

Disaster strikes your company.

A deliberate act of terrorism, a breakdown in quality control, human error, and people are injured because of your product. In response, your PR agency churns out press, your technical people struggle for a solution, your CEO goes on the nightly news.

In the meantime, Yahoo discussion boards are dissecting the problem and dissing your company, rumors float around AOL chat rooms, jokes are emailed across the world, and visitors are jamming your web site looking for information.

In the above situation, you need to control the message, track the rumors and use every channel necessary to inform customers, the press and regulators.

What is your Internet Strategy?

Although this is the perfect role for the Internet, few companies understand how to fully utilize the new media in this situation. Many companies simply publish the latest news and the corporate spin on their web site and leave it at that.

But these static web pages and flat presentation doesn't help the emotional pain of customers and public. In these situations, they want to talk, ask questions, and work through their fears and doubts. Give them a place to vent and speak, and they will walk away calmer and feeling better about your company.

In addition, you can use this opportunity to find out how they feel. What are their major concerns and what do they truly think about your company and actions? Are your messages working? Do they satisfy your customers?

Off your site, things are even worse. In hundreds of chat rooms and discussion boards around the web, people are talking about your company. You don't control the message; you don't even know what they are saying. Rumors can start and spread across the world in minutes, and it can be days before you know how to respond.

How should you handle a crisis?

Proctor & Gamble, Ford Motor Company and others have developed and implemented well-thought out procedures for times of crisis. Their prompt and vigorous actions saved them millions of dollars in the long run – other companies have not been so successful.

To implement successful damage control on the Internet, you need to:

Be Proactive.

First, you need to use the Internet to reach out with your message to interested parties. Your company spokesman may angle to get on the evening news, but has she considered how to broadcast to the increasing legions of web news junkies worldwide?

Be Responsive.

Your crisis is other people's crisis also. In the event of food poisonings, airplane crashes, and product recalls, customers want to talk to company representatives about how it will affect them personally. In addition to the telephone and the postal service, many people now want the immediate benefits of instantly posting questions through the Internet. A timely, professional and competent reply is the best way to assure the public that the

problem is being handled in a competent and responsible manner.

Be Facilitative

People will want to talk about the news. They'll want to tell jokes to let off steam and they'll want to ask each other questions. Let them. Let them talk in a comfortable, protected public space. That way they will be more open and less likely to pass around uninformed rumors. With discussions taking place on your own site, you will also know their concerns and be able to interject facts to offset fears.

Be Informed.

Survey your customers for their attitudes and track them over time. Is your message getting through? Is your brand weakening? If 78% of the people regard your company positively, is that an increase or a decrease in your position? Regular, quantitative surveys are only half the data; you also need to see what resonances your message sets off in people's minds. Use focus groups to allow people to express half-formulated feelings and to inform you if your surveys are asking the right questions.

You can let people talk about you on your site, under your eyes, or on another site that you don't know about.

The TCMG Internet Crisis Package

Talk City Marketing Group offers a special crisis package to meet your Internet communication needs in the time of a crisis. These tools allow the public and press to gather, learn and discuss.

The elements of this package are typically:

- **Public WebCasts.** Allows your CEO to speak to press or consumers and answer questions individually.
- **Monitored Chat Rooms.** Let your customers to talk freely to each other and to your representatives. Chat lets your customers blow off steam and respond quickly to each other's comments.
- **Swept Discussion Boards.** Get customers to discuss your crisis in depth. Discussion Boards are one of the best ways to ensure that all sides of an argument are heard and that the ramifications are completely explored.

- **Online Focus Groups.** Test your message and find out how people are responding viscerally to the news.
- **Online Surveys.** Poll visitors on the effectiveness of your communication efforts and track how their attitudes change.
- **Stable Hosting.** Hosted on TCMG's secure, stable infrastructure, it insulates your own site from sudden spikes in demand that may slow response or bring your servers down.
- **Targeted Branding.** The site is identified as yours, but uses variations of your graphics, logos and colors. Since the cheery colors and flashy design of your main site may be inappropriate, this allows you to tend the needs of some customers without the cost of a complete site redesign.
- **More.** Posting of Corporate documents, Explanations, Press releases...

The Internet is one of the fastest and most efficient ways to reach and calm your customers.

Summary

The need for controlled, interactive communication is never so important as in times of crisis. When a crisis happens to your company, you must be able to proactively handle your message, learn your customer's fears, and respond to their concerns. TCMG's Internet Crisis package offers a complete solution to Internet Crisis Communication – including WebCasts, interactive community applications, and full market research and testing – all run off of TCMG's highly scalable servers. This is the closest you can get to a turnkey Internet crisis solution.

Many of the most brand-savvy companies such as Microsoft, Disney and HBO trust Talk City Marketing Group with running their brand dialogues with their customers. TCMG's expertise and robust applications make us an excellent choice to communicate your messages in ordinary times or crisis times.

Call Talk City now to find out how we can help you control your message in times of crisis.

Suggested Configuration of the TCMG Internet Crisis Package

- **WebCast:** Three audio-enabled presentations for up to 5000 attendees. StreamingAudio.
- **Discussion Boards:** One publicly accessible board with unlimited folders and conversations.
- **Corporate Presentation board:** Post Press Releases and technical documents, and let customers talk about them.
- **Chat room:** One 24x7 chat room. Monitored for 4 hours/day. Up to three discussion chat rooms for two hours after each WebCast.
- **Online Focus Groups:** Three focus groups of press, consumers or other targeted groups to test the public attitude.
- **Online Surveys:** Monthly surveys to track changes in customer attitudes.
- **Consulting:** Advice on design of site and using dialogue marketing for spreading your message.