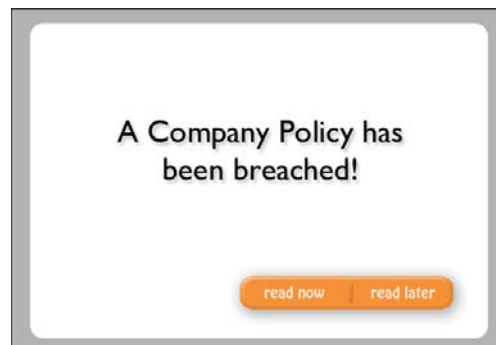


Internal Crisis Communications

1. Remind people at least once a year about the policies and processes
2. Set up crisis communications channels in advance
3. Use internal social media to listen to your employees
4. Set up target audiences in advance
5. Carry out scenario planning and plan messages ahead
6. Make and communicate decisions quickly
7. Communicate face-to-face
8. Temperature check
9. Offer answers to employees' questions
10. Manage 'data deluge'
11. Involve all levels of the organization
12. Simplify and repeat key messages
13. Focus on employee well being
14. Attempt(!) to focus employee social media discussion internally
15. After the crisis



Nothing tests your organization's internal communications function more than a crisis. By its nature, a crisis strikes at the things that matter to you most – your organization's reputation, your bottom line, and your customer relations. And it usually happens when you least expect it. Effective communication, internally and externally, is one of the keys to reducing the negative impact of a crisis – and to capitalizing on any opportunities it presents.

Why internal crisis communications are important

Your employees are perhaps your most important 'stakeholders' during a crisis. Poor internal communications can undermine all your efforts to manage a crisis externally, and the lack of trust, low morale, employee turnover and poor customer relations that result can compound the issues you face.

So see your employees as your front line to the world. Keep them informed, up-to-date and involved in your organization's response to the crisis.

Good employee communications can avoid a crisis in the first place

Crisis seem to come from nowhere. However, very often they are the result of bad practices or issues which have been smoldering for some time. Your leadership team may not have known about them but your employees almost certainly will have.

Tip 1 - Remind people at least once a year about the policies and processes

For example, tell them about your health and safety, security and financial policies and processes and what they should do if they have an issue.

Use Screensaver messages, desktop alerts and on-line forums. Screensaver messages are a great visual way to raise the profile of important messages. Think legal compliance, financial compliance, health and safety. Use a compliance desktop alert to ensure that employees read and acknowledge important messages. And an on-line forum that allows anonymous posts can let employees 'blow the whistle' and bring smothering issues to the surface so that you can address them before they become a crisis.



Tools = Desktop Alerts, Screensaver Messaging and Internal Social Media

Plan ahead

Planning is the key to effective internal crisis communication.

Tip 2 - Set up crisis communications channels in advance

Make sure your crisis communications channels are in place before the crisis hits. The middle of a crisis is not the time to be asking your IT team to set up a new discussion forum or be training your employees to use a communications channel.

Make sure the crisis communications channels you choose are easy to use

Have back up crisis communications channels available. Depending on the nature of the crisis, some channels may not be effective so build in some redundancy.

Use Message reporting to view which employees have read the messages and identify 'gaps' in your coverage. These gaps may indicate that your computer network is down in a particular area and that you need to find other ways to communicate with some employees.

Set up 'sleeping' discussion forums and blogs in advance, target the employees you want to reach and the rights you want to give them (e.g. view, read, comment), and choose moderators. Then just activate the discussion forum or blog when you need it.

Tip 3 - Use internal social media to listen to your employees

Some organizations shy away from setting up social media channels internally as they are concerned they will turn into an 'on-line complaints desk'. This can be a valid concern. However, you cannot turn off employees' dissatisfaction just by refusing to hear it and many crises start as small, smoldering problems that people have chosen to ignore. Social media are a good way to bring these issues to the fore. While they may create more work in the short term, they will let you keep a finger on the internal pulse and respond to issues early.

Tip 4 - Set up target audiences in advance

The SnapComms internal communications channels let you target employee groups. This can be based on existing network settings (based on MS Active Directory) and/or you can use a registration desktop alert to allow employees to specify their information requirements (which are automatically translated into targeting groups within the content management system).

Set up a crisis management team as one of your target groups. So when your crisis strikes, you can communicate with the team quickly. Consider setting up a secure discussion forum for the crisis team to use to share ideas during the crisis. Both features will help you respond to the crisis quickly.

Tip 5 - Carry out scenario planning and plan messages ahead

The SnapComms content management system lets you to set up different messages in advance target them to the relevant employees and store them without publishing them. So when a crisis hits, you can update the relevant messages and publish them to your targeted employees within minutes, using a range of channels: screensaver messages, desktop alerts, scrolling newsfeeds, discussion forums and blogs.

