, pharmacists, product users, celebrities, Ministry of Health or other government representatives

Who will be responsible for reading the paper and clipping relevant articles?

Do you need a press clipping service to clip and highlight relevant articles that appear in the media?

Who will order it?

When will it start?

Who will see the clips?

What else will let you know when things might be going wrong?

Relationships to Build

With whom should relationships be built who could help address vulnerable areas? Consider politicians, women s groups, health professionals, church representatives, business people, academics, people who understand the technicalities of contraceptives, celebrities, members of the media

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

What do you do to inform these people What could they do to help? How can you support them?

Key Publications

What media reaches your target audience?

What relationships do you have with writers, editors and reporters of those publications?

Where do relationships need to be developed?

Who will make contacts with each individual?

Schedule of Things to Do

Here is a list of things to consider doing. Some can be done in advance of a problem, others will need to be done when a problem emerges.

Spokesperson identification and invitation -- Who has already agreed to be spokespersons? Who else needs to be invited? Who will invite them and by when?

Media training -- Do you or your spokespersons need it? Should they have a general training to learn how to communicate about the project and effectively talk with the media now? (See *Practical PR Interviews*)

Clearances -- What is the clearance process for materials and messages in a crisis situation?

To Do List

Who will...

By when...

- Write media statements

- Prepare mailing lists (customer, distributor, etc)

- Prepare media lists

- Print materials or photocopy

- Distribute materials

- Brief staff

- Predetermine audiences to contact

- Develop communications objectives, position statements

- Write background information, articles, speeches

- Brief media

- Inventory news release paper

- Investigate facilities and prepare logistics checklist for news conference

- Other

Rebuilding After the Crisis

A crisis is never a pleasant experience, but after the dust has settled, you can take steps to turn the crisis into a positive, learning experience

You need to go beyond assessing just the program's financial losses. How has the crisis affected the opinions of your key publics? What is their perception of the SOMARC program? What do they now think or believe about available contraceptive methods?

Conduct a Survey

You may want to conduct a survey among key audiences to gauge the public opinion damage of the crisis. You may be able to use pharmacies and clinics, for example, to distribute a public opinion survey. Once you have tabulated the results, send the survey findings to your key audiences along with a cover letter that outlines any changes in policy or new procedures that have been created in response to their concerns.

Stay Involved

Even though your crisis has abated, the public--and the media -- are now sensitized to the situation. Your consumers and the media need to receive reassuring messages about the SOMARC program and your products. Use your distribution channels to communicate to your audiences.

Keep a Log

Keeping a log of the crisis can be an important tool. It could be converted into a report showing how the program successfully responded to and handled the problem. This document can present your decision-making and actions throughout the crisis and can demonstrate the program's accessibility and openness. This final report might be relevant to distribute selectively to the media and your key audiences.

In Conclusion

Thinking through a crisis communications plan requires an investment of time that will pay off greatly, should a problem ever occur. We hope this booklet has given you some of the tools to get started. Good luck!