



PR CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLAN · ANJANA RAMAN · 2026

When It All Goes Wrong.

*A Step-by-Step Crisis Communications Plan
for PR Professionals*

63%

of crises escalate
due to slow response

24hrs

the window to control
a PR crisis narrative

3x

harder to rebuild trust
after mishandling a crisis

What Is a PR Crisis?

A PR crisis is any event, statement, or situation that threatens a brand's reputation, public trust, or business continuity - and demands an immediate, coordinated communications response.

Product Crisis

Safety recalls, quality failures, misleading claims

Reputational Crisis

Leadership scandal, employee misconduct, discrimination

Digital Crisis

Data breach, viral backlash, social media pile-on

Operational Crisis

Service failure, supply chain breakdown, outage

The Golden Rule

Every crisis has three phases:

PRE-CRISIS

Prepare before it hits

DURING CRISIS

Respond fast and honestly

POST-CRISIS

Rebuild and learn

Build Your Crisis Response Team

Before a crisis hits - know exactly who does what.



Crisis Lead

PR Head / CEO

Owns all decisions. Single point of command. Nothing goes out without approval.



Spokesperson

CEO / MD / PR Head

The only face and voice of the brand. Trained. Calm. Consistent.



Legal Counsel

Legal Team

Reviews every statement before release. Protects the brand legally.



Media Relations Lead

Senior PR Manager

Handles all journalist calls, press releases, and media briefings.



Digital Monitor

Social Media Manager

Tracks all mentions, comments, hashtags in real time. 24/7 during crisis.



Internal Comms Lead

HR / Comms Manager

Keeps employees informed. Prevents internal panic and leaks.

The 6-Step Crisis Response

Speed + Truth + Accountability = Crisis Contained

01

Assess & Declare

Confirm the crisis is real. Categorise severity (Level 1–3). Activate the crisis team immediately.

02

Hold Statement

Issue a brief holding statement within 1 hour: 'We are aware. We are investigating. We will update shortly.'

03

Gather Facts

Do not respond until you know the truth. Legal, PR, and leadership align on what is known and unknown.

04

Craft the Response

Write the full statement. Lead with empathy. State facts. Acknowledge impact. Outline next steps.

05

Distribute & Monitor

Send press release. Brief spokesperson. Post on social. Monitor all mentions in real time.

06

Rebuild & Review

Post-crisis: apology if needed, corrective action, internal debrief. What went wrong? What do we change?



What to Say in the First Hour

HOLDING STATEMENT TEMPLATE

We are aware of [the situation] and take this matter extremely seriously.

We are currently investigating to understand the full facts and will provide a comprehensive update as soon as possible.

The safety and trust of [our customers / employees / stakeholders] remains our highest priority.

We will share further information within [timeframe].

5 Rules of the Holding Statement

Issue within 1 hour

Silence is interpreted as guilt

Acknowledge — don't deny

Even if you don't have all facts yet

Show empathy first

Lead with people, not legal language

Give a timeframe

Promise a follow-up and keep it

One voice only

All staff refer media to spokesperson

What Works. What Destroys You.

✓ DO THIS

✓ Respond fast - every hour of silence costs you

✓ Lead with empathy, not legal language

✓ Be consistent - one message across all platforms

✓ Acknowledge the impact on real people

✓ Update regularly even if you have nothing new

✓ Take accountability when you are at fault

✗ NEVER DO THIS

✗ Never say 'No comment' — it signals guilt

✗ Never speculate before facts are confirmed

✗ Never attack the media or critics publicly

✗ Never delete posts - screenshots exist forever

✗ Never let junior staff speak to media

✗ Never go silent after the first statement

Not All Crises Are Equal

Know your level before you respond - response speed and intensity must match the severity.

Level 1

Low-level complaint or negative coverage. Monitor closely. Prepare response. Do not over-react.

Examples: Social media complaint · Bad review · Minor inaccuracy in press

Level 2

Growing attention or multiple complaints. Issue a statement. Brief spokesperson. Monitor hourly.

Examples: Viral negative post · Staff controversy · Product complaint trending

Level 3

Full-scale reputational threat. Activate crisis team immediately. CEO involvement. All hands on.

Examples: National media coverage · Data breach · Leadership scandal · Safety issue

Rebuild After the Storm

The crisis is contained. Now comes the harder work - rebuilding trust.



Full Statement & Apology

Issue a complete, honest account of what happened and a genuine apology where appropriate. No corporate-speak.



Corrective Action Announcement

Announce specific, measurable steps you are taking to prevent recurrence. Actions speak louder than statements.



Stakeholder Re-engagement

Brief investors, employees, and key media contacts personally. Restore confidence with direct communication.



Brand Narrative Reset

Begin rebuilding through positive stories, community initiatives, and proof-points that reflect your values.

How Do You Know It Worked?

Response Time

Time from crisis eruption to first public statement

Target: Under 1 hour

Sentiment Shift

Change in brand sentiment from negative to neutral+

Target: Positive shift within 72hrs

Media Coverage Tone

Ratio of neutral/positive vs negative media stories

Target: 70% neutral+ within 1 week

Social Mentions

Volume and tone of social media mentions over time

Target: Declining negative mentions

Spokesperson Score

Media and public perception of spokesperson credibility

Target: High trust rating in surveys

Recovery Milestone

Return to pre-crisis brand trust and sales baseline

Target: Within 90 days

The Bottom Line

A crisis doesn't destroy brands. Silence does.

The brands that survive crises are not the ones with fewer problems.

They are the ones with a plan and the courage to be honest.

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This is an original portfolio piece created to demonstrate PR crisis communications knowledge.