Tools = Desktop Alerts, Internal Social Media and Targeting features

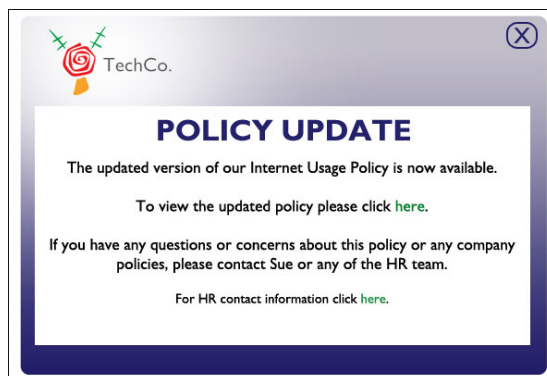
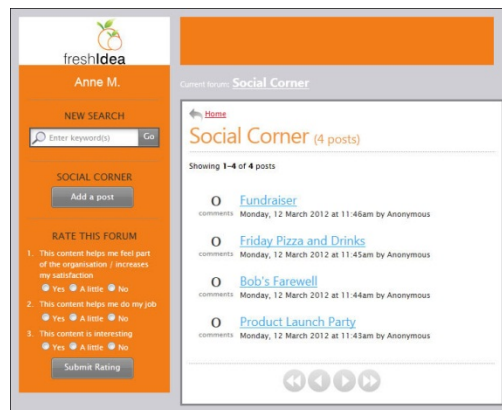
When a crisis hits

Tip 6 - Make and communicate decisions quickly.

Fast, effective decisions are critical during a crisis. But making the right decision at the right time often means bringing together busy people in different time zones. An online discussion forum can help here. Set it up in advance and activate it quickly when you need to. Use the targeting, security and authentication features to restrict access. Delete or archive the messages when you no longer need them.

As soon as you have made your decisions, tell your employees. If they understand your decisions and the reasons for them, they are likely to get behind them.

Tell your employees first Whenever possible during a crisis communicate internally before you spread the word externally. Open, timely communication with your employees will help build trust and make them willing to represent your organization and support the way it is handling the crisis.



Tip 7 - Communicate face-to-face

Face-to-face communication can be one of the most effective ways of communicating during a crisis. However, small, personal gatherings tend to be more appropriate than large 'town hall' meetings. Use the RSVP desktop alert tool to offer different session times and gather employees' questions and concerns before the meetings.



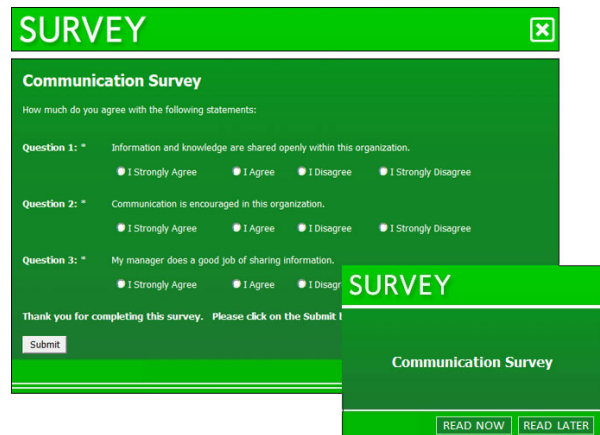
Tip 8 – Temperature check

Use pop-up desktop surveys to do a 'temperature check' and gather employees' feedback quickly and easily as you respond to the crisis. Desktop delivery and pop-up recurrence options let you repeat and escalate the message, to encourage employees to reply.

Internal discussion forums let you gather qualitative feedback. Employees may be reluctant to disagree openly with the way you are managing the crisis but, if you let them voice their opinion online (anonymously, if needed), they are likely to be more candid. You may not want to hear some of their comments but they will give you a valuable point-of-view. (Just make sure your social media channels are secure.)

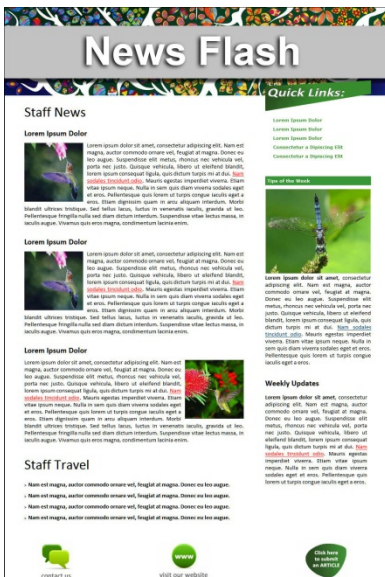
Tip 9 - Offer answers to employees' questions

An interactive Q&A forum can be a simple, effective way to provide answers to concerned employees. You may not be able to predict all the questions they may have, as the situation may be changing fast, so use this online forum as an evolving FAQ.



