Using Technology to Implement and Activate Your Crisis Management Plan
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In these fast-paced, dynamic times, the task of effectively preparing for the next corporate crisis can seem daunting. And unfortunately, it’s only getting worse: Over the past decade, the number of headline-making crises that occur in a given year has risen by more than 80 percent for corporations. This means that your organization is likelier to encounter a large-scale, very public crisis with every passing year.

It’s no wonder that there is a growing focus on and investment in crisis management across nearly every industry. Increasingly, digital crisis management is becoming a key part of corporate crisis preparedness. This isn’t only the case in the IT field or in organizations with a large online presence; today digital technology touches nearly every business in both positive and negative ways. And it must be a part of your crisis planning.

In this guide, we take a deeper dive into the role of digital technology in our modern corporate crisis landscape, as well as how technology can also be an invaluable tool for implementing and activating your crisis management plan.
Digital crisis management refers to the efforts of an organization to prepare for and manage any online incident or situation that could threaten the company’s reputation and potentially impact its earning potential. Digital crisis management is an offshoot of traditional crisis management that focuses on digital platforms, such as social media sites and applications, blogs, and news and opinion websites.

Digital technology has significantly condensed the typical crisis management timeline. Years ago, organizations only had to contend with the 24-hour news cycle; if a crisis occurred, the company’s crisis team had a bit of time to carefully consider the situation and determine how to best respond.

Today the news of a crisis can spread around the globe, and to millions of internet users, in a matter of minutes. We see this play out all the time as big-name corporations struggle to cope with fast-moving news and harsh social media backlash.

United Airlines’ April 2017 scandal is a good reminder of how quickly news can travel. When officials dragged a passenger off an overbooked flight, his fellow passengers whipped out their smartphones and began recording. The videos were shared innumerable times, and outrage quickly grew online. Instead of apologizing profusely, which could have helped people move on, the airline issued a statement from CEO Oscar Munoz that apologized only for “having to re-accommodate...customers.” Then Munoz issued a letter to United employees that described the passenger as “disruptive and belligerent.” Of course, this further fueled public anger, and United faced an unprecedented backlash to an event that may have been neutralized with a heartfelt, timely apology.

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Another high-profile digital crisis also made waves in 2017, illustrating the sheer power of digital communication. Pepsi released an ad that critics said borrowed and commercialized imagery from the Black Lives Matter movement and therefore trivialized protests against the killing of black people by police. Fury grew quickly online, and many people demanded that Pepsi remove the ad and apologize. As a testament to the power of social media, the beverage company pulled the ad and issued an apologetic statement—all within a single day of the ad’s premiere on YouTube.

As these examples illustrate, news and outrage travel fast in our digital world. That means your organization can no longer take its time in crafting the perfect response once a crisis has already struck; deciding on a position and drafting statements takes too long in our era of instantaneous news. That is why preparedness is now more important than ever.
As the stakes of a single crisis grow higher every year, it becomes increasingly necessary for organizations to prepare for the worst. Unfortunately, only 49 percent of organizations have established a “playbook” for crisis scenarios, which is a key step in becoming crisis-ready.

A surprising number of companies that do have a crisis plan in place are still using an archaic approach that is not effective for today’s fast-moving crises.

Traditionally, crisis management plans were stored and supplied in two ways:

1. “Analog” solutions, in which the crisis management plan is printed out and stored in a three-ring binder in someone’s office or in a common area

2. Technology solutions, in which the plan is digitally stored on the company’s intranet or on SharePoint

Both of these methods create serious problems. First, a hard-copy plan is difficult to access and to reference during a crisis. Several members of the crisis team may need it at once, which slows response. And more time is wasted while people search through lengthy documents to find the right information for the crisis at hand.

In addition, hard-copy plans are difficult and time-consuming to update. Depending on the size and nature of your organization, you may need to update your crisis plan once a month or more, which would quickly become expensive and impractical. If the company adopts multiple hard-copy plans in order to improve accessibility, updating them becomes even more challenging. To make matters worse, there is no way to easily verify that all relevant employees are referencing the most recent version of the plan.

Depending on the size and nature of your organization, you may need to update your crisis plan once a month or more, which would quickly become expensive and impractical. If the company adopts multiple hard-copy plans in order to improve accessibility, updating them becomes even more challenging.
Digitizing your plans onto a platform such as SharePoint or the corporate intranet is a step in the right direction, but this approach still has several troublesome shortcomings. First, files that are uploaded to these systems are usually only accessible using a laptop or desktop computer, meaning employees must be at their desks when a crisis hits. If the power or internet service fails during a crisis, the plan would be completely inaccessible, leaving your people uncertain of how to proceed.

Both hard-copy and SharePoint/intranet-based plans also present another problem: When a crisis occurs, people do not naturally think of rushing to a bulky binder or the corporate intranet to determine how to respond. Instead, they first ask themselves, “Do I have my cellphone, keys, and wallet?” Only then do they start considering, “What should I do now?”

An ideal crisis management approach would provide key information to employees in a reliable, practical, and intuitive way. Luckily, organizations today can leverage modern technology to move away from traditional crisis management plans and create truly actionable, highly accessible crisis playbooks.
Since the introduction of the iPhone in 2007, mobile technology has grown to touch nearly every aspect of a consumer’s life. Today individuals can use their phones to instantly access work and personal email, stream music, make restaurant reservations, secure a rental car, file taxes, get directions, and even learn how to rebuild an engine. And they can do all of this at any time, from any location with network coverage or WiFi. We are becoming increasingly connected to our mobile devices, relying on them for new functions all the time.

