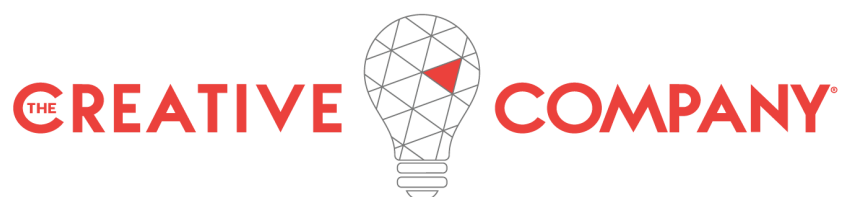


CRISIS PLANNING

# How to Write a Plan That Protects Your Reputation

A Complimentary Guide to Crafting Clear, Confident Crisis Communications.

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# Crisis Planning Guide

A publication of:



The goal in every situation (and every opportunity) is to build trust. During the COVID-19 crisis, the opportunities to do so are exponential, intense, and necessary. Having a straightforward crisis plan in place will help you navigate this crisis and make your organization more resilient for future crises.

## How to Write a Crisis Plan

*“When you’re not at the table, you may be on the menu.”*

A crisis is defined as a major interference with operations. It is a sudden, unexpected event or situation that could affect stakeholders and your business and requires immediate attention.

By providing vital information to stakeholders in a timely fashion, you will also display your authority and capabilities while mitigating losses. It’s essential to remain pragmatic and flexible while leaning on your values as you move through a season of crisis.

Right now, it probably feels like you don’t have the time to create a plan, but by taking even one hour with your team to think through these questions and write a brief plan, you’ll be ahead of 90% of the companies navigating this right now. You’ll also provide some security for your employees, board of directors, customers, and other stakeholders.

## Step 1: Identify Stakeholder Groups

### LIST AND PRIORITIZE

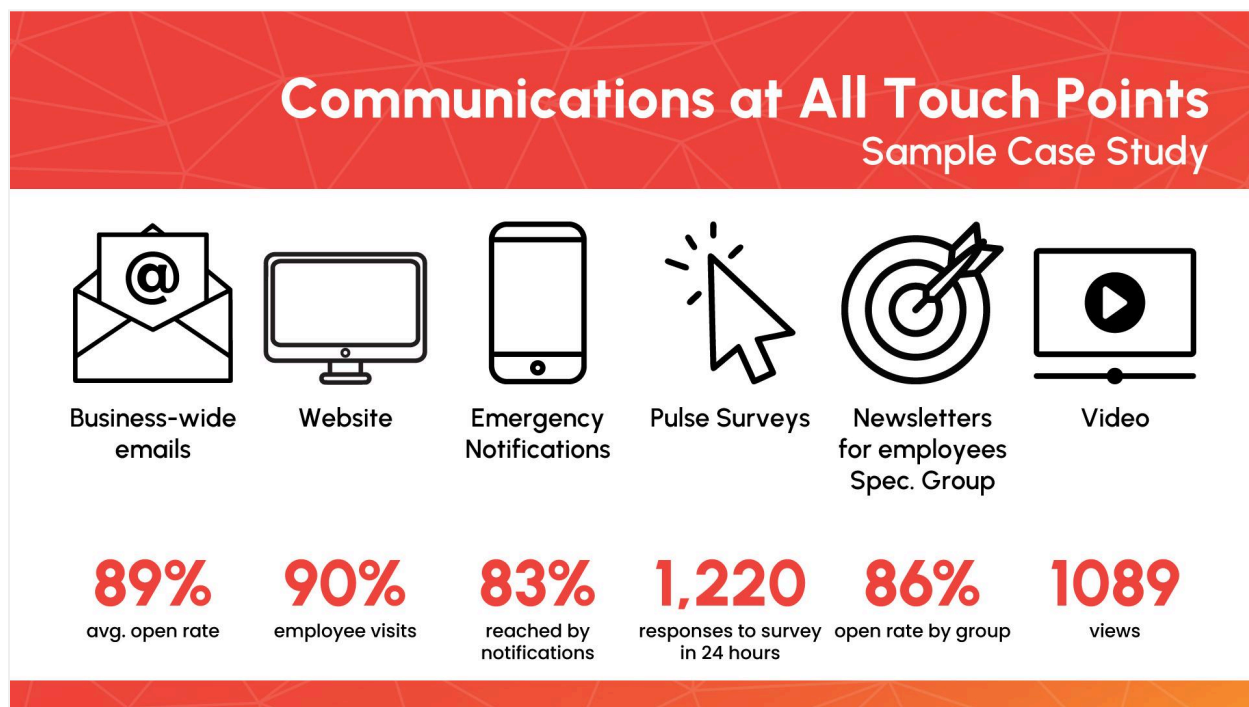
**Examples:** employees, customers/clients/patients, media, vendors, association groups, Chambers of Commerce, communities, financial institutions, board of directors, and supply chain partners.