Tip 10 - Manage 'data deluge'

'Information overload' is a problem in most organizations at the best of times. During a crisis, managing this issue is more critical than ever. Employees may become confused about where to find correct, up-to-date information and important messages may be buried in the deluge of data.



Shield employees from low value, mass internal communications. You may wish to defer all communication that is non-critical. Or consolidate 'lower value' updates into a 'one-stop magazine'.

Managing information overload helps increase the chances that employees will notice your internal crisis communications. The SnapComms acknowledgement desktop alert also lets you check whether employees have read and acknowledged important messages. Use the up-to-the-minute reporting tools to see which messages employees have read and where you may need to use other channels to get your message across.

Tools = Desktop Alerts, Internal Newsletter tool and Message reporting

Tip 11 – Involve all levels of the organisation

Make sure your leaders are seen to be leading

The more visible your executives are during the crisis and the more open they are about what is happening, the better. An executive blog can be an effective way to communicate during a crisis and show the executive team leading from the front. If face-to-face meetings are not possible, desktop video messages can be a fast, personal alternative.

Involve your line managers

Employees will look to their direct manager for information about the crisis and what it means for them. So make sure you give your managers the information they need. The urgency of the crisis may force you to update employees directly, rather than 'cascading' information through your managers in the way you usually would. However, there are other ways to support your managers. Consider

using a discussion forum for them to ask questions and share concerns. Or set them up as a targeted group and use tools like desktop alerts and scrolling newsfeeds to remind them about the important role they play in leading their employees through the crisis.

Tip 12 – Simplify and repeat key messages

Keep your messages short and simple

Crises breed concern and concern breeds short attention spans. So keep your messages short and simple. Use simple terms, short sentences and features like headings and bold type to highlight your main points.

Repeat messages using a range of internal communications channels

A crisis can be a crazy, distressing time. Different people absorb information in different ways and at different times, so repeat your important messages regularly, using a range of channels. For example, consider using:

- Desktop alerts for fast 'cut-through';
- Face-to-face meetings, information hotlines and discussion forums to communicate, listen and give more context;
- Screensaver messaging, scrolling news feeds and Internal Newsletter articles to remind and reinforce;
- Helpdesks, Q&A spots and the intranet for more information;
- SMS messaging and audio-conferencing for employees without computers.

Tip 13 - Focus on employee well being

Some crises put employees' health and safety at risk. Addressing this risk should be a high priority. Until you can reassure employees that your organization is taking appropriate steps to deal with the crisis, they are unlikely to be able to focus effectively on anything else.



The Swine flu pandemics have been recent examples.

Screensaver messages can be a great way to focus on the precautions the organization is taking and to encourage employees to 'do their bit'. Create visuals that have impact. Highly visual messages help reassure employees that the organization is prepared.

Tools = Screensaver Messaging

Tip 14- Attempt (!) to focus employee social media discussion internally

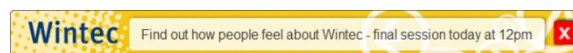
Due to social media, messages can now spread faster and wider than ever before, both inside and outside your organization. They can be subjective, distracting, hard to manage and inaccurate. In fact, social media can spread panic as effectively as they reassure.

One way to limit the negative effects of social media is to provide your own social channels and to restrict their use to within your organization. While this will not stop employees posting on external sites, it will reduce this and concentrate the debate inside your organization. Any external postings employees do make are more likely to be accurate and support the organization's response to the crisis.

Use internal social media channels and let employees have their say in a secure way where you can follow the postings and correct any misinformation. Unlike email which can end up in the hands of people outside your organization, these channels are designed to keep internal messages exactly that – internal.

Tools = Internal Social Media

Tools = Desktop Alerts and Desktop Newsfeeds



Tip 15- After the crisis

Get back to 'business as usual' as soon as you can. Focus your internal communications back on the things that matter to your organization – your strategy, how you are performing, new projects, the good work your employees are doing.

Recognize how your employees have contributed during the crisis.

Use communications channels such as screensaver messages or the Internal Newsletter on the intranet to thank your employees and profile those who have played an important role in dealing with the crisis.

Lighten up

If you have been controlling some of your channels more strictly than usual during the crisis (e.g. moderating social media more closely or editing the Internal Newsletter more tightly), lighten up on the controls.

Wipe the slate clean

Remove old messages that only serve to remind employees of the difficult time your organization has been through. Replace screensaver messages, remove old discussion forums or archive old posts. Your focus needs to be on the present and the future, not the past.

Learn from the crisis – and start planning for the next one

Every crisis brings opportunities to learn. So take the time to review. What worked well? And what could you have done better? Use this information to refine your internal crisis communications plan. Review your scenarios, update your draft messages and improve your internal crisis communications channels.

Related resources

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