In fact, the proliferation of mobile devices is part of the reason behind the growth of digital crises that are plaguing organizations like yours. Today 69 percent of U.S. adults use at least one social media platform, and most access these sites using their smartphones.\(^6\) Seventy-two percent of smartphone users read news on their devices, and an impressive 55 percent even opt to get breaking news alerts pushed to their devices.\(^7\)

These statistics are proof that the real-time nature of mobile devices is helping accelerate the rate at which digital crises spread. Whether your next crisis is news that an executive has broken the law or an inflammatory tweet from one of your employees, you can rest assured that people will hear about it quickly.

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**Today individuals can use their phones to instantly access work and personal email, stream music, make restaurant reservations, secure a rental car, file taxes, get directions, and even learn how to rebuild an engine.**

However, mobile technology isn’t just a driving force behind the growth of digital crises; it is also an incredible tool for preventing, halting, and resolving them. Today a growing number of organizations are recognizing the potential of app-based mobile technology for implementing and activating their crisis management plans, doing away with the archaic, unreliable methods of the past.
Going Mobile for Crisis Management

A mobile crisis management solution does away with the limitations of hard-copy and intranet- or SharePoint-based plans. An app-based platform not only digitizes your plans, but it turns them into digital playbooks in a platform that also enables real-time communication with the crisis team; push notifications and alerts; and fingertip access to draft statements, checklists, scenario plans, and more.

A mobile crisis management solution enables organizations to benefit from the power of mobile technology, putting key information into the hands of their people during the moments they need it the most. Reimagining crisis management plans in this way offers several important benefits:

### Instant access to relevant information

A crisis management app provides one-touch access to the information that people need when a crisis strikes. This includes scenario planning, draft statements, and activation protocols. This saves time initiating a crisis response, empowering your crisis team to react quickly and nimbly.

### Real-time activation

It takes some time to activate a hard-copy or intranet-based plan, because people have to physically access the plan and then search for the information they need. An app-based plan can be activated instantaneously, as soon as a crisis hits, which enables your organization to respond quickly and effectively.

### Anytime/anywhere access

As we explored above, today the vast majority of people are closely connected to their mobile devices. Even if members of your crisis team or other employees are away from their desks or on the road when a crisis strikes, a mobile app will give them immediate access to the information they need, right on their smartphones. This means that, during a crisis, your organization won’t lose precious time while your crisis team rushes to track down your plan at the office or on the corporate intranet or SharePoint.

A mobile crisis management solution does away with the limitations of hard-copy and intranet - or SharePoint-based plans.
Customizable permission levels

Many organizations benefit from the ability to customize which crisis management information each employee, department, or facility receives. With hard-copy plans, managing multiple versions quickly becomes overly complex—especially when updates are required. But a crisis app enables customizable permission levels, so your people have instant access to the information that they need—and nothing extra. For example, managers at your company’s various facilities could have crisis management playbooks for their building but not the others. Meanwhile the crisis team could have plans that apply to company-wide assets and tools, such as social media, IT, and human resources.

Simplified updates and training

A crisis app allows for updates to be pushed out to all users quickly and easily. It also simplifies training, because all the information needed is in one convenient place. Your crisis team can even track which employees have and have not completed training or reviewed the latest updates using the app’s software platform.

Efficient communication

During a crisis, real-time communication can make the difference between success and failure. A crisis management app does away with less effective methods of communication—such as call trees and emails—and allows your team to make the most of its mobile devices. Crisis playbooks include secure links to contact details, enabling employees to instantly pull up phone numbers and email addresses for the crisis team. As the crisis evolves, the crisis team can also send alert notifications to employees and members of leadership and keep each other in the loop with progress reporting.

Online and offline accessibility

During a crisis, many people find that their cell phone can’t connect to the network or make calls. If your crisis team encounters connectivity problems during the next incident, it’ll still need access to the company’s crisis plans and draft statements. A crisis management app takes this possibility into account, enabling users to download important crisis planning documents directly to their mobile devices to ensure they are available at any time, even if the network fails.
Using technology to implement and activate a crisis management plan can have a profound impact on an organization’s crisis preparedness. Take, for instance, the case of Fluidmaster, a company that for years stored its crisis management and emergency response plans on enormous documents on SharePoint and flash drives. This approach meant that during a crisis, the plans were not easily accessible and could not be quickly activated. In fact, if the power was out, employees could not access the flash-drive plans, and if the network failed, SharePoint was inaccessible. When it came time to update the plans, the process was overly complex and time-consuming. Executives could easily find themselves with obsolete information. And worse yet, an employee might lose a flash drive with sensitive company and employee contact data.

To improve its crisis readiness, Fluidmaster adopted a crisis management app as a way to better access and distribute its plans. Now the company’s incident response team and employees have instant access to the most up-to-date incident response plans. They can immediately find the information they need to initiate an effective crisis response, even if the power or network fails. The app has been widely embraced by Fluidmaster’s employees, and the company feels much more confident that it is ready for any crisis that may occur.
Regardless of the size or nature of your organization, it is only a matter of time before it encounters its next crisis. The question is, how quickly and effectively will your people be able to activate your crisis management plan?

Today’s mobile technology gives you an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine your crisis plan and make it more accessible and more usable than could ever be possible with hard-copy or intranet-based plans. By re-creating your plan into a user-friendly, highly accessible playbook, you will ensure that your crisis team and employees are empowered to quickly and confidently respond to any crisis, at any moment.
Discover how to operationalize your crisis management plan with a digital platform. Request a demo of In Case of Crisis.

SCHEDULE A DEMO

Resources