Who matters? What are their expectations? What do they want to experience, and how do they want to experience it? What do you want them to experience?

Safety, trust, transparency, and expertise must be conveyed at every touchpoint.

## Step 2: Define Internal Communication Plan

- Research shows that people don't think well under extreme stress. It's important to acknowledge the stress people are under by showing empathy and preparing staff by helping them feel more secure and informed. Words and clarity matter now more than ever.
- Review the tools you will use to navigate this crisis and keep people updated.
- Establish and maintain communications platforms (e.g., Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.) with regularly scheduled video calls.
- You may set up text groups for emergency communication or use other tools like Slack, WhatsApp, etc.
- Context matters – explain what the news means in your company setting and share how it will impact your service agreements, product offerings, etc.
- If you are part of a large organization, you can also survey employees to see how your organization is doing from a communications perspective. Do employees feel they are receiving the right amount of communication? Is technology helping or hindering their ability to do their jobs? Do they feel engaged enough?
- Always remember that those who are closest to you are most important.



## Step 3: Define External Communication Plan

Timing of Communication to Stakeholders

Here is an example from the Logos Institute for Crisis Management and Executive Leadership about what to consider:

### THE FOUR-QUESTION TEST:

1. Will those who matter to us expect us to do or say something now?
2. Will silence be seen as either indifference or as an affirmation of guilt?
3. Are others speaking about us, shaping the perception among those who matter to us?
4. If we wait, will we lose the ability to influence the outcome?

### PROTOCOL

- What are you responsible for?
- Whom should you notify?
- With whom should you communicate?

**Social Media:** (60% of organizations do not respond to negative posts.)  
Decide now if you're going to react and how. Agree on the protocol (length of time to respond, what's reasonable, who is in charge, and whether you will respond publicly to the post or via direct message or other channels).

**Reporter Contact:** If the media contacts you, do you have a designated spokesperson? If not, who is in charge? Do they have the most current and up-to-date information? In a crisis, the first 45 minutes are critical. If you need additional time, having a placeholder statement in place is better. Write one now. Ensure ALL staff know that any questions from the media need to be directed to this person and that no one else is allowed to go on the record.

## Step 4: Identify Potential Issues and Crisis

Determine **what does constitute** a crisis as well as **what does not constitute** a crisis. Identify the following:

- What are the factors and or processes to consider in discerning the degree of a crisis?
- What should be done?
- Who should be notified?

## ➤ Step 5: Rank the Threats & Create Specific Response

List the **top 5 to 10 crisis issues** your organization may encounter, then prioritize them, focusing on safety first.

Imagine and formulate the crisis, walking through each step from your internal and your stakeholders' perspectives.

