



Essential Elements of a Crisis Communications Plan

Crisis communication plans vary in complexity, but here are the essential elements every organization should compile in order to be prepared for a crisis.

- List of members of the Crisis Communication Team and complete contact information (including after-hours)
- A clear delegation of responsibilities for each member of the team (including backups)
- Clear protocols and procedures for activating the Crisis Communication Team and approving communications
- Guidelines for working with the media during a crisis, including a clearly defined media policy and designated spokesperson(s) and support
- Lists of critical stakeholders and databases with their contact information and guidelines for outreach
- Pre-established notification system(s) and instructions for activation
- Policies and procedures for the front office staff on how to handle media calls & visits
- Pre-approved messages for crisis scenarios and templates for letters, statements to the media and other communication tools for each scenario
- Guidelines for the use of social media during a crisis, including company policies, authorized responders, preferred sites, accounts and general guidelines for participation, monitoring and responding
- Background information for the media and/or a dark website containing executive bios, fact sheets, maps/directions to facilities, high-resolution photos and logos, Material Safety Data Sheets, etc.
- After-hours contact information for local media. (Crises rarely happen during business hours, and the local media will continue to cover your organization long after CNN leaves.)
- Other useful information, including instructions and passwords for social media platforms and 24/7 contact information for outside resources

When your organization is threatened, you need a specialist.

A crisis management specialist.

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On-Line Press Rooms & “Dark” Websites

Make sure YOU have the knowledge, usernames and passwords to gain emergency access to your website (as well as your Facebook and Twitter accounts)

Downloadable Press Kit

Complete PR Contact info (be sure it's 24/7/365)

Searchable archives

Company history, timeline, mergers, acquisitions, names changes, new plants, etc.

High-resolution, color media-trade photos of company/building/products

- Usually 5x7 at 300 dpi (though some newspapers & magazines like 8x10 at 300 dpi)
- Using a JPEG compressed in “very high quality” mode is usually acceptable
- Offer suggested captions

Executive bios (AKA obituaries), headshots & team photos

Video (both high and low-bandwidth footage)

Video News Releases (VNR) & B-Roll

Diagrams, illustrations and graphics, including company logos (offer in low-rez, perhaps keeping hi-rez password-protected)

Press releases (current w/ release dates and archived); categorize by section or product

Corporate backgrounders

Case studies

Product overviews

Searchable database of experts on-staff

Opt-in for news distribution

Links to related articles

Consider adding a blog to provide insight by expert employees & monitor opinion

Events calendar (executive appearances, press conferences, trade shows, products releases)

Hidden content for crisis comm, including media statements for crisis scenarios (in text format, not PDF)

Post a FAQ, Terms of Use & Privacy Policy

Helpful Tips

Ensure website has an easy to navigate design

- A mobile version is absolutely essential
- Simple and functional is best
- Avoid fancy graphics, Flash animation, etc.
- Keep use of PDF's to a minimum – reporters in the field are likely using smartphones

Whenever possible, do not password-protect your online pressroom – reporters may not have time for lengthy registrations and they may not like feeling they are going to be “tracked”

- That said, you still may wish to consider using a combination of open and password-protected areas within the online newsroom, allowing you to keep control over more sensitive information
- Pros: allows you to collect data and monitor how the site is being used; password-protected sites will also keep those pages from being “spidered” and, therefore, unavailable through a Google or Yahoo search

Absolutely, positively make certain that your online newsroom is current and up to date

- Learn how to post news releases and update info without being dependent upon your IT Department

Add Really Simple Syndication (RSS) to the site



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Bruce M. Hennes

Bruce M. Hennes is the Managing Partner of Hennes Communications, one of the few firms in the U.S. focused exclusively on crisis communications and crisis management.

Hennes has more than 30 years' experience working in politics, having managed or served as a campaign consultant for a wide variety of political campaigns. Hennes also served three years as Executive Director for The Temple on the Heights in Pepper Pike, Ohio, and three years doing government and public relations in the automotive industry. He opened his own communications firm in 1989.



As one of Ohio's best-known crisis communication specialists and media trainers, Hennes is an in-demand speaker before bar and trade associations on the subject of crisis communications and "how the media manipulate the news." He frequently speaks to mayors, police, fire, education and health officials about how to handle mass casualty incidents and other "extreme" situations involving threats to life & limb, often sponsored by county Emergency Management Agencies.

Hennes Communications now counts among its current and former clients such companies as ThyssenKrupp, Carpenter Technology, The MetroHealth System, Evonik, Interlake Steamship Company, Kent State University, Lubrizol, NASA, Northeast Ohio Medical University, Riverside Companies, as well as scores of law firms, hospitals, educational institutions, nonprofits and government agencies.

Hennes is past chairman of the Greater Cleveland Partnership's Public Affairs Committee. He was one of the founding board members of the FBI Citizens Academy Foundation of Cleveland. He is also an adjunct professor at the Levin College of Urban Affairs at Cleveland State University and a frequent guest lecturer at John Carroll University, Kent State University and Case Western Reserve University. Hennes serves on the boards of The Judicial Candidates Rating Coalition (Judge4Yourself.com) and the Cleveland Leadership Center. He is also a longtime member of the executive committee of The Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, which awarded him its first-ever President's Award. Hennes is president of the Leadership Cleveland Class of 2008 and recipient of the President's Special Award for Extraordinary Service from the Cuyahoga County Bar Association and two Vega awards from The American Red Cross. In 2010, Hennes was inducted into the Plain Local Schools Hall of Distinction (Canton, Ohio); in 2011, he received the Communicator of the Year award from the International Association of Business Communicators- Cleveland; and in 2013, he received a Gold "Rocks" award and "Best of Show" award from the Public Relations Society of America- Greater Cleveland Chapter for his crisis communications work related to a ferry boat crash in New York City's Financial District. He has a degree in political science from York University in Toronto, Canada. Hennes received certification in Effective Communications from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and The Federal Emergency Management Agency.

About Hennes Communications

Hennes Communications is a crisis communications and crisis management consulting firm based in Cleveland. Serving corporations, government agencies and nonprofits that are "on trial" in the Court of Public Opinion, Hennes Communications also offers litigation communication support, media training, pre-crisis preparation and crisis drills to clients. In 2009, Hennes Communications won the coveted "Best of Show" award from the Cleveland Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America for its work with another agency on the national peanut butter recall. Hennes Communications also won Gold "Rocks" awards in 2010 and 2011 for its work on behalf of The MetroHealth System and Saint Joseph Academy. In 2012, the firm won another Gold "Rocks" award for its Crisis Comm & Media Relations E-Newsletter. In 2013, the firm won PRSA's Gold "Rock" award and the "Best of Show" award for its work on a ferry boat crash. In 2014, the firm won its 6th Gold "Rocks" award for a program it created and carried out for a forestry client in Australia. For more information, please go to www.crisiscommunications.com.