

**There's a crisis, the media are in pursuit and you need to react. Follow these guidelines to minimise negative press. Better still; call Southern PR for advice, support and effective crisis PR management.**

## **1. TAKE THE INITIATIVE**

Do not try to maintain a low profile. The incident/accident/crisis will be subject to speculation in the media long before any official or semi official enquiry gets going.

Remember that how a company behaves in the initial period is vital to goodwill - and business, both now and long into the future!

A company must take the initiative. No news (and "no comment") will always be interpreted as bad news or worse, guilt.

## **2. KEEP IN CONTACT WITH THE MEDIA**

Dialogue should start when times are good. Good media relations in good times can mitigate the effect of a crisis. It will put any bad news in context.

## **3. SPEAK THE TRUTH**

Journalists are better at detecting lying than company spokespersons are at lying. And anyway, telling the truth is always easier in the long run.

## **4. TREAT THE MEDIA WITH RESPECT**

The incident is a genuine news item. It probably irks the company to realise it a bad news story will get more coverage than any positive achievement.

Nevertheless, the journalist has a job to do and you should not assume that he/she is antagonistic.

The reporter generally wants to report the facts, not to pass judgement on the company. Give the reporter what he/she needs then the reporter can move onto another story. If you can't supply the information now, take contact details and promise to supply at an agreed time, then meet the deadline!

If you have a camera, shoot your own pictures.

As reporters make enquiries, give them all pertinent information and advise them regarding photographs. Do not force them to seek it out for themselves.

## **5. DO NOT SPECULATE**

A company must only deal in facts. It must assume that everything it says will be quoted. Avoid "off the record" without exception.

## **6. DO NOT ASK FOR A RETRACTION**

Misquoting will frequently happen, particularly in a crisis situation. By then, the damage is done. Retraction generally adds to the story's development.

## **7. MAKE SURE INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS ARE GOOD**

Good internal communications generally indicate good external communications. Your people need to know what's going on if there is to be any consistency of message.

## **8. KEEP YOUR COMMUNICATIONS SIMPLE**

The media don't know as much about the company as the company does. In a crisis situation, a company should say as much as necessary and no more. Do not answer questions that are not asked.

Avoid jargon. The journalist a company deals with in a crisis may not be the industry or business journalist the company is usually in touch with. This person may not understand your industry-speak.

## **9. THINK OF THE HEADLINE**

This concentrates the mind and condenses the message. The main facts must be communicated first. As with all communication, the sender must put herself in the position of the receiver.

## **10. THINK ABOUT THE QUESTIONS**

Similarly, you must consider the questions a journalist will ask - who, what, when, why, where, how? Any press release must also answer these questions.

## **11. THINK IN TERMS OF PEOPLE**

News is about people. Facts, statistics and stories must be personalised.

## **12. MONITOR ALL MEDIA COVERAGE**

Only by keeping tabs on every release, every phone conversation, every report, article, comment and news item, can a company hope to retain some control

over the story. When the media makes a factual error they should report it at once.

Communication is continuous dialogue. Keeping tabs teaches the company how media relations work and what works better.

### **13. FOLLOW UP**

The story isn't over when the crisis ends. The company should write and thank the media, provide follow-up information, maintain the dialogue.

### **14. GET TRAINING**

Media training will make your next unplanned media experience easier and more effective. Call Southern PR for effective training.

You'll learn how the media works and how you can make it work for you.