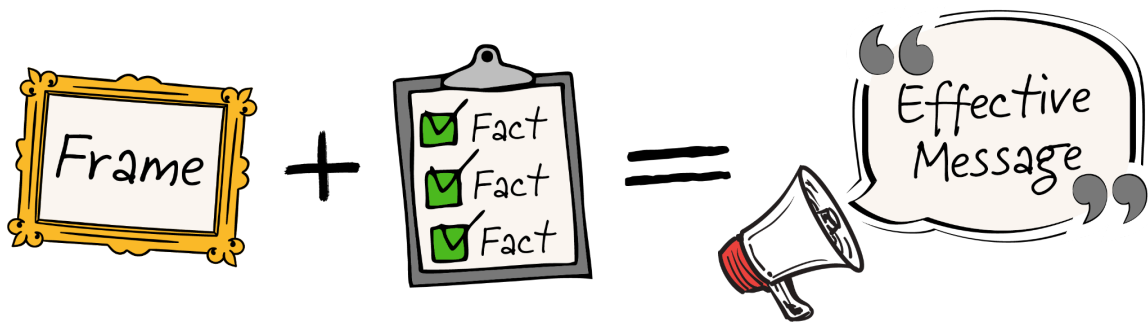
Create a Process Map for how you will respond to each crisis.

- What is happening?
- What does it mean to our clients, customers, and staff?
- What do we want? (The desired end state is based on the risks.)

## ➤ Step 6: Implement a Crisis Communications Strategy

Prepare a crisis statement. The **first hour** is the most crucial for your response time.

### CRISIS STATEMENTS (FRAME + FACTS = MESSAGE)



- Acknowledgment
- Empathy
- Values
- Approach
- Commitment

Ideally, you should also have the following prepared:

- Fact Sheets about the issue
- Talking points
- Potential spokespeople
- Scripts



One of the first things  
people ask us during a crisis is,

***“What should we say?”***

This is important but identifying **what you want to achieve** and **how you want your stakeholders to think, feel, know, and do** must be done before we say anything.

## **Step 7: Get the message out/Inform**

Does anyone need to know this information before the general public does? Make a list of the chain of information.

Then, send or post to:

- Media Lists
- Clients/Customers
- Email
- Website
- Social Media (use a tool to streamline and monitor your efforts, such as HootSuite)
- Other Channels

Let stakeholders know they will find the most up-to-date information on these sites.

Consider how the SBA, WEDC, and other business organizations are working together now. They need to act quickly and communicate complex details to a large audience. Using that as an example, you can see how they quickly move through these steps.

**Monitor Media Coverage:** Have a designated person in charge of monitoring media stories related to your industry and social media. There are many tools available and resources you can also utilize, which are generally paid by subscription. However, you will still need a real person to monitor and respond if any inaccuracies are reported.

As needed, provide regular information updates to media, staff, and other stakeholders.

## Summary

1. **Begin with the end in mind.** Your goal is to build trust through clear communication. Communicate with transparency and often with everyone in your supply chain about what's happening and your plans related to current events.
2. **Start with empathy** and keep your values and commitment to employees and customers front and center.
3. **Schedule daily briefings** with your team to check in and review the plan for today and tomorrow. Make sure everyone has a chance to talk. It's better to do a live call than an email.
4. **Keep a running checklist** of crises or potential crises and rank them daily. Respond accordingly using the guide above.
5. **See where you can do good.** Amidst all this, we see so many companies step into the fray, innovate, and create solutions to meet the needs of our community and healthcare workers. Shine a light into the darkness, and together, we'll get to the other side stronger and even better than before.

Your customers, staff, and stakeholders will appreciate your efforts, and with a plan and strong communication, your business's continuity is far more likely, even during times of great change. If you need assistance, we welcome your questions and the opportunity to work alongside you and your business.

For an inspiring look at how to walk through this leadership challenge, please read [Time to Rise - How to Walk Through the Biggest Leadership Challenge of Your Life](#) by Laura Gallagher, President of The Creative Company.

## About The Creative Company

### Our Process



**When companies build, grow, or change, they trust The Creative Company to tell their story.** Founded in 1989 and based in Madison, The Creative Company is a WBENC-certified, PR and marketing firm dedicated to mission-driven organizations. A 2025 IC100 Award recipient and named 2022 Dane County Small Business of the Year, we blend strategy with creativity. Learn more at [thecreativecompany.com](https://thecreativecompany.com).



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